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Author: Adolf Streckfuss

Translator: A. L. Wister

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TOO RICH

A ROMANCE

AFTER THE GERMAN

OF

ADOLPH STRECKFUSS

BY MRS. A. L. WISTER

**TRANSLATOR OF "THE SECOND WIFE," "ONLY A GIRL," "THE OLD
MAM'SELLE'S SECRET," "HULDA," "A FAMILY FEUD," ETC.**

**PHILADELPHIA
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TOO RICH.

CHAPTER I.

It was a very warm day in summer. The lindens on either side the broad promenade drooped their thirsty dusty leaves above the pedestrians sauntering beneath their shade. These loitered along as slowly as possible, but the heat was really too oppressive, and many of them soon turned into narrower and cooler side streets, resigning all attempts to meet the various acquaintances who usually at noon thronged the gay promenade of K----. Others indeed took refuge beneath the tempting awning of some one of the various fashionable restaurants on the promenade, where, secluded from the burning rays of the midday sun, they refreshed themselves with ices, and were at leisure to recognize and criticise all who drove, rode, or walked past.

On a day like the present "Büchner's restaurant," famous for its sherbet, and a favourite lounging-place with young sprigs of fashion, was sure to be thronged. Here might be seen the officers of the various regiments in garrison at K---- and numerous civilians whose rank entitled them to such distinguished companionship, and here the choice of amusements for the evening was discussed,—whether, in spite of the intense heat, the charms of the lovely S---- were sufficiently great to make the theatre endurable, or whether preference should be given to an open-air entertainment at some favourite concert-garden.

In the world of fashion it was eminently 'the thing' to pass half an hour every afternoon on the veranda beneath the awning at "Büchner's," and consequently in the afternoon the place was so thronged that scarcely a seat was to be had at any of the numerous tables there, while on warm days it was quite full at noon, for there could hardly be a more commodious and pleasant point of observation on the entire promenade.

The guests at Büchner's were of the most select,—to see that they were so was a chief care with the attentive head of the establishment, who thought no pains lost which secured to him the custom of the officers. He still recalled with vivid melancholy the war-time, and the deserted aspect of his veranda while it lasted; he knew that he owed his brilliant success in business to the officers and to please them he displayed the greatest zeal. Was he not always on the watch to keep away from the veranda any persons supposed to be obnoxious to these distinguished guests? All such, even although there was still room beneath the awning, were shown to seats far back in the inmost recesses of the place. Only to the young officers and their intimates of the first rank in society was it permitted to lounge indolently upon the veranda, their cigars in their mouths, their chairs tipped back, and their legs resting either upon other chairs or upon the wrought-iron balustrade, in which graceful and easy attitude they could observe the passers-by at their leisure.

Thus elegantly posed on this same sunny noon, two young cavalry officers were scanning, eye-glass in eye, the passers-by, negligently returning the greetings of acquaintances, and, careless as to whether their remarks were overheard or not, ruthlessly criticising in a loud voice the occupants of the various equipages rolling by.

In their immediate neighbourhood two infantry officers were seated near the balustrade, scorning however the negligent attitude of the two dragoons; one of them was reading a newspaper, while the other was gazing out at the passers-by.

"I believe you mean to learn that paper by heart, Leo," one of them, a young fellow of about three-and-twenty, remarked to his comrade, his senior by two or three years, and also in rank as the star upon his shoulder indicated.

The man thus addressed looked up with a smile, disclosing a handsome, expressive countenance of a forcible manly type. His thick, fair moustache became him well, concealing somewhat as it did the rather hard outline of the mouth and thus softening a certain sternness of expression which had characterized his face while absorbed in his newspaper, but which vanished entirely as he smiled. The mild lustre of large dark eyes made the handsome face still more attractive.

"You're an awful bore to-day, Leo," the younger man continued; "we've been sitting here full half an hour, and you have hardly opened your lips. I cannot imagine what you find to read in that wretched 'Daily Post;' it makes me yawn only to look at it; nothing would induce me to read a line of it; 'tis full of such stupid stuff in these tiresome times of peace."

"You're mistaken; the proceedings in Chambers are extremely interesting to-day."

"The proceedings in Chambers!" the other cried, with comical dismay. "Good heavens, the fellow is reading politics! Leo, Leo, as your true friend, I must warn you: you are in perilous paths; read everything else that you choose,--the trashiest novels, and even poems if you insist upon it, but no politics; you will lose caste. Already you are looked upon askance as a genius, more than half an artist; if it should be whispered about that you are a politician you are ruined, Leo. An officer with an interest in politics is a lost man; if my warning voice has any influence Leo von Heydeck shall never fall so low. Throw the paper away, my dear fellow, and be a man; let us follow the example of our comrades the dragoons, Herr von Bertram and Count Waldheim, and criticise the lovely ladies driving past; this is just the time for it. Look! there comes the fairest of the fair, the richest of the rich, the loveliest of the lovely, divine Eva Schommer!"

Leo von Heydeck suddenly dropped his newspaper and glanced in the direction indicated by his friend, but on the instant his face darkened; he hastily looked around him to observe the effect produced upon the group of officers beneath the awning by the approach of the celebrated beauty, and then quietly took up his paper again and seemed to become more than ever absorbed in it. He did not even look up as the barouche in which the object of so much admiration sat rolled past.

He was, however, the only one upon the veranda who accorded no notice to the fair occupant of the barouche; every officer present gazed after her with the greatest interest, and some few, who had enjoyed the happy privilege of an introduction, saluted her with distinguished courtesy. Among these fortunate individuals were the two dragoons, Herr von Bertram and Count Waldheim; as soon as they were aware of the approach of the equipage each started up from his negligent attitude and standing close behind the balustrade bowed low as if to some princess. Certainly no princess could have acknowledged their salute with a slighter or haughtier inclination of the head than that with which it was received in this instance.

Carelessly leaning back among the satin cushions of the elegant barouche of which she was the sole occupant, Fräulein Eva Schommer seemed to receive the homage offered her but as a fitting tribute to her beauty; no smile played about her pensive mouth as she thus slightly bowed, and her large dark eyes scarcely deigned to rest for an instant upon the two dragoons. Suddenly her cheek flushed a little, and a degree of animation lit up her face for an instant as she shot one fleeting glance at the figure sitting absorbed in the newspaper and not even looking up as her barouche drove past. The next minute she turned away her head and replied most courteously to the passing salutation of a rider, who cantered on a blood horse past her equipage.

Like an apparition the barouche drawn by its pair of thoroughbreds flashed past Büchner's awning and was soon lost to sight as it turned almost immediately into a cross street. With it the degree of excitement which its approach had produced also vanished; the two dragoons took their seats again, put their feet up upon the rail of the balustrade, and balanced themselves after their old elegant fashion.

The younger infantry officer, who had also sprung from his seat and bowed to the lady most courteously without however receiving any acknowledgment in return, now resumed his seat, and regarded his friend still zealously perusing the newspaper with immense astonishment. "This is too much, Leo!" he exclaimed. "There you sit and never even look up as she drives past; have you a heart of stone? You were the only one whom she looked at; the only one of us to whom she deigned a glance, and you pore over your politics all the while as if you meditated mounting the rostrum yourself. 'Pon honour, Leo, she did bestow a look upon you which would have driven many a fellow who had chanced to get it wild."

"You must have been mistaken, Kuno," Leo replied, indifferently, although his friend's words did not seem quite devoid of interest for him, for he folded his paper and laid it aside; perhaps he had entirely finished his perusal of the most interesting proceedings in Chambers.

"Kuno von Herwarth is never mistaken," the young officer said, with mock heroism. "I beg you to remember that I said, 'Upon my honour she bestowed a look upon you,' which entirely forbids all possibility of a mistake on my part."

"Of course," Leo replied, good-humouredly. "I do not doubt you for an instant. Why should the young lady not have accorded us a fleeting glance? I only cannot believe that it rested especially upon me."

"And why not? Were you not presented to Fräulein Schommer by her uncle at the *fête-champêtre* at Schönsee?"

"True: the young lady was so gracious as to accede to her uncle's request on the occasion, and I could not without discourtesy refuse to be presented."

"Refuse to be presented? Really, Leo, I cannot understand you. There is not one of our comrades who would not think himself lucky if he could contrive an introduction to Fräulein Schommer, and you----"

"I do not join in the universal adulation, the nonsensical idolatry, offered to the lady," Leo interrupted his friend. "I very unwillingly consented to be presented to her, and was justly punished for my consent by the negligent hauteur with which I was received. She scarcely deigned me a glance, and received the few polite remarks which I made to her after my presentation in so indifferent a silence that I had no inducement to pursue a conversation evidently distasteful to her. Afterwards, when by chance my seat was next hers in the boat upon the lake, I again, as courtesy I thought required, said a few words to her, to which however she returned such icy monosyllabic replies that I gladly left her to her conversation with her neighbour on the other side, the old Privy Councillor's wife, Madame von Sturmhaupt, with whom she could talk fast enough."

"Take care of yourself, Leo!" Kuno replied, with a laugh. "This indifference of yours towards Fräulein Schommer does not seem quite genuine. Else why should you be so offended by her cold reception of you when you were presented to her?"

"You are wrong; I am not in the least offended, for I do but share the fate of all those who do not possess at least a million. Otherwise you are perfectly correct in saying that I am not indifferent to Fräulein Eva Schommer,--I do not like her! I will not deny that she is handsome,--extremely handsome,--but her whole bearing is distasteful to me. Pride or, to speak more correctly, self-conceit I always dislike,--purse-pride is inexpressibly odious to me. But enough of this, Kuno; do not let us talk of it: this at all events is not a fit place for such discussion."

"You should have thought of that before, Herr von Heydeck," Lieutenant von Bertram interposed at this point. He had been an attentive listener to the foregoing conversation, and now rose and approached Leo with much arrogance of manner.

Guido von Bertram was about as old as Leo von Heydeck; if mere regularity of features constitute beauty he was the handsomer man, but in his face there was none of the frank manliness which lent such a charm to Von Heydeck. He evidently affected the man of extreme fashion: the eye-glass stuck in his right eye, and the drawling tone of his voice, were in harmony with his entire bearing.

As he stood before Leo von Heydeck he adjusted the said eye-glass more firmly in position, and scanned his opponent most offensively. Leo looked up in surprise; he had been on terms of intimacy with the dragoon in former years, but this intimacy had long since ceased. Bertram's sudden interruption therefore took him quite by surprise; before he could reply Bertram continued, emphasizing each word as he drawled it out, "You have allowed yourself to speak in a highly-offensive manner of a young lady with whom I have the honour to claim acquaintance; I must beg you to retract all that you have said."

The words were too distinct to be misunderstood. Leo perceived that Bertram was endeavouring to step forward as Fräulein Schommer's champion; the tone of the dragoon's voice and his words were so insulting that Leo's eyes flashed angrily; but the next instant he mastered his first impulse of indignation at the sudden attack and admitted to himself that he had been indiscreet. He should never have allowed himself to indulge in any criticism of a lady in so public a place; he was ready to atone as far as was possible for such an indiscretion.

"I regret, Herr von Bertram," he said, quietly, "that words spoken in a strictly private conversation with my friend Herr von Herwarth, and intended solely for his ear, should have reached yours. I can assure you that nothing was further from my thoughts than any insult to Fräulein Schommer."

"This excuse does not satisfy me, Herr von Heydeck. As you spoke sufficiently loud for me involuntarily to overhear every word, your conversation with Herr von Herwarth cannot be considered 'strictly private.' You spoke of annoyance, of conceit, of purse-pride. Although Fräulein Schommer is above all possibility of insult from you, I will not suffer a young lady whose acquaintance I have the honour to claim to be thus spoken of in a public place. I therefore require you instantly to declare your expressions a calumny and to retract them upon the spot."

"Herr von Bertram, let me entreat----" Kuno von Herwarth exclaimed, in dismay; but before he could proceed the dragoon interposed.

"Lieutenant von Herwarth, I must protest against any interference upon your part in this matter between Herr von Heydeck and myself. Since you are a witness to this conversation, you may shortly perchance act the same part in another affair, where you may congratulate yourself upon occupying a neutral position. Therefore I must beg you not to interrupt this conversation." Then, turning to Leo and raising his voice, he continued: "You have heard my demand, Herr von Heydeck; I require immediate compliance with it."

Leo von Heydeck started from his seat at these insolent words; his cheek glowed with indignation, his hand involuntarily sought his sword-hilt, but he quickly recovered himself. He folded his arms, looked down thoughtfully, and then, after a pause that lasted but for an instant, he replied to his insolent opponent with perfect repose of manner, looking him full and calmly in the face the while,--

"You have no right to make any such demand, Herr von Bertram. If you are not bent upon a quarrel you will be satisfied by my reiterated assurance that I had no intention of insulting Fräulein Schommer, and that I regret that words which I had best not have uttered should have been regarded as intentionally insulting. I hope this declaration will satisfy you."

"No, it does not satisfy me. As you do not retract your assertions, you of course maintain them, and force me to assert myself! It is dishonourable,--understand me, Herr von Heydeck,--I repeat, grossly dishonourable to calumniate thus publicly a young lady who cannot defend herself! It is a grossly dishonourable act, which I shall chastise as it deserves!"

Again Leo's eyes flashed, again his cheek flushed scarlet, but he gave no words to his anger. One glance of intense scorn he cast at Bertram, who stood insolently awaiting his reply, and then without a word he turned and left the veranda.

This extraordinary scene had arrested the attention of the other officers present. Bertram's last words had been intentionally spoken so loudly and with such emphasis as to be heard by all, and most of his auditors were justly indignant.

When the dragoon after Leo's departure went with a triumphant smile to take his seat again beside his friend Count Waldheim, he was regarded by his comrades with much disfavour, and expressions of their displeasure reached his ears such as, "An insolent attack!" "An entirely unjustifiable insult!" but he apparently cared little about these utterances of opinion. Perfectly satisfied with his conduct, he began to balance himself again comfortably on the hind legs of his chair, and preserved his self-conceited smile even when Kuno von Herwarth, without a word and with a glance of evident contempt, passed by him to follow his friend.

Count Waldheim however was far from sharing in his content; moving his chair more closely to Bertram's side, he whispered, "What do you mean, Bertram? You have got yourself into trouble, I am afraid, and, if you will pardon the expression, you've committed a great folly."

"Do you think so?" Bertram rejoined in as low a tone, twirling the ends of his moustache. "I assure you I never committed an act of less folly in my life, or one more entirely successful."

"What! you were not carried away then by the impulse of the moment?--you intentionally and designedly offered so deadly an insult to Herr von Heydeck?"

"Intentionally and designedly. I was not in the least irritated, but as calm as ever I was in my life."

"I understand you less than ever then. I am certainly not ignorant in such matters, but I cannot conceive of provoking a mortal quarrel without the slightest provocation. You know Heydeck's reputation as a pistol-shot; he is famous for absolute certainty of aim and steadiness of hand. Are you tired of life, Bertram?"

"Not at all; it is in no danger from Herr von Heydeck," Bertram replied, with the same serenity of manner. "Will you bet with me, Count? I wager ten Friedrichs-d'or that Heydeck pockets my affront,--he will not call me out. Eh?"

"Impossible! You accused him of dishonourable conduct; he must resent such an insult, and---"

"Will you wager?"

"If you choose; but you have lost already. In return I will act as your second."

"No need; Heydeck is too much of a coward to send me a challenge."

"Heydeck a coward? You're dreaming, Bertram. Why, his thorough scorn of danger got him the iron cross at Gravelotte. He is known throughout the entire regiment for his cool courage in facing deadly peril. I know what I am saying; one of my cousins serves in his battalion and is very intimate with him."

Bertram shook his head with a contemptuous smile. "I know him better: we were at school together; I tell you he is a coward who will never dare to call me out. You say he showed courage in the field? Bah! what is courage in the field? Every plough-boy displays it. The coward pushes on there because he is sure of a bullet through his brains if he runs away. You will soon learn to your cost, as far as your purse is concerned, that I am right, but even were I wrong, and he were really to send me a challenge, I should perhaps be better pleased. Let me explain, for I see you shake your head incredulously. I should be only too glad to fight him if thereby I might succeed in gaining one word of gratitude from the lovely Eva, and here I depend upon your friendly services, Count."

"Now I begin to comprehend," Waldheim said, in a tone of surprise; "but the game you are playing, Bertram, is a dangerous one. Are you sure the stakes are worth the winning thus? Fräulein Schommer to be sure is handsome----"

"Wonderfully handsome!"

"And rich too, they say."

"Two millions at least!"

"Very fair; but remember, Bertram, Fräulein Schommer comes from a very low grade of society. Her uncle, Balthasar Schommer, is a common fellow who submits to his niece's petting and scolding like some favourite puppy. I believe her father was a miner, and it is extremely doubtful whether he could read or write his own name although he died the possessor of rich mines and a millionaire. You ought to think twice, Bertram, before you make up your mind to marry into such a connection."

"But you visit at the Schommers', Count?"

"Why not? The old fellow is common enough, but his wine, or rather the fair Eva's, is capital; although really that makes very little difference to me. All the world goes to the Schommers', and why should not I follow its example? If I ever am tired of going there, I have but to cease my visits and cut old Schommer when I meet him. Meanwhile I like very well to talk and dance with the girl who is certainly very lovely; but I never should dream of making her Countess Waldheim."

"Nor should I perhaps, were I the wealthy Count Waldheim, but such scruples are not for a poor Herr von Bertram whose debts are considerably larger than his estate. That which you disdain I covet, and I ask you for your assistance in obtaining it."

"I really cannot see how I can be of assistance to you in so delicate an affair."

"Nevertheless you can. Let me be frank with you; I know you will not abuse my confidence. You know Fräulein Eva,--you know how proud and reserved she is. Between ourselves what Heydeck said of her was true enough. I myself have often suffered from her pride. All my exertions, the most delicate attentions to her that I could devise, have never advanced me one step in her favour. I should long ago have relinquished all pretension to it if she had not treated every one else--yourself, Count, perhaps excepted--with the same coldness and hauteur which I have experienced from her. She cannot be approached after any ordinary fashion, but I hope that to-day I have found out a means of awakening her interest. When she learns how slightly Heydeck spoke of her, that he was instantly called to account for his expression, and that I was the champion who undertook to vindicate her honour, and defended her at the peril of his life----"

"You have just wagered that Heydeck would not challenge you; the peril then is not so very great."

"True, but she need not know that. The friend who tells her of the zeal with which I undertook her defence might add for my sake that Heydeck is famous as a perfect marksman, and that in case of a duel my life is in the greatest danger."

"And you ask me to be this friend?"

"If you would so far oblige me, my dear Count, I should be forever grateful to you. The charming Eva must take a deep interest in so fearless a defender of her honour. She cannot treat him with the cold formality which she accords to her other adorers. If once the ice is broken, and the smallest opening made in her armour of cold reserve,--if she admits me to the slightest degree of confidence, I will take care of the rest. She is no woman if gratitude to her champion is not at last metamorphosed into love. Will you help me, Count?"

"Hm,--the affair is not greatly to my taste," Count Waldheim slowly answered; "but we have always been good comrades and I will not desert you now; especially since I believe that you really stand in peril of your life,--a peril foolishly incurred by yourself. I will call at the Schommers' and see what I can do for you. She has just driven home, I shall be admitted. Besides, I must leave you at all events. I confess I am not comfortable here where every one is looking at us, and your name is whispered at all the tables."

"Very natural after what has passed."

"But these whispers are by no means complimentary to you, my dear fellow; and in fact these comrades of ours are not far wrong in my opinion. In your zeal to make yourself interesting to Fräulein Eva you treated Heydeck badly."

"Bah! he deserved nothing better."

"I will not play your Mentor, but, I do not care to stay here and be stared at any longer,--I am going. We shall meet at dinner at the Casino, and I will report as to my visit at the Schommers'. Good-morning."

"I shall stay here for a while. *Au revoir.*"

And Herr von Bertram stayed, balancing himself as airily as before, and gazing out upon the promenade, but nevertheless he was not quite comfortable. He felt himself the object of universal observation; he noticed that every fresh-comer--each officer who strolled into Büchner's--was informed immediately in a low tone by some one of his comrades of what had occurred. Among these new-comers were several of his own intimates, but none of them, after hearing what there was to tell, came near him or accorded his presence any acknowledgment save by the most commonplace salutation.

At last he rose, and walked through the rows of tables, bowing here and there. He soon perceived how unanimous was the disapproval of his comrades. His more intimate associates who had reason to expect that he would address them evidently avoided him, and the other officers returned his salutation in the coldest manner; some indeed turned away and made as if they were so absorbed in conversation as not to notice him.

He bit his lip angrily and asked himself whether he had not a right to demand an explanation of such conduct. Once when Baron Feldkirch of his own regiment and his intimate acquaintance turned away with only the salutation required in the service, he paused, half resolved to call him to account, but he instantly reflected that it would only make matters worse, and refrained.

He hastily passed on, and felt wonderfully relieved when he reached the open street; really he seemed to have been morally running the gauntlet during the last few moments.

Leo von Heydeck had only gone a few steps after leaving Büchner's when he was joined by Lieutenant von Herwarth. The two young men walked on together for a while in silence, each too busy in reflecting upon the previous scene to care to continue their former conversation.

Kuno von Herwarth was very angry; the unprovoked insult just offered to his friend filled him with indignation against its author. He remembered with much satisfaction the comments upon Bertram's conduct which he had heard expressed upon all sides as he left the veranda, and which were all indignantly condemnatory. Such a unanimous opinion on the part of the corps of officers was very important. It made the necessary consequences of the insult far less damaging to Leo than they usually are in such cases to the insulted man.

"Don't look so grave, Leo," Herwarth said at last "The affair is not so black as you think; fortunately you are sure of your man. Give him a distinct memento--a ball in the upper arm will do--and we shall probably be able to hush up all talk of the duel, which would really be best since the authorities are rather hard upon duelling just now. Of course you will choose pistols? Wing the insolent fellow and have done with him."

Leo looked up at his friend as if awaking from a dream. "I cannot answer you now," he replied. "I am not yet clear in my own mind. You forget how often we have discussed this question. Must I bow now to a prejudice against which I have hitherto contended with all my might? Must I transgress the dictates of morality and my own profound conviction and have recourse to arms to avenge words which, from the lips of a scoundrel like Bertram, have really no power whatever to injure me? You know my views with regard to duelling."

"But you cannot rest calmly beneath such an insult," his friend replied. "Remember, he accused you of dishonourable conduct, and he would add, of cowardice, if you failed to demand satisfaction for the insult! And what would your brother officers think of you?"

"I know all you would say, Kuno," Leo replied, sadly. "I knew you would reason thus, and that almost every one of my brother officers for whom I have any real regard will agree with you. And this is just why it is so difficult for me to come to a determination. I have a hard struggle with myself to pass through,--give me time. Do not ask of me a decided reply at once. This evening after I have taken counsel with myself you shall have it, and I promise you that if I decide to bow to the prejudice in favor of duelling you shall be my second."

"If?" Herwarth cried, indignantly. "How can there be any 'if' in the matter? Have you no blood in your veins? Mine boiled at that 'dishonourable,'--I could hardly keep myself from inflicting summary chastisement upon the insolent fellow. And you to whom it was applied can talk about an 'if' when the question is of the vindication of your honour. Really, Leo, if I had not seen you in the field I might misconceive you! And what will others, who do not know you as I do, think of you? The mere thought of their calling you 'coward' makes me furious! Make up your mind instantly, Leo! Do it for my sake! Upon my life you owe it to me, for rely upon it I never will suffer mortal man to call you coward, and in refusing to fight one duel yourself you'll cause me to fight

a dozen."

"Coward!" How could the word fail of its effect upon Leo? His eyes flashed, his cheek burned red to become pale the next instant, and for a while he walked on beside his friend without a word. Then, when he could command himself sufficiently to speak calmly, he said, "Your words are harsh, Kuno, but I can forgive them for I know that you can never think me a coward. Trust me, there is more courage required to brave the condemnation of all who are dear to us than to use sword or pistol. I do not yet know whether my courage now will stand me in stead. I cannot yet decide what to do. Do not make the conflict with myself in this matter harder for me than it is of necessity. If you love me, Kuno, leave me for a while. Be sure I need all the powers of my mind, all the strength that I possess, to come to a determination. This evening you shall learn what that determination is."

Leo paused, shook hands with his friend, and hastily turned and left him.

CHAPTER II.

"Home!"

This order came quite unexpectedly to the coachman. Fräulein Schommer had already enumerated to him the various shops at which he was to stop, and suddenly her plans were changed. Scarcely had the carriage turned off the promenade into "Great Wilhelmstrasse" when she gave this order, although she had not as yet purchased anything.

The young lady held her parasol so closely before her face that it not only shaded it but entirely concealed it; of course she did not perceive the numerous bows and smiles of the acquaintances whom she passed in her short drive home, but could resign herself undisturbed to dreamy reflection. It was of no very pleasant description, as was plain from the grave expression of her face, the defiant curl of her beautiful lip, and the dark almost gloomy look of her black eyes.

The carriage stopped before an elegant villa; the footman opened the door of the barouche, but Eva stepped hastily from the vehicle, scorning his proffered help, and hurried into the house, acknowledging only by a haughty nod the respectful greeting of the porter who stood in the hall. Neither did she deign to notice the footman, who followed her awaiting orders up the broad carpeted marble staircase, until she reached the landing, when she forbade him by an imperious wave of her hand to follow her further, and opened a door leading into the interior apartments of the villa. One of these she entered; it was a small room elegantly and comfortably but by no means splendidly furnished, with windows leading out into the garden.

A young girl coquettishly dressed who was seated at her sewing, sprang up as the young lady entered and hastened towards her. "You are returned very soon, my lady!" she said, as she assisted her to lay aside her hat and light summer wrap.

"How often must I tell you, Nanette, that I detest that silly 'my lady'?"

The reproof was administered with tolerable severity, and was by no means grateful to Nanette, as was shown by her look as she received it. She had learned, however, to control herself. "I beg pardon, Fräulein," she said, with a low courtesy; "I will try to remember, but 'my lady' comes so naturally; and who has a better right to the title than such a beautiful, rich lady as Fräulein Schommer?"

"Hush!" Fräulein Schommer exclaimed, in an imperious tone. "I hate all such speeches! If you really desire to remain in my service you must remember once for all that I forbid all flattery as well as the title 'my lady.'"

Nanette cast one more venomous glance at her mistress, and made a deeper courtesy than before. The young lady, however, noticed neither the one nor the other; she walked up to the mirror and repaired some slight disorder in the arrangement of her magnificent black hair, impatiently disdaining Nanette's proffered help as she asked, "Where is Fräulein von Schlicht? In my room or in the garden?"

"The Fräulein is on the veranda with her embroidery."

At this reply Eva turned to her maid impatiently and asked sternly, "Are you transgressing my orders intentionally, or do you not know that I have especially requested that all the servants of my household shall speak of Fräulein Aline von Schlicht as the 'Lady Aline'?"

"I cannot possibly give a hired companion a higher title than my mistress! I thought because--"

"When I command you are not to think, but to obey," Eva interrupted the girl; "and I require you to give Fräulein von Schlicht the title of 'Lady,' which belongs to her. Nor is Fräulein von Schlicht in my service, as you appear to think; she is not my hired companion, but my friend who does me the honour to reside with me, and as such you are to respect her, and to obey her commands even more strictly than my own. Any forgetfulness in this respect will be punished by immediate dismissal from my service."

Of course there was no answer to be made to all this: Eva would have suffered none; she never noticed that Nanette's face grew scarlet,--that an ugly expression of hatred disfigured the otherwise pretty mouth,--nor that the maid's hand trembled as she opened the door leading into the next room for her mistress to pass. Eva left the apartment without even glancing at the girl.

Nanette, as the door closed behind her mistress, clenched her little fist and shook it menacingly, while her whole face showed the malice that she felt. Suddenly her gaze fell upon the mirror, and she started at the countenance reflected there. She stood before it and tried to smile; at first in vain,--those hateful lines were too firmly fixed about the mouth, but they must be banished. Nanette saw herself how ugly they were, and what must be done she could do,--she was not wanting in strength of will.

After spending some time before the mirror, every trace of the disfigurement which anger at the imperiously-administered reproof had produced, vanished. She contemplated the reflection of her pretty face and figure with immense self-satisfaction; she nodded pleasantly to herself, and then stepping on tiptoe to the door leading to the next room, opened it noiselessly a very little way so that through the chink she could command a view of the apartment and of the veranda adjoining.

She bestowed no attention whatever on the luxuriously furnished drawing-room. It had interested her somewhat a few days before when she had first entered Fräulein Schommer's service; she had then examined admiringly the costly furniture and the splendid pictures upon the walls, while a bitter feeling of envy of the possessor of all these treasures had filled her soul. Since then she had dusted and arranged them frequently and she no longer admired. Admiration had vanished, envy still existed in full force.

Nanette's attention was concentrated upon the veranda, upon which the drawing-room opened by two tall glass folding-doors. Sitting there in the thick shade of a leafy climbing vine was a young lady, her hands for the moment resting idly upon some embroidery in her lap. Her back was towards Nanette so the girl could not see her face, and the distance was too great to allow of her understanding what she said,--the low voice reached the listener's ears only as a gentle murmur.

Beside this young lady Eva was sitting on a garden-chair. She too was gazing abroad into the garden with her back towards the maid. She spoke also in her turn but in so low a tone that not one syllable could be distinguished by the listener. In vain did she strain her ears: she so longed to overhear what the ladies were talking about, but she soon found that this would be impossible unless she could contrive to slip into the drawing-room and conceal herself in the embrasure of one of the windows.

She could not lose so delightful an opportunity of learning from the intimate conversation of the two friends what could have put Fräulein Schommer into such an ill humour to-day, and her resolution was soon taken. Cautiously opening the door a little wider she entered the drawing-room and had just noiselessly advanced to the centre of the apartment when Fräulein Eva suddenly turned round and flashed a look of indignant surprise upon the detected eavesdropper, who stopped short reddening with mortification, and uncertain whether to advance or withdraw.

"What do you want there?"

This question, conveying reproof not in words but in manner, restored to Nanette all her wonted self-sufficiency. She quietly stepped out on the veranda before replying, and then said, "I heard you call, Fräulein Schommer. What are your orders?"

Eva was not misled by this reply. The maid's sudden confusion had betrayed her, and she easily guessed for what she had been slipping so noiselessly into the drawing-room. With undisguised contempt in her look she said sternly, "That is a falsehood! You know that I never call,--that I always ring for you when I have any orders to give. You were listening!"

"Oh Fräulein Schommer what an accusation to make! I assure you----"

"Hush! Not a word! I will not be contradicted! Your colour your confusion betrayed you. I will let it pass this time, but if ever again I find you listening I shall dismiss you instantly!"

"But, Eva dear, do not be so hard," her companion interposed. "What possible temptation could Nanette have to listen to our conversation? You are wronging her!"

"Heaven knows I never wanted to listen!" Nanette cried, in an injured tone. "I thought

Fräulein Schommer called,--indeed, indeed, that was why I came! I never listened in my life, and I would rather cut my tongue out than tell a falsehood. I do not deserve to be accused of such things! I am perfectly innocent, and it hurts my feelings very much to have Fräulein Schommer suspect me so."

Nanette put her handkerchief to her eyes, and from behind it came inarticulate sounds that were really a creditable imitation of suppressed sobbing, but her clever acting failed to impose upon her mistress. Eva was not easily shaken in her convictions, and least of all could Nanette's theatrical asseverations move her.

"I will not hear another word!" she said as sternly as before. "You know now what you have to expect if you are ever found listening again. Go to your sewing, and if I want you I will ring for you!"

This command was so imperative that Nanette did not venture another word in self-defence,--a very successful sob was her only reply. While she was passing through the drawing-room she kept her handkerchief up to her eyes, but once more alone, with the door closed behind her, she tossed it aside and for a few minutes gave herself up to the envious rage that possessed her. When she had grown quite calm once more, and had, by a glance into the mirror, assured herself that her pretty face retained no trace of her agitation, she left the little room, leaving the door open that she might hear any summons from the veranda, and went into the hall.

Here she found the footman who had attended his mistress during her drive pacing slowly to and fro; he was a fine-looking young fellow, with a fresh good-humoured face; his handsome livery became him excellently well.

Nanette gave him her friendliest smile. "Good-morning, Wilhelm," she whispered, evidently pleased. He returned her greeting with undisguised admiration in look and tone.

"Don't speak so loud, Wilhelm. Fräulein Schommer need not overhear us if I like to talk a little with you."

"Would you like to talk a little with me, Nanette? That's kindly of you now. I thought you never meant to take notice of me; you've hardly said one word to me in the three days since you came, and when I was so glad that we were going to have the same mistress."

"What else could I do? Haven't I to sit in that little den all day long just listening for Fräulein Schommer's bell? A pretty fuss she would make if I chanced not to hear it!"

"Come now Nanette, she is not so bad as you think,--a little strict perhaps,--but mind your orders and you never hear a hard word from her."

"She's a fiend! a Zantuppy!" Nanette rejoined, pettishly.

"A Zantuppy?" Wilhelm asked, astonished. "What is a Zantuppy?"

Nanette regarded the ignorant fellow with condescending compassion. "You have had no education, Wilhelm!" she said. "Every one who knows anything calls every scolding woman a Zantuppy. I'd Zantuppy her if I could with her proud and haughty airs treating us as if we were the dirt under her feet!"

Here she suddenly recollected how her anger disfigured her, and compelling her features to a smile that contrasted strangely with her words, she went on: "And to-day she's bristling like a porkypine; first she scolded me for saying 'my lady' to her, and then for not saying it to the stupid companion."

"But that's nothing, Nanette; she doesn't like to be called my lady; and if she wants us to bow and scrape to the lady Aline von Schlicht, 'tis easy done,--and the place is a good one. I've lived in the first families; but such meals, and such perquisites! Rely upon it, Nanette, you'll like it and thank me yet for helping to get you here. If Fräulein Schommer gets out of bed the wrong side now and then never mind it,--she's the right stuff at heart. She is a little out of sorts to-day. I saw that when she so suddenly gave orders to drive home, although she had not been to a single shop."

"She is in a bad humour then? I knew it; she flew at me as if she would eat me. What went amiss? Did anything vex her on the drive?"

"Not that I know of. We had scarcely driven through the promenade when she suddenly called out, 'Home!'"

"Something's wrong. Perhaps she's in love. Did you meet any one who did not seem pleased enough to see her?"

"What queer ideas you have, Nanette! She never thinks of such things,--never looks at a man. With all her millions she's twenty-two and unmarried. She might furnish a worsted-shop with all the mittens she's given the men, if she could collect them."

"Of course any one as rich as she can give as many mittens as she chooses; there are always

men enough to hanker after money, but there are some who don't care for it."

"And that's true enough, Nanette," Wilhelm replied, with a grin. "Now here am I, who never think of money when I see such a pretty face as yours."

Nanette rewarded the compliment with her best smile. "But then you're different from most of these grand gentlemen. Still, some have ideas of their own. Now there's Count Waldheim, whom I used to see every day when I lived with the Privy Councillor's lady, Frau von Sturmhaupt. This princess of ours might throw her millions at his feet and he wouldn't stoop to pick them up. All the money in the world wouldn't persuade him to look at any one who had not a 'von' to her name."

"You're out there, Nanette. Count Waldheim comes here often, and likes our Fräulein extremely well. It is 'charming Fräulein Schommer,' and 'lovely Fräulein Schommer,' and she treats him better than any of the young men who come here."

"Count Waldheim visits here?" Nanette asked, in surprise. "Well, I wouldn't have thought it;--and our princess likes him? I'll lay my head she's in love with him, and he wouldn't have her if she had shovelfuls of money. I bet you she met him to-day when she was out driving, and he never bowed to her."

"Out again, Nanette! We didn't meet him, but we saw him; he was sitting at Büchner's under the awning with Herr von Bertram, the nephew of your old mistress, Frau von Sturmhaupt, and he bowed so low that he almost bumped his nose against the bar of the balustrade. Fräulein Eva has no heart-ache for him, nor for any of the rest of them; they all bow when she drives past, as if she were a princess. Only one man sat still and read the newspaper without looking at us; but he does not visit here, and I don't think our Fräulein knows him."

"Indeed! Who was he?"

"Lieutenant von Heydeck of the infantry. Why should our Fräulein look at the infantry when she can have cavalymen by the dozens?"

"That's just why she doesn't care for them. 'Tis sure to be Herr von Heydeck whom she's vexed about. I don't know him. Is he handsome?"

"I don't know; he looks like all the other infantry fellows. I never trouble my head about him. What does it all concern us?"

"It is just what does concern us!" Nanette replied, peevishly. "I'll find out all my fine lady's tricks and teach her who I am! I tell you, Wilhelm, we can do what we please with our masters and mistresses if we only can find out their secrets; and to do that we must keep our eyes and ears open and help each other, for what one doesn't see the other may. So you must tell me everything that you learn, in or out of the house, Wilhelm, and I'll put this and that together."

Nanette's proposition did not appear to find much favour with Wilhelm.

"I'll tell you what, Nanette," he said. "I'd like nothing better than to please you, but you'd better leave me out of this. I've no fancy for spying on my mistress. I do my work and no more bother."

"But if I were to beg you, dear Wilhelm?" Nanette asked, tenderly laying her hand upon his shoulder and looking sweetly into his face,--indeed, she was extremely pretty. "If I were to promise you a kiss," she continued, "would you refuse to do what I ask?"

The bribe was so seductive that honest Wilhelm's principles were hardly strong enough to withstand the maid's request, coming as it did from lips so rosy and inviting. Her cause was half won when he asked, with some hesitation, "But what do you want me to do?"

"Nothing wrong, Wilhelm dear," the girl hastily answered; "nothing wrong. I wouldn't ask it of you, but really we poor servants must stand by each other if we wouldn't be trodden down into the very dirt. Is it wrong in us to use the eyes and ears that God gave us? We are human beings, and ought to know all that is going on around us. Keep your eyes open when you drive out with our Fräulein, and never forget who meets or speaks to her. And when you are waiting at table you can pick up many a bit of information,--you must tell me what they talk about. That's no wrong: you tell no one's secrets. If you'll only do this, Wilhelm dear, I'll like you so much, and give you a kiss, or perhaps two, for every piece of news you bring me. You shall have one now if you'll promise to do as I say."

The temptation was too great. Wilhelm could not resist. He gave a prompt "yes," and for his reward took not one but a dozen kisses. Nanette seeming nothing loth, he might have gone on receiving prepayment for his services had he not been startled by a loud exclamation behind him, followed by the words, in most distinct Saxon German,--

"By Jove! Deuce take the fellow! A pretty household this! and in broad daylight, too!"

The speaker was an elderly gentleman, dressed with extreme elegance, who had been

contemplating the embrace from the staircase-landing, his fine Panama hat on his head, and his hands resting upon his gold-headed cane. He continued to observe the couple with a good-humoured smile, as they stood as if spell-bound in dismay.

When, however, Wilhelm had sufficiently recovered himself to recognize the elderly spectator, he looked much relieved. "Don't be frightened, Nanette," he whispered; "'tis only our Fräulein's Uncle Balthasar. You won't tell of us, Herr Schommer? 'An honest kiss ne'er comes amiss."

Herr Balthasar took the request in very good part, made though it was rather familiarly than respectfully. He nodded good-humouredly to Wilhelm, pinched Nanette's blooming cheek, and smiled broadly. "A kiss," he said,--"a kiss, to be sure, is all very well, but you took a dozen, you deuce of a fellow. If I should tell my wife or my niece you're both done for."

Wilhelm seemed little disturbed by the threat. "You wouldn't be so hard on us, Herr Schommer," he said; and his security was fully justified by the good nature that characterized this uncle of his mistress.

Herr Balthasar Schommer was a personification of good humour. It beamed pure and unadulterated from his small gray eyes, it was distinctly stamped on the broad smile of his large mouth. Whoever had once seen Herr Balthasar knew that he could rely with certainty upon his thorough goodness of heart. There was no guile in the man; his round face was the mirror of his character. Try as the old gentleman would by twirling the ends of his gray moustache straight into the air to give himself a stern, martial air, no one was ever deceived by it.

"I'll let you off this once, deuce take you!" he said, vainly endeavouring to make his words sound stern and dignified; "but another time take care. And you too, you little minx," he went on, turning to Nanette; "for I can tell you that if my niece had seen you--ah, by Jove!"

Again he pinched the girl's cheek, then laughed heartily, and tapped Wilhelm on the shoulder with his cane. Then with a farewell nod he went into the drawing-room to find his niece.

"Won't he tell?" Nanette whispered anxiously as the door closed behind him.

"Never!" Wilhelm replied in a tone of firm conviction. "Herr Balthasar wouldn't for the world do an unkind thing by any one. Oh, he's a splendid old gentleman!"

"He's a foolish old fop!" Nanette rejoined, saucily; "looking at me so and pinching my cheek. It's my belief he'd have liked a kiss himself."

"Well, you might have given him one, Nanette; I wouldn't have been jealous."

Nanette's face grew dark, and she would have made some cutting rejoinder, but she bethought herself in time that it behooved her to keep Wilhelm in good humour, so she contented herself with saying, "Thank you kindly for your permission, which I shall not need, however. The vain old fool! He looks like a bedizened monkey in his light summer costume. You can see with half an eye that he once weighed out sugar and sold molasses. He can't hide that for all the big diamond in his shirt-front. And then such language! 'Bai Chove!' and 'teuce of a yellow!' at every third word. It is scandalous that a girl who has always lived in the best families should have taken service with such riff-raff!"

In her zeal and irritation she had quite forgotten her resolution always to be amiable when Wilhelm was by; one glance into his honest face reminded her of this, and she forthwith controlled herself. None too soon, however; for Wilhelm had just made the discovery that pretty Nanette could be very cross and look almost ugly.

"I don't know what you mean, Nanette," he said, with much less warmth. "What has the good old man done to you? He is so good-hearted that I should think no one could be angry with him."

"I am not angry with him," Nanette answered, aware that she had made a blunder, and anxious to repair it if possible. "I see he is a very good-humoured old man; but when a girl has lived in the first families, it is very difficult for her to become accustomed to low-bred manners. If you were not here, Wilhelm, I could not stand it three days longer; but for your sake I will stay, if you will keep your promise to me. We have talked enough now, and I must go to my sewing, or Fräulein Eva will know where I have been."

She kissed the tips of her fingers to Wilhelm, whose irritation she had thus quickly appeased, and returning to the small room adjoining the drawing-room seated herself by the window and took up the sewing which she had put down upon Fräulein Schommer's return from driving.

CHAPTER III.

"You really are too severe with poor Nanette," Fräulein Aline von Schlicht said to the young heiress.

Eva Schommer was conscious that there was justice in her friend's reproof. Her impulsive temperament often led her to make use of hasty expressions which she regretted afterwards, especially if she had been actuated by anger, and she frequently seemed to show an insensibility to the feelings of others which was by no means part of her character. When she was irritated she would rebuke any omission of duty upon the part of her servants with an undeserved severity, and she admitted to herself that this had just been the case with Nanette. She had reproved the girl upon mere suspicion as sharply as if the fault had been proven. She was vexed with herself for her hastiness, but the dislike with which Nanette's whole conduct had inspired her, and her conviction that the girl had actually tried to play the part of eavesdropper, were by no means weakened.

"You are right, Aline," she said, sadly; "I am ashamed of myself, but I could not help it. The girl is so odious to me that I cannot conceive how I came to take her into my service. I really think it would be best to give her a quarter's or even a half-year's wages, and dismiss her."

"Do not be unjust, Eva. Has she given you any good reason to send her away? Have you any right to break the contract which you tacitly concluded with her when you engaged her as your maid?"

"But I will not break it. I will indemnify her duly."

"With money? Can it be done? If you send her away after three days in your service, will it not be thought that she has been guilty of great misconduct, perhaps even of dishonesty? Can money repair the harm done to the girl's reputation? How often you have told me how you despise the wretched dross, and yet you propose to atone with money for the wrong you will do poor Nanette by suddenly dismissing her from your service without reason!"

"I will not do it, my dear, good Aline!" Eva cried, kissing her friend tenderly. "You are my good angel," she continued; "you are always right; I see how unjust I should be. I was wrong to take the girl into my service simply upon Frau von Sturmhaupt's recommendation and Wilhelm's request, when, in spite of her pretty face and figure, I was not at all prepossessed by her, but now that I have made the mistake I must bide by the consequences. I should have trusted my first impressions and not taken her into the house. My dislike to her, which increases daily, may easily make me unjust to her. Her affected smile, her hypocritical humility, and her whole manner, indeed, confirm my want of confidence in her. I do not believe her even when she is telling the truth. I suspect her always of some sly ulterior motive in all she says."

"Are you not unjust again, Eva dear? You are prejudiced against the girl, and see faults in her which I fail to discover. To me she seems amiable and willing. I have not known her to tell a falsehood. She is neat, capable, and industrious, pleasant in her manner, and in short, so far as I can judge from the few days she has been in your service, she possesses all the qualities of an excellent lady's-maid. That she is honest and trustworthy is proved by the excellent character she brought you from Frau von Sturmhaupt, with whom she lived several years."

"Why did she leave if Frau von Sturmhaupt was satisfied with her?"

"Nanette told you herself that as she has an old mother dependent upon her, she was obliged to ask higher wages than Frau von Sturmhaupt--who is by no means wealthy--felt herself justified in giving. I cannot see that we have any reason to doubt the truth of this explanation. Is it not natural that a poor girl should try to improve her condition?"

"I cannot argue the matter, Aline. All that you say is perfectly correct, and nevertheless something that I can neither explain nor contend with convinces me that Nanette is false, that her amiability is hypocrisy, and that she returns with interest my dislike. I know she hates me, and that she will show me that she does so as soon as she has the opportunity."

"You will not allow such a vague 'something' to influence you?"

"No, Aline; I will follow your advice. I will try to conquer my prejudice--for I confess that my dislike of Nanette is prejudice--but I cannot promise more. I will not testify towards her the dislike with which she inspires me, but I cannot command my confidence, and I cannot pretend to show her any."

"She has no right at present to ask that you should. Your confidence in her must be the result of faithful performance of her duties; and I hope she will succeed in winning it, for you are too dear and good not to resign a prejudice as soon as you know that it is unjust."

"I will try, my darling Aline," said Eva, taking her friend's hand and tenderly kissing it, "I will try, and perhaps I shall succeed since you are with me, for you are, as I said, my good angel."

When I look into your kind, loving eyes, and hear your gentle words, I think I can be better; my wild, impulsive nature grows calm. I am not dear and good, as you call me, Aline. I know I am not, but I want to be so. When I see your heavenly gentleness and repose, I feel how hateful are my hasty judgments, my sharp hard words, my unfeminine obstinacy. I long to be like you, but I cannot; I forget all my good resolutions as soon as I am provoked. I know how odious this is, and, when I think of it, I cannot conceive how you, who are so infinitely better and gentler than I, can love me. Oh, if I could only be like you!"

Aline returned her friend's kiss, and said, with a smile, "Who would believe that the charming Eva could be guilty of such folly, that the proud beauty whom all adore could wish to resemble poor insignificant me, whom no one cares for except the friend whose affection blinds her? No, stay as you are, dear, for as you are you conquer every heart."

The lovely, gentle smile that had transfigured Eva's face as she had caressed her friend vanished at Aline's last words, her dark eyes flashed, and the lines about her mouth grew hard. "Yes," she said, bitterly, "as I am I conquer the hearts of all the men who have set their hearts on my wretched millions, the most unfortunate inheritance which my good father could have bequeathed to me. He never dreamed, while he laboured night and day to give wealth to his darling child, that this miserable money would be the curse of her existence, poisoning her very soul!"

Aline looked at her, with a smile. "If your wealth is your greatest misfortune," she said, gayly, "I am afraid you will find but little sympathy for it among your heartless fellow-mortals, and that you will be obliged to learn to endure with stoicism the burden of your millions."

"You too, Aline!" Eva cried, reproachfully. "Can you consider wealth a blessing? I know perfectly well that others envy me, but if they dreamed what misery this wretched money has brought me, how it daily embitters every enjoyment of life, filling my mind with distrust and suspicion, making me despise those about me, they would give me pity instead of envy. Wherever I go I am received with delight and loaded with courtesies. I? No, my millions! I represent to these sordid souls their idol,--wealth. I am nothing to them but the heiress, and as such beautiful, lovely, talented, fêted and caressed wherever I go. Have I not known this from my earliest childhood? Gray-headed servants cringed and yielded to every wish of the spoiled wayward child, finding all that she did charming and attractive because she was an heiress. Can I be happy in kindness shown not to me but to my money? As soon as I appear in society all the men vie with each other in doing me homage. One flatters me, another exerts all his wit to entertain me, a third sighs and languishes at my feet,--and it is all a lie, all wretched hypocrisy! These very men who flatter and woo me would never accord me a moment's notice if I were poor. Oh it is hard to be obliged to repeat over and over to one's self, 'You yourself are nothing; these wretches adore your millions, not you!' What do they care although I treat them with the greatest arrogance and contempt? I am rich, and all I say and do is charming, and would be although I united in my one character every possible vice. I despise them and show them that I do so, and they adore me! They sue for my hand and not one thinks whether I can be a faithful, loving wife. I bring the man whom I marry millions, and who cares whether a heart accompanies them? The more persistently they pay court to me the more I am humiliated in my own eyes, the more thoroughly I hate these miserable, sordid men! Yes, I hate them so thoroughly that even that vain aristocrat, Count Waldheim, and that *blasé* fop, Paul Delmar, seem delightful to me, only because I know that they never think of marrying me; they at least are not to be bought with my money. Waldheim's pride of birth protects him from such degradation, and Delmar is richer than I; he wants none of my fortune."

"Poor child!" Aline said, sadly.

"Yes, you are right now!" Eva continued, with emotion. "I am poor, terribly poor; in the midst of my wealth I am destitute of everything that constitutes happiness. It is a sad fate, indeed, never to be loved for one's self alone!"

"Never, Eva?" Aline asked, reproachfully. "Do you mistrust me?"

"No, never!" the girl cried. "You and dear old Uncle Balthasar are the only people in the whole world whom I really love and trust with my whole heart,--you two, and perhaps Aunt Minni, who, I think, gives me as much affection as she can spare from her lap-dog Azor. If it were not for you I should be desperate indeed in this cold heartless sordid world!"

"Because you see the world much more cold heartless and sordid than it really is,--because you regard men with a suspicion that they do not deserve. I cannot comprehend how you can be so mistaken as to believe that every one who comes near you to show you kindness or preference thinks only of your fortune,--that every man who woos you desires your money only. Look in your mirror, and if you are not blind it must tell you that your beauty----"

"Not another word, Aline! You argue against yourself. Is all their homage paid to my beauty? Why, this is almost worse than if it were paid to my wealth. How can beauty without mind and heart attract any man of genuine worth? Because they all praise my beauty I despise them the more. Has one of the crowd about me ever had an opportunity of discovering whether I possess either heart or intellect? I scarcely reply to their flatteries; I treat them with the cold contempt that they merit, but they cringe all the more. Remember that fête at Schönsee. I was in the worst

of humours, and intentionally as disagreeable as possible; you, on the contrary, were as charming, as lovely, as--well, as you always are. You are much handsomer than I."

"But, Eva----!"

"Let me finish. You have brought this on yourself. I know that I am not ill-looking, but I am not so conceited as to compare myself with you. And that day you looked so lovely that I was positively enchanted with you. The air had deepened the colour on your cheeks, your glorious blue eyes were sparkling with pleasure, and as the wind played among the golden curls on your forehead you looked like some angel just flown down from heaven."

"Oh, Eva, Eva!"

"I will not be silenced; you shall hear me out. You were so lovely and so gay, you talked so charmingly that all the women envied me for having such a friend. And the men? they crowded about me, unamiable, silent, repellant as I was, and neglected you who were all loveliness. But no; now I recollect. Lieutenant von Herwarth did not neglect you; but he was the only one who bestowed upon me no more than a due share of attention, and therefore I liked him better than all the others."

Aline's cheeks flushed crimson at this mention of Lieutenant von Herwarth, and Eva laughed merrily. But it was her turn to blush when Aline, recovering from her embarrassment, said, "Herr von Heydeck certainly paid you no especial attention,--he and Herwarth make two; so you see all the men do not deserve your censure."

"I will except Herwarth for your sake!" Eva replied, gayly.

"And Herr von Heydeck?"

"I know him too slightly. I suppose he would have been like all the rest, but I scarcely spoke to him when Uncle Balthasar presented him."

"And he took it very ill of you, my dear," said a deep voice behind the two girls.

It was Uncle Balthasar who thus interrupted them; he had come through the drawing-room without being perceived by the two friends, whose faces were turned towards the garden, and he now stepped out upon the veranda. Nodding pleasantly to his niece and raising his straw hat to her friend, he drew a chair up to the table at which they were sitting and took his place beside them.

Uncle Balthasar was conscious of the possession of an important and interesting piece of news, and he comported himself accordingly. He did all that he could to assume a grave and dignified expression, succeeding but ill however, for the good-humoured smile would not resign its wonted place upon his face and shone through his affected gravity. He twirled his moustache until the two ends pointed directly upwards, then folded his arms and cast down his eyes reflectively, never stooping to pick up his gold-headed cane, usually his favourite toy, when it fell on the floor at his feet.

The two girls exchanged a smiling glance of mutual understanding; they knew Uncle Balthasar, and that he was longing to impart to them some fresh piece of gossip.

Eva, always ready to please him, opened the way for him by a question: "You come from the city, uncle? Is there any news? You look so solemnly important that we are dying of curiosity."

Uncle Balthasar gave his moustache a fresh twirl and nodded with exceeding gravity. "There is bad news," he said, slowly and seriously; "yes, yes, my dear, very bad news, I can assure you. The thing occurred as I tell you. I had just drunk my usual can, and was sauntering home, when I met Count Waldheim, or rather he overtook me and tapped me on the shoulder. 'Good-morning, Herr Balthasar,' said he. 'Count, your most obedient servant,' said I. 'How is your niece to-day?' said he. 'Thanks for your kind inquiry; she is very well,' said I. And we went on talking most sociably."

Here he paused and looked thoughtfully at the mosaic top of the table before him, pondering how to convey his news to his listeners in the most impressive manner.

But Eva misunderstood him; she thought he had finished, and she said, laughing, "And is this your bad news, uncle?"

Uncle Balthasar was quite offended by his niece's tone and words, and gave vent to this feeling with all the sharpness in voice and manner of which he was capable,--"I take your sneer extremely ill, my dear. I take the greatest pains to consider how best to spare your feelings in telling you what Count Waldheim has just told me of Herr von Heydeck, and you sneer at me. My dear, you are wrong, very wrong."

The merry smile vanished from Eva's face at her uncle's mention of the name of Heydeck; she blushed and looked up at him eagerly. "Don't be angry with me, uncle dear," she begged, "I did not mean to offend you. Pray go on."

"I am not angry," the kindly old man declared, "but you have quite put me out. I wanted to

spare your feelings, and now I really do not know how to begin."

"Spare my feelings? Has any misfortune occurred?" Eva asked, anxiously. "But no, that is impossible! I saw Herr von Heydeck hardly half an hour ago, under Büchner's awning."

"Just so; it was at Büchner's that the affair took place. One of them will of course be killed; probably Herr von Bertram, for Herr von Heydeck is sure of his man at a hundred paces."

"For God's sake what has happened? I pray you do not keep me in suspense!"

"Why you see, Eva my dear, I don't know very well myself. I only know what Count Waldheim told me. He was there when Herr von Heydeck, under Büchner's awning, abused you, and Herr von Bertram would not permit it; and so they both went at it. The Count says there must be a duel, for Herr von Bertram flew into such a rage that Herr von Heydeck must challenge him and shoot him of course. But Herr von Bertram won't mind giving his life for you in the least. That's what the Count said; and he was coming to tell you all about it, but meeting me, he said I would do just as well. He would send Herr von Bertram himself, who could tell you everything. And that's all I know about it."

And Uncle Balthasar, leaning back in his chair with an air of immense satisfaction, picked up his cane, and lightly tapped with it his patent leather boot-tips.

Eva had listened eagerly to all he had to say, growing alternately red and pale the while. When she heard that Herr von Heydeck had spoken ill of her, her black eyes flashed and her cheeks burned with mortification; when she heard that Bertram had been her champion, she grew pale. That he--he whom of all her numerous admirers she most hated--should have undertaken her defence, and against Heydeck! Her heart beat violently: a mist came before her eyes; she sank back half fainting into the arms of Aline, who kissed her brow tenderly and compassionately.

Uncle Balthasar, seeing the effect his narrative had produced upon his niece, started to his feet. "Eva my dear girl, what is the matter?" he cried, frightened out of his wits. "The doctor! where is the doctor? Where is the bell? Send Wilhelm for the doctor!"

In the wildest distress he ran hither and thither, perfectly uncertain what to do; but his anxiety soon ceased, for Eva quickly recovered herself and arose. "Compose yourself, uncle," she said, gently, "I am not ill; the fright overcame me for a moment, but I need no physician. I am quite strong again and ready for what must be done! This duel must not take place!" She took from the table before her a little silver bell and rang it violently.

"What are you going to do?" Aline asked, with anxiety.

"I do not know just yet; I only know that a duel must be prevented,--prevented at all hazards."

Nanette instantly obeyed her mistress's summons, and was devoured with curiosity at sight of Eva's pale face and flashing eyes, although she received her orders without any sign of interest. "Send Wilhelm," Eva said, "to Lieutenant von Bertram. If he does not find him at home, let him go after him, wherever he is, and beg him to come to me as quickly as possible. I will await him here on the veranda."

"But, Eva, you must not do this," Aline interposed. "What will Herr von Bertram think of such an invitation?"

"What are conventional forms to me when two human lives are at stake? No, Aline, I shall follow the dictates of duty; nothing that you can say will shake my resolution. Dearly as I love to follow your advice, I cannot do so now. What are you waiting for, Nanette? Do you not understand my orders?"

"I thought perhaps the Lady Aline----"

Eva was about to give vent to the irritation caused her by these words, but she remembered in time her late conversation with Aline, and she merely said, in a gentler tone than she was used to employ towards Nanette, "I wish Wilhelm to request Herr von Bertram to come to me as soon as possible. Make haste and carry him my orders. Go!"

Then, when Nanette had left the veranda, she turned to Uncle Balthasar: "Will you do me a favour, uncle dear?"

"A thousand if you will, my darling. You know I do everything that you wish," Uncle Balthasar hastened to assure her.

"Then pray go to Count Waldheim. I am afraid Wilhelm will not find Herr von Bertram, but Count Waldheim will surely know where he is. I must see Herr von Bertram. Bring him to me, there's a dear good uncle!"

"You shall have him, my pet, you shall have him! I'll bring him to you, be sure, my poor little darling! I know where to find him. Count Waldheim told me he was to dine with him at the Casino. You shall have him; I'll bring him."

CHAPTER IV.

With feverish impatience Eva awaited the arrival of Lieutenant von Bertram, an impatience all the more intense from her inability to hasten his visit, accustomed though she were to an instant fulfilment of her every wish.

Eva was one of fortune's spoiled darlings; her father, who from being a common day-labourer had become the possessor of mines and millions, cherished an idolatrous affection for his daughter. Was she not an only child, the very image of the wife whom he had wooed for very many years only to have her snatched from him by death after one short year of marriage?

Karl Schommer was universally held to be a hard, cold, stern man, capable of only one passion--avarice. One woman, she to whom he had given his whole heart, knew what he really was. For her sake, to win for his wife the daughter of his wealthy, purse-proud employer, Schommer had laboured with superhuman energy, and embarked his first accumulated earnings in speculation. Everything that he attempted succeeded. He won wealth, and with wealth the woman whom he loved. Her death was a terrible blow; it would have crushed him had he not been sustained by a sense of duty. He had a sacred charge to fulfil in care for the little motherless daughter whom his dying wife had put into his arms with her last loving smile.

To little Eva he henceforth devoted himself with all the unselfish tenderness which he had shown to his early-lost wife. For her he continued to labour with the same restless energy and with the same success as heretofore. The child needed a woman's care; the anxious father would not entrust it to a hired nurse, but he bethought himself of his sister-in-law, the wife of his brother Balthasar, and he begged her to take charge of his motherless little one.

It was no easy matter for Aunt Minni to make up her mind to leave beautiful Dresden, where she kept a thriving haberdasher's shop; but persuaded thereto by her kindly husband, who loved his brother dearly, she did leave it and undertake to preside over her brother-in-law's household and to take charge of little Eva.

Karl Schommer could not have provided better for his child's physical welfare than by summoning his sister-in-law to his aid. Never was there a more devoted aunt and nurse, and she was rewarded by seeing her charge develop into a strong, healthy child.

It was decidedly questionable however whether Aunt Minni's capacity for undertaking Eva's mental culture were equally good; but of this Karl Schommer thought not at all. His own education was very defective; it never troubled him that his brother and his brother's wife were alike uncultivated; it was enough for him that they loved his child almost as tenderly as he did himself.

There could hardly have been worse training for a child than that under which the little Eva grew up, and but for her admirable natural endowments of disposition and intellect, she must have been entirely ruined by the constant and injudicious indulgence with which she was treated.

She was still very young when her father died; her home-education was after this neither better nor worse than it had been before. She tyrannized over the entire household, over her teachers and schoolmates. Only one of these last would not bend before her: this was Aline, her present companion.

Aline was quite as clever as Eva; they were rivals for first honours in school and out. Out of this rivalry there grew a friendship between them that ended only with their lives. Aline was the daughter of a man of rank, who occupied a high position under government, but who was dependent upon his official salary for the means to support an extremely expensive family. He died suddenly, and there was no course open for his daughter but to turn her talents to account in earning her own living.

No sooner did Eva hear of her friend's misfortune than she sought her out, and did not relax her entreaties and persuasions until the poor orphan had agreed to live with her, occupying the position of a dear sister.

Since the day when Aline had obeyed the call of the young heiress and dwelt beneath her roof a new existence had begun for Eva. She gladly resigned herself to the guidance of her wiser and better-disciplined friend, whom she often called her good angel, and to whom she clung with intense affection.

To-day for the first time she had refused to listen to her friend; but for the first time also her heart had made itself heard. Were not two human lives at stake? While she waited she passed in review in her memory all her past intercourse with Bertram and Heydeck, she recalled every word spoken to her by either.

She had frequently met Bertram in society; his aunt, Madame von Sturmhaupt, never omitted to invite Eva to every entertainment, large or small, which she gave. The old lady appeared exceedingly fond of the young heiress, whom she heaped with attentions; for Eva's sake she often endured hours of ennui with Aunt Minni, upon whom she called at least once a week. But for the most part she arranged these visits so as to find Eva at home, and then Aunt Minni's taciturnity served her turn well, for she could dwell without interruption upon the fine qualities of both mind and person of her nephew, Guido von Bertram, whom she described with enthusiasm as the cleverest, noblest, best, bravest, gentlest, and handsomest officer in the entire German army.

Only one thing was to be regretted, and that was his insensibility to female charms; he might have made the most advantageous alliances, so many charming girls had been absolutely thrown in his way by their parents, but really her dear Guido, who was possessed of every requisite to make a wife perfectly happy, must have a heart of stone in his breast, if indeed--and here Madame von Sturmhaupt would heave a melancholy sigh--an unfortunate passion had not steeled that heart against all the rest of the fair sex.

When the good lady reached this climax, which was sure to crown all her descriptions of Guido, she would cast a meaning look at Eva. An unfortunate passion! Poor Guido, he was so sensitive, so unselfish! The mere thought that perhaps a wealthy girl might suspect him of being mercenary would drive him wild; his aunt was sure that the fear of laying himself open to such a suspicion would deter him from ever confessing his love to a girl who had money.

That was why he was so often sad and pensive. Yes, there was no doubt of it, he was sick at heart with an unhappy love.

Such talk was infinitely annoying to Eva, but do what she would she could not avoid it, for with incomparable dexterity Madame von Sturmhaupt would lead the conversation back into her favourite channel whenever Eva contrived to divert it thence for a while, and at all the dinners which she gave the doting aunt arranged that her Guido should sit beside the heiress.

On such occasions Herr von Bertram played to perfection the part which his aunt had assigned him. Sometimes he conversed fluently with Eva, endeavouring to let his light shine and to be witty and amusing, and then again he would sit silent, gazing moodily on the ground or casting long melancholy looks at the heiress.

Guido was an excellent actor, and his aunt seconded him ably, but Eva's keen insight, sharpened as it was by the distrust of others, which was becoming her second nature, enabled her to see through their schemes. She was not deceived either by the enthusiastic praises lavished by the aunt or by the assumed melancholy of the nephew. All this love and devotion were for her millions, not for herself; of this she was well assured, and the better Bertram played his part the more odious he was to her. She despised him as a hypocrite, and she detested him because she could not avoid his attentions, since there was a reason, which she thought an important one, why she did not like to refuse any of his aunt's invitations.

At every entertainment given by Madame von Sturmhaupt Lieutenant von Herwarth was sure to be present, and the young officer was devoted to Aline. Eva knew that her friend did not regard him with indifference, although she had never questioned her about him, and for Aline's sake she endured Bertram's odious attentions, for Aline's sake she accepted all his aunt's invitations, while all the more did she detest Bertram himself. And he--he of all others--had stepped forward to defend her against Leo von Heydeck!

There was a pang at her heart as she thought that Heydeck, as Uncle Balthasar had said, had allowed himself to make offensive remarks with regard to her. Was this conceivable? Yes, it was possible; his arrogance was great; had he not conducted himself at the fête at Schönsee with such hauteur and reserve as to provoke Eva to treat him with even more than her usual coldness of manner?

She had been really glad when her uncle Balthasar presented to her the young officer of whom she had heard so much that interested her. Aline, who learned it all from Lieutenant von Herwarth, had told her that he had distinguished himself as much for bravery and scorn of death in the field as for humanity and kindness shown to the French peasantry. To Herwarth, as he told Aline with enthusiasm, Leo von Heydeck was the very ideal of a nobleman and officer. Herwarth could not say enough of him, and Aline repeated faithfully to Eva all that he told her.

Thus an interest in Leo was awakened in Eva's mind before she saw him, and when they did meet, his manly bearing, his noble, expressive face, answered to the impression of him already existing in her imagination.

But Eva was a spoiled child of fortune. Accustomed to servile homage from her numerous adorers, Leo's dignified quiet demeanour when they first met, had seemed to her offensive, and she had resented it by an increase of cold reserve on her part. And Leo hated her for it! Eva knew

it. She had watched him that day, and had detected him regarding her with mistrust and dislike. And to-day!--he had recognized her; their glances had met for one instant as he looked up from his newspaper, but he had immediately and intentionally averted his eyes; he was the only one there who had not accorded her even the simplest salutation.

Yes, Leo von Heydeck hated her, Eva knew it, and meant to give hatred for hatred; she could have no effect upon him to prevent the duel, for she never could so humble her pride as to address even the merest word of friendly appeal to him. But she could prevail with Herr von Bertram. True, it was very irksome to her to ask a favour of him for which she should owe him gratitude, but a higher sense of duty forbade her to yield any weight to this thought. This duel must not take place!

Eva remembered her uncle's words, that Heydeck was an unerring pistol-shot; she had formerly heard the same thing from Aline. Heydeck's brilliant skill with this weapon had contributed to win him Herwarth's enthusiastic admiration.

A duel with deadly consequences! The idea was so horrible that it banished every other consideration. A nameless, feverish horror possessed the young girl; in imagination she saw the fatal combat: she saw the foes stand opposite each other; the signal was given, the shots were fired, and one sank on the ground with a bullet through his heart, but this one was not Bertram, but Leo von Heydeck, whose pale face, convulsed with the death-agony, seemed to hover before Eva's eyes.

The horrible waking dream was so vivid that Eva screamed aloud, and only recovered herself when she felt Aline's gentle arm around her and heard the kind voice in her ear begging her to be calm and composed once more.

"You must control yourself, Eva," Aline said, gravely; "you cannot receive Herr von Bertram while you are in this agitated state. It was wrong to interfere as you have done, without due reflection, in an affair between these two men. But now that you have gone so far you must show no weakness when the lieutenant comes. You must not receive him until you are entirely mistress of yourself. It would be better to let me speak with him; tell me what you desire he should do; you really are not in a condition to see him."

"No, Aline, I must see him; he will not refuse my request; I will implore him to give up this wretched duel; I will not rest until he has given me his promise, even although I should beg for it on my knees."

"He cannot grant it; his honour as an officer is at stake. Take my advice, Eva, let me speak with Herr von Bertram; if it is possible to prevent this duel I promise you it shall be done, but pray do not you appear in the matter. It is bad enough to have your name mixed up with a scandal, which is town-talk by this time. Do not furnish any further food for gossip."

"What is town-talk to me? Let gossip say what it will of me, I do not care. Do not try to shake my resolution: it is perfectly firm; I shall see Guido von Bertram, and force him to put a stop to this unhappy duel, but I promise you to be calm, and to control myself. You shall be present at the interview; I will look at you if my anger threatens to master me; but, dearest Aline, do not talk to me, leave me to myself; do not confuse me with entreaties now, when I must be calm and clear in my own mind if I would obtain what I desire."

"As you please," Aline replied, disappointed; "I will not thrust my counsel upon you." She took up the embroidery which she had laid aside, and worked away industriously, but from time to time her eyes anxiously followed Eva, who was restlessly pacing the veranda to and fro.

An hour elapsed. Eva's state of expectancy had become almost unendurable, when at last Uncle Balthasar's loud voice was heard at the other end of the drawing-room.

"Come in, come in, Herr von Bertram, Eva is awaiting you on the veranda."

Eva pressed her hand to her throbbing heart.

"Be composed, Eva," Aline whispered.

"This way, pray, Herr von Bertram," Uncle Balthasar was heard saying, and the time consumed in traversing the drawing-room was sufficient to restore Eva's self-possession. She was only very pale when the lieutenant presented himself upon the veranda, followed by Uncle Balthasar. The hand which she rested lightly upon the back of her chair as she arose to receive her guest trembled a little, but Aline alone perceived this; even to Uncle Balthasar his niece appeared perfectly calm and self-possessed.

So thoroughly had she regained her self control that she greeted Bertram with a slight smile, offering him her hand, which he kissed with perhaps more warmth than custom warranted. This, however, Eva did not seem to notice; she did not withdraw her hand until he relinquished it, and then motioned him courteously to a seat.

Guido obeyed her invitation silently; even he, whose heart was not wont to be easily thrilled, perhaps because, as both his friends and foes averred, he really did not own the article, could

with difficulty suppress his agitation; he knew that a decisive moment was at hand.

On the way to the villa, Uncle Balthasar had told him, after his easy, good-humoured fashion, how Eva had been quite beside herself with terror when she heard of the impending duel. She had been half dead with fear lest Herr von Heydeck should kill the man who had defended her so stoutly. She had declared that she would prevent the duel at all hazards.

Guido could not but suppose, from Uncle Balthasar's words, that Eva's terror and her intense desire to prevent the duel arose from fear lest his life should be in danger, and in fact this was the old man's belief. He himself had a certain regard for the handsome young officer.

For months Guido had eagerly pursued his scheme of winning the hand of the wealthy heiress. Hitherto he had been hopeless of success. Eva had treated him with such cold reserve that he had frequently declared to his aunt that he would relinquish his pursuit of her, he was but wasting time, and his persistence had been owing to Madame von Sturmhaupt's earnest entreaties.

The old lady frequently told him that Eva's repellent manner and her coldness were only feigned. She was too proud to be easily won; in the end, she would surely grant his suit. If Eva really disliked him, she never would accept, as she did, every invitation to her, Madame von Sturmhaupt's, house, since she knew she should meet him there. Her readiness to accept these invitations was the surest possible proof that she liked to meet him, and that her coldness was only a cloak for the preference she secretly entertained for the handsome lieutenant.

Such views harmonized so entirely with Guido's wishes that he could not but lend them a ready ear. Still, he was not convinced, and every fresh repulse of his attentions on Eva's part awakened fresh doubts in his mind.

He had resolved more than once to put his fate 'to the touch' and 'win or lose,' so unendurable did these doubts seem to him, but his prudent aunt besought him to have patience. Undue haste in declaring himself would, she said, lose Eva to him forever. The heiress was proud, wayward, and self-willed, full of whims and contradictions, and these might easily influence her to say 'No' when she really meant 'Yes.' He must wait for the right moment, and in the mean time his aunt promised to advise him of everything that occurred at the Schommers', so that he should on no account lose this right moment.

It had come in a manner which the aunt had never dreamed of. After Uncle Balthasar's communications, Bertram could not doubt that Eva was impressed with profound gratitude for his defence of her against Heydeck's insults, and filled with tender solicitude upon his behalf. The smile with which she received him, in contrast to her former cold greetings, confirmed Uncle Balthasar's words. She had not even shown the slightest displeasure when he had bestowed so warm a kiss upon her hand. Certainly there could be no more favourable moment than the present for a formal declaration of his sentiments. He must use to his advantage her solicitude for his safety, her gratitude, her emotion; the next minute should be decisive!

"You have kindly acceded instantly to my desire to see you, Herr von Bertram," Eva began the conversation, after Uncle Balthasar had withdrawn. "I thank you for so doing, and I hope you will as kindly grant the great favour which I am about to ask of you."

"Be assured of it, Fräulein Schommer. Do you not know that I desire nothing more earnestly than to fulfil your behests?"

"You promise fairly, Herr von Bertram; I hope not too fairly."

"Put me to the proof. You can ask nothing, dear lady, that I can deny you."

It was the first time that the lieutenant had ventured to make use of such warmth of expression. Eva's pale cheeks flushed crimson, her eyes flashed angrily; but bethinking herself how inadvisable it was to provoke the man, she overlooked the familiarity of his address which she would else have resented instantly.

"I am going to put you to the proof, Herr von Bertram," she replied, gravely. "My uncle learned to-day from Count Waldheim that there has arisen between Herr von Heydeck and yourself a quarrel of which I am the unhappy cause. More my uncle did not learn; wherefore I beg you to tell me all about it."

Guido found it difficult to suppress a satisfied smile and in its stead to express upon his features painful regret, but he managed it very successfully. With a sigh, he said, "After what Herr Schommer said to me, I almost expected this demand from you; but it is, I confess, extremely difficult for me to comply with it. My friend Count Waldheim, with the best intentions of course, was excessively indiscreet in mentioning to Herr Schommer what had just occurred beneath Büchner's awning. I am greatly pained that you, my dear Fräulein Schommer, should thus have learned what never should have reached your ears."

"Since it has reached my ears, and, but for Count Waldheim's communication, might have reached them too late, I refuse to be satisfied by vague declarations. I wish to know just what happened, and therefore entreat you to tell me the truth,--and the whole truth."

"I promised to fulfil your desire, and, hard as it is for me, I must keep my promise. As Count Waldheim told your uncle, there is a quarrel between Lieutenant von Heydeck and myself--a quarrel which Heydeck provoked by the insolence with which he dared to speak of you, my dear Fräulein Schommer."

"This explanation does not suffice me. I must know--I have a right to know--exactly what took place. You took upon yourself the office of my champion. Herr von Bertram, I must know what acts or expressions of Herr von Heydeck's gave you a right to do so. I desire you to repeat to me word for word, if possible, what was said."

There was no encouragement in the tone in which Eva uttered these words, especially when she spoke of Guido's right to champion her. The lieutenant's lofty hopes were suddenly dashed to the ground, for there was certainly no gratitude, no tender solicitude as to the issue of the strife in Eva's manner; no, the air with which she regarded him as she made her demand seemed almost hostile.

"You ask much of me," Bertram said. "My tongue rebels against repeating the miserable words that scoundrel used."

"But I require it. Remember your promise!"

"I obey, though with a heavy heart. You remember, dear Fräulein Schommer, that you drove past Büchner's to-day. You probably did not notice that Herr von Heydeck was ill-bred enough not to salute you. That irritated me, but my indignation was aroused when the man discussed you aloud with his friend, Herr von Herwarth, in the most offensive manner."

Aline von Schlicht had hitherto been an attentive although silent auditor of what passed. Now she suddenly turned to Bertram, and with a sharpness and decision hardly to have been expected from so gentle and retiring a young lady, said, "That cannot be true! Herr von Herwarth never would have taken part in any 'offensive' discussion of Fräulein Schommer. I know from himself how greatly he respects her----"

"I envy Herr von Herwarth so fair a defender," Bertram replied, smiling, "and I willingly affirm that not the slightest reproach can attach to him,--his expressions were perfectly respectful. I spoke only of Heydeck----"

"Proceed! proceed!" Eva impatiently interrupted him. "What were the offensive words used by Herr von Heydeck?"

"I obey your behest, and will repeat his words as exactly as I can remember them, although I cannot possibly reproduce the arrogant tone, which was more insulting than the words themselves. He first told Herr von Herwarth that it was much against his inclination that he had been presented to the 'fair princess,' as he expressed it, in silly adoration of whom he never could join----"

"Why was he presented, then?" Eva angrily interposed.

Guido shrugged his shoulders, and continued: "He then proceeded in the most reckless fashion to tell of how Fräulein Schommer had treated him with contemptuous discourtesy, and at last dared to declare that Fräulein Schommer was odious to him,--he hated her arrogance! her low purse-pride! These are his very expressions!"

Eva grew deadly pale; the little hand still leaning on the back of the chair trembled convulsively. It was not anger that thus moved her, but pain, real pain, as she exclaimed, "Purse-pride! low purse-pride! I, purse-proud! Oh, if he knew how I loathe and despise the wretched money! But I will not complain; it is my destiny to be made miserable by this unhappy wealth. Go on, Herr von Bertram. What happened next? I must know all."

Bertram continued, thinking this the best possible opportunity to present himself to the young girl in a favourable light: "I was profoundly indignant at so contemptible an insult publicly offered to a lady whom I esteem highly. I instantly required Herr von Heydeck to retract his expressions. He refused to do so, and of course forced me to brand him as guilty of dishonourable conduct."

"And he? How did Herr von Heydeck resent your insult?"

"How could he resent it? Conscious of his guilt, he received my words in silence; he left Büchner's, followed by his friend, Herr von Herwarth."

"And who authorized you to stand forth as my champion?" Eva asked, when she could collect herself.

This question was so sudden, and as she put it Eva's eyes flashed such angry menace at the lieutenant, that for an instant he knew not what to reply, and could only stammer out, "But--dearest Fräulein Schommer, what could I do? Had I not a right, was it not my duty, to resent an insult offered you so disgracefully--in public?"

"No! You had as little right to do so as you have to annoy me by repeatedly addressing me as

'dearest' Fräulein Schommer. You can hardly expect me to be grateful to you for thus, by your officious interference, making my name the theme of common gossip throughout the city!"

"But that fellow's insult?"

"Would have been forgotten as soon as it was uttered. Who cares, since I do not, whether or not Herr von Heydeck hates me and thinks me haughty and purse-proud? You had no right to accuse Herr von Heydeck of dishonourable conduct because you overheard him make use of certain expressions in conversation with an intimate friend. If my reputation should suffer in this matter it is your fault, not his. He has done me no injury; you have grossly insulted me!"

Bertram angrily bit his lip; he saw his fairest hopes shattered, and by his own fault; unconquerable dislike of him flashed in Eva's black eyes; he felt that she never would forgive him. This was the end of all his schemes for winning the hand of this beautiful heiress.

With rage in his heart he turned to go, and would have left her presence without another word, but a delicate hand laid on his arm detained him. "You must not leave me yet, Herr von Bertram," said Eva. "I have much to say to you; you have not even heard the favour I am about to ask of you. Forgive my irritation; I did not mean to offend you, and if I have done so unintentionally, you must ascribe it to the natural agitation produced by this unfortunate occurrence. Do not go. Must I remind you of your promise?"

What transformation was this? The angry sparkle no longer shone in the beautiful eyes; a smile played about the lovely mouth; the young girl's words contained no menace, but a gentle entreaty. Bertram looked at her in amazement; he could not understand the change, nor did he dream of the mental struggle through which Eva had just passed.

Her hasty temperament had led her against her will into a frank avowal of her sentiments, but scarcely had the words left her lips than she saw the mistake she had made. She wished to prevent the impending duel; this could only be done by an appeal to Bertram, and she had so offended him that he had turned to leave her. He must be appeased if she hoped to attain her end, and therefore she smothered the dislike she felt for him, therefore she smiled and spoke gently.

It had the desired effect. Bertram's anger passed away; he was induced to take a seat and to listen to her request.

"I must recur once more to this unfortunate quarrel," Eva continued. "You tell me that Herr von Heydeck received your insult in silence, and immediately afterwards left the veranda. Tell me frankly, do you believe that the quarrel will have no further consequences?"

"No; I do not."

"And what will happen now?"

"What Herr von Heydeck will do of course I cannot foresee. I only know what a man of honour would do in his place."

Again Eva's cheeks flushed: "Herr von Heydeck is a man of honour! No one dares to doubt it!"

"I dare to doubt it, Fräulein Schommer," Bertram rejoined, with a scornful laugh. "I knew what I was saying when I spoke to him as I did, for a man who does not hesitate to calumniate an unprotected woman has no sense of honour!"

Eva, mindful of how necessary it was for her to keep her temper, made no reply to this remark, but asked, in as quiet a voice as she could command, "Do you think that Herr von Heydeck will accept your insult without resenting it?"

"I do not know; but in any case he cannot escape punishment for his unworthy conduct. If an officer should pocket calmly an accusation of dishonourable behaviour and not challenge his accuser, he would be outlawed from the corps of officers as a coward. Perhaps this will be Heydeck's fate. But if he is really brave enough to challenge me, I shall chastise him as he deserves for unworthy words with regard to a lady for whom I have the highest esteem, although I am so unfortunate as not to find favour in her eyes."

"A duel," Eva said, sadly, not noticing his last words, "a mortal combat, on account of a few thoughtless words."

"A duel will ensue if Heydeck has the courage to challenge me, which I very much doubt."

"You need not doubt it, Herr von Bertram. Herr von Heydeck has proved upon the field that fear is unknown to him; he will call you to account. Do you know that his skill with the pistol is unerring; that he never misses his aim; that your life will be at his mercy?"

"I also know no fear, Fräulein Schommer. If it should be my fate to fall in this duel, I shall die content, for my life will be a sacrifice to my duty as a man of honour. Were the consciousness mine that you would give a kindly thought to my memory, I should meet death joyfully."

Bertram spoke these words with immense pathos, looking earnestly at Eva the while. To his chagrin, however, he could not but see that his display of feeling produced no effect whatever upon the obdurate beauty; indeed she scarcely seemed to hear what he had said. She gazed thoughtfully before her for a few minutes that seemed like hours to Bertram, and then, looking up at him, said hastily and with some agitation, "This duel must not be, Herr von Bertram. You can prevent it, and I now remind you of the promise you made me at the beginning of our conversation."

"I do not understand you, Fräulein Schommer. It does not depend upon me, but upon Herr von Heydeck, to accept my reproof calmly without sending me a challenge."

"But you can so arrange matters that it need not be incumbent upon him to challenge you. I have read that if, in such cases, the offending man retracts what he has said and begs pardon of him whom he has offended, the quarrel is made up and never proceeds to a bloody issue. It is in your power thus to prevent any combat with Herr von Heydeck. Tell him that you recall your offensive remarks, and ask his pardon; there will be then no reason for his calling you out. Remember your promise, Herr von Bertram; I implore you, speak a conciliating word. You can do it, for Herr von Heydeck did not insult you, but me, and I forgive him. Remember that I never could have another happy moment if I thought that I had been the cause of mortal strife between two human beings. The blood spilled for me would cleave to me like the curse of Cain. Be magnanimous, Herr von Bertram, not towards your enemy, but towards me, I pray you, I conjure you. Make me the sacrifice of the pride which prevents you from speaking the conciliating word."

The first impression produced upon Bertram by Eva's words was that of immense surprise, her request astounded him; was it prompted by fear for his life? No, assuredly not, he had not forgotten the look of hatred which he had seen in her eyes a few moments before.

Suddenly another idea flashed upon him. Eva had defended Heydeck with a warmth she had never as yet shown to any one besides. Was it his life and his future for which she trembled if he should make up his mind to fight? Her tender consideration was, then, all for Heydeck; for him her intense desire that the quarrel should have a peaceful conclusion. She loved Bertram's enemy, hence her sad surprise entirely devoid of anger, when she heard that he had called her purse-proud. She loved Heydeck, who despised her! For an instant, but only for an instant, this thought filled Bertram with savage indignation; the next moment he smiled, for there occurred to him with the swiftness of thought a scheme whereby he might turn this love to his own account. New hopes immediately sprang to being within him; he would not try to win Eva's heart. What did he care for the girl's heart? She might give her hopeless, unrequited affection to whomsoever she chose if she would give her millions to the husband whom she hated.

Bertram needed but a few moments to decide how to act. Fortunately Eva gave him these few moments to ponder upon her request, and when he replied his mind was entirely made up. "You do not dream what you require of me, Fräulein Schommer," he said with great gravity. "You ask nothing more or less than the entire annihilation of my future. I spoke the words in question to Heydeck in a public place before numerous witnesses; they must be retracted in the same manner before Heydeck can be justified in not fighting me."

"Do so, Herr von Bertram,--I implore you, do so!" Eva begged afresh.

"And if I do so, what have I to expect? I will tell you, Fräulein Schommer; it is right that you should know the full extent of the request you have made of me. After I have made a public retraction all my comrades who have hitherto been my friends will fall away from me and despise me. 'He is a coward,' they will say; 'afraid evidently of Heydeck's well-known unerring aim.' My honour is lost, and with it my future career. I must leave the army, my comrades disdaining to serve with me! I am poor, Fräulein Schommer. You, rolling in luxury, have no conception of what it means to be poor. Having left the service, I must accept any, even the meanest, position that can insure me sufficient income to maintain a wretched existence, if indeed I do not have recourse to a bullet through my brains to end a life that has been such a wretched failure. This is my future if I fulfil your request. To-day the world stands open to me. The highest honours that crown a military career may be mine. In a few years I shall be captain and in a condition to offer my hand, without exposing myself to the charge of mercenary motives, to the lovely girl to whom I long since gave my whole heart. These hopes you ask me to destroy with my own hand; for how could I, a beggar, degraded in my own eyes and those of the world, ever venture to aspire to one heaped with all that can make life desirable? I should, and justly, be repulsed with scorn. Have you a right to require this sacrifice of me? I have given you my promise, and if you require it I will keep it, for there is nothing that you can ask which I will not perform, but before I do so, before you ask the sacrifice of my entire future, you must know what are the delicious hopes which you thus annihilate. It is you, Eva Schommer, whom I have loved passionately from the first moment when my eyes were gladdened by the sight of you. I have religiously concealed this love, for what right had a poor dragoon to reveal it? The thought that you might suppose I wooed you for your wealth, and not for your sweet self alone, would have driven me frantic. Therefore I was silent; therefore I curbed the wild desires of my heart. I resolved to wait until with increase of rank I could offer you a position not unworthy of you. Yes, Eva, I love you with an intensity of which you cannot dream, and hence my right to step forth as the champion of your honour; hence the wound I felt when you so harshly rebuked my presumption. It is but just that I should tell you all this. Now decide my fate; it is in your hands. Ask of me my life, or, what is infinitely more dear to me, my honour, I will sacrifice everything to

you."

He ceased, and awaited Eva's reply. Possessed of histrionic talent by no means contemptible, conscious that this was a decisive moment in his life, he was really agitated; and this agitation lent to his words and manner an appearance of reality that could not but impress Eva with a belief in their sincerity. As he spoke, she grew very pale; she was not surprised,--she had long foreseen with annoyance that she should some day be obliged distinctly to reject his proffered affection; and yet she had not looked for a declaration of it just at this time.

What should she say to him? Had she a right to require of him the sacrifice of his entire future? And yet, if she did not do it, this terrible duel, sure to end in the death of one of the combatants, would inevitably take place. It was her sacred duty to prevent this. Bertram had given her a glimpse of a way in which the right to ask him to relinquish his entire future would be hers.

Sacrifice for sacrifice! Her heart seemed to cease beating at the thought. Never had the handsome dragoon been so utterly detestable to her as when he was pouring forth his glowing assurances of affection. But could she hesitate to sacrifice herself? Two human lives depended upon her decision. And what did she resign? A happy future? No! None such could be hers with this curse of wealth cleaving to her. What did it matter in the end whether she gave the hand so coveted to Bertram or to another? were not all her wooers alike indifferent to her? They all coveted her millions, and set no store by the poor girlish heart hungering and thirsting for true affection. Bertram was no worse than the rest; perhaps somewhat better,--at least he was willing to make a sacrifice for her. Certainly his protestations of love had seemed genuine.

And yet, another image would rise before her mental vision,--was there then one to whom she was not so entirely indifferent,--one lost to her forever? Fie! she would not think of him: he was her enemy; he hated and despised her, although he hardly knew her.

"Is there no other way, no honourable way, in which this duel can be avoided without imperilling your future?" Eva asked; her mind was already half made up to sacrifice herself, but she hesitated to say the fatal word.

"None."

"And you will keep your promise, Herr von Bertram? You will sacrifice your future to me if I desire it? You will make the public retractation which will prevent the duel?"

Bertram hesitated for one instant. He had read Eva's countenance; he hoped that his scheme had been successful, but he was not quite sure. It was possible that she might require of him the fulfilment of his promise and yet refuse him her hand! And, if she did, was not a hasty promise better broken than kept? Is it not the brave whom fortune favours? "I will! I swear it by my honour! In your hands lies my fate!" he cried, with well-feigned enthusiasm.

"I accept your promise, Herr von Bertram, and requite it by my own, that, as far as in me lies, I will try to repay the sacrifice you make to me. If you succeed in avoiding this duel, then, Herr von Bertram, I promise to deny you no request you may make of me."

"Eva, what are you doing?" Aline here interposed. "I adjure you to consider what you are saying, and the possible consequences of such a promise!"

Aline knew that her interference was hardly consistent with delicacy, but her friend's happiness was at stake, and speak out she must at all hazards.

"I have considered, and I know what I promise," Eva replied, calmly, in a clear, firm voice. Having once forced herself to embrace a resolution, she would not shrink from putting it into action.

Bertram could have shouted for joy, but he perfectly understood how to retrain any excessive exhibition of delight. "Have I heard aright? Can I trust my powers of comprehension, dearest Eva?" he said, with the due amount of rapture beaming in his eyes, as he took her hand and kissed it eagerly. "I hardly dare to believe it. Will you make me the happiest of men? Will you grant any request of mine, even one for this lovely hand?"

"Any one!"

Aline lost her self-possession entirely. She seemed to see the friend whom she loved about to plunge into an abyss from which she must rescue her. Greatly agitated, she arose, and interposed. "You are going too far, Eva!" she said, indignantly; "you must not purchase the prevention of this duel at such a price; and you, Herr von Bertram, if you are a man of honour, will not accept such a sacrifice,--you cannot thus take advantage of the misery of a weak girl. I know that Eva does not love you----"

Eva interrupted her friend. "Stay, Aline!" she said, in a tone so stern and decided that it forbade all further contradiction. "Even from you I cannot suffer any interference with my freedom of action. I will deceive no one,--certainly not Herr von Bertram," and she turned to the dragoon: "Aline has told you that I do not love you; she has told you the truth! I can give you my

hand, if you demand it. I cannot give you my heart, but," she added, with a sad and bitter smile, "that will be a matter of perfect indifference to you."

"Can you for an instant doubt what to reply, Herr von Bertram?" Aline again interposed. Eva's harsh words had daunted her for a moment, but anxiety for her friend gave her courage to make one more attempt to save her. "Can you, if you are a man of honour, still ask Eva's hand of her?"

"Aline, I forbid you----!"

"You are certainly the mistress and I the servant, I know that, Eva. You often forget this; I never do! But now, the duty I owe to my mistress is lost in that which I owe to my friend. You must not obstinately persevere in making your whole future life unhappy, and if I cannot prevail with you to refrain from making such a sacrifice, I must appeal to Herr von Bertram, to his honour, which forbids his thus bartering for your hand. What hard-driven bargain for money could be half so disgraceful? You cannot accept this sacrifice, Herr von Bertram, for you can never succeed in winning Eva's heart!"

A mocking smile hovered upon the dragoon's lips, but he suppressed it, and said, in the quiet tone of perfect conviction, "You are wrong, Fräulein von Schlicht! I shall win this noble heart; it will be conquered by my devoted affection. I am conscious of sufficient force and courage to enable me to win it, and therefore, knowing that I shall succeed in making her whom I love a happy wife, I claim the dear hand, although she gives it to me without her heart. Yes, dearest Eva, I hold you to your promise. I claim your 'yes'----"

"You are not yet justified in doing so. My promise was coupled with a condition," Eva said. She had listened with cold indifference to Bertram's words. She had no faith in this triumphant love; his mocking smile, fleeting although it were, had not escaped her, and had confirmed her in the conviction that he coveted only her hand and her fortune, and not her heart.

The dragoon was nothing daunted by her coldness; he was determined not to let the fortunate moment slip from his grasp.

"Your condition is fulfilled," he replied; "I give you my word of honour that the duel you so dread shall not take place. As soon as I leave you I will go to my friend Count Waldheim, and beg him to summon Herr von Heydeck to meet me at Büchner's there to receive my apology for whatever offensive words I may have used towards him."

"What if, nevertheless, Herr von Heydeck persists in his challenge, since spoken words cannot be made unspoken?"

"That is not conceivable, but should it be so, I still promise you that there shall be no duel. I will repeat my apology, and, moreover, declare that I will accept no challenge. You have promised, dearest Eva, to atone to me, as far as you can, for the sacrifice of my honour which I make to you. You can thus atone if I may carry from your presence the 'yes' I long for. If I leave this house your future husband, I can say to my comrades that I am bound by a promise to my betrothed to avoid a duel with Herr von Heydeck. This statement, which will then be strictly true, will greatly modify public opinion with regard to my behaviour towards Herr von Heydeck. Be magnanimous, dearest Eva; give me this precious 'yes' now, that I may leave this house to fulfil your wishes, your promised bridegroom."

"Do not do this, Eva!" Aline entreated.

"And why not? What difference can it make whether what must be happens now or this evening?" Eva said, in a hopeless tone. "I am ready, Herr von Bertram, to accede to your wishes, but upon certain conditions----"

"I will fulfil any conditions that you can impose upon me----"

"By their non-fulfilment, Herr von Bertram, I now declare here, in the presence of my friend, you will forfeit the right to claim my promise. I allow you to make known our betrothal, I will present you as my betrothed to my uncle and aunt, but I require on the other hand that you should never lay claim to any of a lover's privileges, never venture to annoy me with professions of affection, or to look for any such from me; also, the time of our marriage must be appointed by myself alone, and you are upon no account to venture to influence me to shorten the period of our engagement----"

"You are cruel, Eva."

"I cannot be otherwise; let there be truth between us. I have told you that I do not love you, and that only a sense of the duty I owe you in atoning for the sacrifice you make me induces me to give you my hand. But my indifference would become hatred should you force me to endure caresses which I abhor,--the first attempt to do so dissolves our engagement and sets me free! Do you accept my conditions, Herr von Bertram?"

"You are very, very cruel; but I cannot say no."

"You agree, then, to my conditions?"

"Yes."

"So be it! Aline, let me present to you my betrothed. Follow me, Herr von Bertram; I will conduct you to my uncle and aunt."

CHAPTER V.

Before Leo von Heydeck returned to his apartments he took a long walk in the park. He wished to be alone to hold communion quietly with himself, that he might come to a decision with regard to his future conduct. He knew that he had arrived at a crisis in his career.

Forced, against his inclination, by a stern father, Colonel von Heydeck, to embrace the military profession, he had, notwithstanding, become reconciled to it during the war with France, which he had entered into with patriotic enthusiasm, and in which he had greatly distinguished himself.

Esteemed and beloved by his comrades, he had never before now found himself in a position either to send or to receive a challenge. He had always considered duelling as a savage relic of mediæval barbarism; but the insult offered him intentionally in the presence of numerous witnesses, by Herr von Bertram, was certainly cause sufficient, if any such could exist, to justify the savage practice.

As he slowly sauntered along the secluded alleys of the park he weighed and pondered every argument for and against his yielding in this case to military prejudice. He had a hard struggle with himself to undergo, but by the time he reached his home he had made up his mind,—he would be true to his convictions and yield no jot to public opinion.

On the stairs he met his servant who surprised him with the intelligence that Colonel von Herwarth was in his apartment, where he had awaited him for a quarter of an hour.

Colonel von Herwarth, the commander of his regiment? What did this visit portend? Had he heard already of the scene at Büchner's?

Leo paused for an instant, and his heart beat undeniably faster. He foresaw that the ensuing conversation with the man who was alike his superior officer and his paternal friend would be of great importance to him; he must be perfectly prepared before it began. Once more he passed in mental review the reasons for the resolution he had taken. He never wavered; for the first time in his life an opportunity was offered him to step forward boldly and frankly in vindication of a principle. Firm in his purpose to do so he entered the room.

The colonel had not found the time spent in his young officer's room long. He had been much interested in what he found there, where there was nothing except the weapons, arranged upon a wall with an eye for artistic effect, to remind one that this was the abode of a soldier. The apartment might rather have been taken for a scholar's study or an artist's studio.

One side of the room was entirely covered with book-shelves, the contents of which would hardly have tempted the lovers of light reading, and the writing-table was loaded with books and papers in true scholarly disorder; while quantities of sketches in oil, framed and unframed, occupying every available spot upon the walls, and a large easel in the centre of the room, upon which was an unfinished picture, betrayed the artist.

Before this picture, a portrait of a beautiful girl, the colonel was standing, attentively surveying it, when Leo entered. The dress was only sketched in, but the face was nearly finished; at least so the colonel thought, as he admired the delicate features and the glorious black eyes that seemed to gaze into his own.

Leo's entrance aroused him from its contemplation; he turned and held out his hand. "I have been awaiting you for some time, Herr von Heydeck," he said; "but I do not regret the quarter of an hour spent here, since it has given me an opportunity of admiring your artistic skill. I knew you were fond of the brush, but I had no idea that you had reached such a pitch of perfection in the art. What a brilliant sketch this is! I am sure I have seen that face somewhere. Who is she? I surely know that girl."

"Scarcely, I think, colonel," Leo replied, unable to conceal a certain embarrassment. "It is but a daub,—just begun, and not at all like. You never would recognize the original from seeing this thing."

"And yet--and yet--I surely remember having seen that, young girl somewhere."

"Probably some chance resemblance, colonel. There is no trace of likeness in this portrait; it is only a slight sketch from memory. If I had known that I was to have the honour of a visit from you, I should not have left it upon the easel. Permit me to remove it."

He took the picture from the easel and leaned it with the face against the wall,--the colonel shook his finger at him, with a smile: "You are in a great hurry to hide it away. Have I, perchance, been indiscreet?"

"Not at all, colonel," said Leo, trying unsuccessfully to appear easy and unembarrassed. "I do not know the lady at all. I met her once in society, and hardly exchanged a couple of words with her."

"In spite of which she has made so profound an impression upon the artist that he has painted a charming portrait from memory. But I will not meddle with your secrets, my dear Heydeck, I have come upon other and serious business. You will guess what it is when I tell you that my nephew, Kuno, has been with me. He came to confide, not in Colonel von Herwarth, but in his uncle; and so I come to you, my dear Heydeck, not as your colonel and superior officer, but as your true friend, to discuss this miserable matter in which Herr von Bertram's brutal insults have entangled you. Give me your hand, Heydeck; I trust you are convinced that I have your welfare at heart!"

"I certainly am, colonel."

"And there is good reason why it should be so; not because you saved my life at Gravelotte at terrible risk of your own,--that was your duty, and I would have done the same in your place,--but because you are the best officer in my regiment, and a fast friend to that feather-headed nephew of mine, Kuno, whose admiration and affection for you prevent his getting into many a scrape. You see my friendship for you is rather selfish, but none the less genuine.

"To business, then! Kuno tells me that you have got into your head some romantic and entirely incomprehensible ideas about the immorality of duelling, and that in consequence you are in doubt as to calling out Herr von Bertram. Is this true, my dear Heydeck?"

"Not quite, colonel. I am no longer in doubt; I have decided: I shall not challenge Herr von Bertram."

The colonel, who had been pacing the room to and fro at Leo's side, suddenly stood still. "The devil you won't!" he exclaimed. "Why, it's worse than I thought! Kuno was right, then! Do you know the fate of an officer who allows himself to be accused of dishonourable conduct?"

"I do, colonel, and therefore I am resolved to send in my resignation immediately."

"Why, forty thousand dev--- No, no, I will not swear; I will be calm. Only tell me, are you stark, staring mad? Send in your resignation!--you, before whom there is the most brilliant career? You must not! 'Tis impossible!"

"I must, colonel, and I rely upon your help in the matter, for this is the only way in which mischief among my comrades can be prevented."

"But, deuce take it! why don't you send a bullet through that scoundrel Bertram, as any other brave officer would do, and settle the matter reasonably?"

"Because my principles forbid duelling. My mind is made up, colonel. Pray do not attempt to shake my resolution, for I give you my word of honour that I will not fight a duel."

"There it is!" cried the colonel, in despair. "All's over now! Unhappy, misguided young man, what have you done?"

"My duty, colonel; I but fulfil a sacred obligation. You, at least, will not believe that I am actuated by cowardice."

"Cowardice! You? I'll fight the man myself who accuses you of cowardice in my presence. Your courage has been proved a hundred times in France, as I can testify. No one can accuse you of cowardice,--that's not what vexes me; but you can't stay in the service for all that! What would become of the corps of officers if these cursed democratic ideas of yours were to find acceptance among us? But you have declared upon your honour that you'll not fight, and there's no use talking any more about it. You must send in your resignation, and I'll see that it's accepted. That's all I can do for you now. Sit down this moment and write it, and I'll take it with me and attend to it."

Leo did so. While the colonel walked up and down the room, muttering curses, not loud, but deep, upon the 'd----d democratic nonsense,' Leo wrote his resignation, and handed it to his superior officer.

The colonel read the paper through. "It is all in order," he said, "and shall be attended to. There is nothing else to be done now; but confound that scoundrel Bertram! and deuce take me if

I don't find some way to reward him for his share in this business! I believe the dog knew your craze about duelling. Did you ever mention your cursed democratic ideas in his presence?"

"Of course he knows what my opinions are: we used to be friends."

"I thought so. The confounded coward could play the hero cheaply; but I've not done with him yet. He shall find it no joke to have driven my best officer from the service. But that will not bring you back again. I see well enough that with your principles you had better resign. And you had best leave K--- as soon as possible. Take a journey to get out of the way of all the gossip and fuss there will be. I'll give you a leave upon my own responsibility,--and goodbye. I can't help loving you, my dear fellow, though you are such a d---d democrat; and if ever you need a true friend, remember Oswald von Herwarth, who never will forget you at Gravelotte."

The old officer cleared his throat violently, and indignantly winked away a suspicious moisture from his eyes; then, pulling his cap low over his forehead, he stamped down-stairs without one more word of farewell.

Scarcely was Leo alone than he took up the picture which he had leaned against the wall, replaced it upon the easel, stepped backwards from it, and regarded it sadly. "So you send me out into the world!" he murmured. "It is your revenge upon me for my cowardly words of you in your absence; for it was cowardly so to do violence to myself. Your punishment is hard, but just. Now that I dare once more to gaze into the depths of those dark, girlish eyes, why are they not scornful and angry, but sad and dreamy?"

He stood for a while so lost in thoughts of the few moments he had spent in Eva's presence, and in contemplation of the picture, that he did not hear the door behind him open.

An aged officer, leaning heavily upon a stout bamboo cane, entered the room, and, standing still, gloomily surveyed the young man lost in reverie before the picture; then as he glanced at a mirror hanging on the wall opposite the door, he saw reflected in its depths his own image and his son's. He was startled; the astonishing likeness between them, which he had never before admitted, struck him forcibly and painfully at the moment.

"So like, and yet so different!" the old man thought, "Yes, he is my son. I could not disown him if I would. My only son,--so like me,--and that he should disgrace our name,--'tis maddening!"

He stood for a moment silently watching his son, and then struck the floor violently with his bamboo cane. "Halloo, Herr Leo von Heydeck!" he cried. "Colonel von Heydeck requests the honour of a few words with you!"

Leo turned in surprise. "What, father, you here?" he asked. One glance at his father's gloomy face told him plainly enough that the old man was perfectly aware of the events of the last few hours, and had come to call his son to account. Confused and annoyed, Leo bent his looks upon the ground.

"You did not expect a visit from me?" the colonel asked, contemptuously. "You had indeed no right to do so, for old Colonel von Heydeck has never had anything to do with scoundrels!"

"Father!"

"Why, don't you like the word? I should not have thought you would notice it! I have just seen the Herwarths, uncle and nephew, and I know everything. 'Tis the second time a Heydeck has tamely borne such an insult,--first my vagabond of a brother, and now you, my only son!"

The old man sat down, and continued: "I was on my way here to remonstrate with you when I met your colonel; he told me you had declared upon your honour that you would fight no duel, and that there would be no use in anything I could say; that he had your resignation in his pocket, and was going to attend to it. He spoke warmly in your behalf,--my heart was touched by it; you have him to thank that I do not bestow my curse upon you, as once I did upon my coward of a brother, but that I am come to you to ask, 'What are you going to do now?'" The old man looked about him in his son's room, to which this was his first visit, and frowned, as he went on: "If you have one single spark of affection for your old father do not disgrace our name by a Heydeck's painting pictures for money. I know you will answer me that you cannot live on air, or beg, or steal, and that I cannot support you, since my pension barely suffices for my own wants. I know this is what you will say, but I have a proposition to make. Leo, you must marry!"

Certainly this proposition was the last that Leo expected from his father. "I marry?" he exclaimed, with a side-glance at the easel. "Never! How could I dream of it now when I am about to enter upon a new life, in which the struggle for existence will be hard enough with only one to provide for."

"All the more reason why this new life should never be sullied by any occupation unworthy a nobleman," the colonel replied, quite unmoved by his son's words, "Hear me quietly; we must understand each other, and I have much to do to-day besides. Your colonel has promised that your resignation shall find honourable acceptance. I myself will see to it that Herr von Bertram does not go unpunished for an insult offered to a Heydeck!"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"That's no affair of yours; you are not my guardian. If you claim a right to publish your convictions in direct opposition to universal opinion, I, old man as I am, surely have a right to do as honour bids me. I shall do so, and shall see that the name of Heydeck is not sullied; it is your part, as far as in you lies, to keep it clear from stain."

"What do you require of me?"

"Before I tell you I must, that you may understand me, give you some information concerning the past of a certain member of our family. You know that I have a brother of whom I have never spoken to you; I am going to do so now. We were two merry boys together,--Ferdinand two years younger than I,--and we were very fond of each other, although we were utterly dissimilar physically and mentally; he was a bookworm, excellent at learning, while I was a wild, wayward fellow, fonder of my rifle than of any book. When we left school he wanted to pursue his studies, while I was bent on entering the army. Our father was a stern, harsh man, and would not suffer any son of his to be a quill-driver. All Ferdinand's entreaties, and even the tears of our mother, whose favourite he was, were of no avail; he had to don the uniform. To the last moment he implored my father not to force him to embrace a profession which he hated, but my father contemptuously turned a deaf ear, and did not even bid him good-bye when he left us, nor indeed did I, for I was vexed with him for his womanish conduct.

"And so Ferdinand became a soldier, and the reports received of him from his colonel, an old friend of my father's, were extremely fair. He was no favourite in the corps of officers: he was too staid and grave, he was even accused of miserliness, but he did his duty, soon became ensign, passed a brilliant examination, and scarcely a year after entering the service gained his epaulettes, while I was two full years gaining mine.

"Several years went by; then we met on some great occasion. I had been delighted with the prospect of seeing him, but I soon found that we did not suit each other. He had grown more staid, I was wilder than ever,--no two brothers could be more different. All our comrades said so. I heard remarks of theirs about Ferdinand that made me furious, and yet I could do nothing to contradict them, for there was no positive expression of opinion in what was reported to me,--it mostly consisted of vague sneers from which I drew the worst conclusions.

"Ferdinand was as unpopular as possible; the officers of his regiment accused him of unsociability, and declared that instead of living with them he was always shut up in his room, poring over his books, and that he hoarded every penny of his pay. But they found fault with him chiefly because he never took part in any social entertainment unless he knew that gaming would form part of it. Play was his only passion; his stakes were never large, although when he had a decided run of luck he would play a little higher than usual, but then only with extreme caution. It was owing to this caution that he won with great regularity.

"My head used to spin when I heard my comrades talk of Ferdinand and his never-failing luck at play, using expressions too vague to admit of a reply, but easy enough to understand. I made up my mind to speak frankly with him upon the subject, but before I could do so the catastrophe occurred which separated us forever. One evening we were both present at a gay gathering; Ferdinand knew that the thing would close with play. A young officer of hussars, a Herr von Kleinschmidt, kept the bank, and was unfortunate. He lost considerable sums and it vexed him, but it irritated him still more that Ferdinand, whom he could not bear, played with his usual caution and met with his usual success. Every time Ferdinand won Herr von Kleinschmidt made some cutting remark, and his observations were all the more bitter as Ferdinand scarcely seemed to hear them. Others won far larger sums than he, but he alone seemed to excite the venom of the angry bank-keeper; he followed Ferdinand's play with suspicious eyes, and suddenly, when Ferdinand had won several times upon the same card, the irritated officer threw his cards upon the table.

"'So long as Herr von Heydeck plays I will not draw another card,' he said, angrily; and then, with a contemptuous glance at Ferdinand, he continued: 'I am not a gamester by profession, and am not sufficiently skilful to enter the lists against a man who makes gaming his study and knows well how to assist his luck. I hold such play dishonourable, and the man who practises it guilty of dishonourable conduct.'

"This was followed by dead silence throughout the room. All eyes were riveted upon Ferdinand, who stood by the card-table ghastly pale, biting his lips. He replied not a word, but gathered in the money he had won with a trembling hand and left the room. His comrades gave way before him, seeming to avoid him as he passed out from among them.

"When I heard such disgraceful words applied to my brother I grew almost wild with rage. I was on the point of rushing upon his insulter, but a friend restrained me. 'You can do nothing, Heydeck,' he whispered in my ear. 'Your brother's honour is lost if he leaves you to defend it.'

"I saw that he was right. It was hard to bridle my fury, but I did it. I followed Ferdinand, and overtook him near his lodgings. 'I am your second,' I said to him.

"He made no reply, and, as I looked at him as we passed beneath a street-lamp, I saw his lips

quiver spasmodically; his cheeks were ashen, his eyes without lustre; he looked fearfully.

"I went on talking to him, and asked him how I should word his challenge, but still he did not answer me; and when we reached his apartments he threw himself upon a lounge and sobbed like a child. My brain reeled; I did not know what to think of his condition, for it never occurred to me that fear, pitiable disgraceful cowardice, could turn a Heydeck into a whining baby. I would not believe him when at last he composed himself sufficiently to tell me, his teeth chattering the while, that he could not fight,—could never summon sufficient courage to stand in front of a loaded pistol. He was beside himself, not with the thought of the insult that had been offered him, but with fear!

"He was a coward, an infamous coward; he confessed it to me, and cried like a child, cursing his father's harshness that had forced him to enter the army against his will, and that now condemned him to dishonour, for he could not fight.

"I stood as if turned to stone. I had never dreamed of the possibility of such cowardice. I left him with contempt, and I have never seen him since. The next morning I heard that he had sent in his resignation and was gone; whither I did not learn until long afterwards."

The colonel paused in his story and bent his gaze gloomily upon the ground. Memory was a greater pain to him than he cared to show.

For Leo his father's narrative possessed an absorbing interest. He had frequently heard allusions made to the irreconcilable quarrel that had existed for many years between his father and his uncle, but this was all he had ever known concerning it. Now the veil was lifted from the mystery; this explained the scorn and hatred with which the colonel mentioned the name of his brother, who was now a wealthy man, living somewhere in the Tyrol. But the story had produced upon Leo an effect which the narrator never intended. The young lieutenant was firmly convinced that his father had been mistaken. His uncle Ferdinand had never refused to fight a duel from cowardice; it was impossible! Had he not passed through the same struggle with himself which his uncle had formerly undergone? Small as was the old colonel's comprehension of his son's motives to-day, it must have been infinitely less with regard to his brother's motives in his hot-headed youth. Would he not have suspected Leo of cowardice if his colonel had not borne such enthusiastic testimony to the young officer's bravery?

Leo was most desirous to hear the rest of the story, but he did not venture to interrupt the old man's gloomy reverie. He sat silent until, after a long pause, the colonel at last struck the floor violently with his cane, and, lifting his head, said, in a loud, harsh voice, "What good will thinking of it or regretting it do now? What is done is done, and there's no help for it. The grave will not give up its dead. My cowardly vagabond of a brother has burdened my soul with another's blood! I can see him now, the handsome young fellow, curveting over the field at a review, with his dolman fluttering gayly over his shoulder,—and then it's all changed: I see only his pale face as he lies dying with my bullet through his lungs. He forgave me; he knew I could not help it. I could not endure that a Heydeck should tamely suffer disgrace. With his dying breath he declared me a man of honour whom he greatly esteemed, and he died in my arms.

"I can forgive Ferdinand everything but this, that he should have forced me to shoot down that fine young fellow and rob a poor mother of her only child! No, I can never, never forgive him! But enough of this; I did my duty then, and I will do it again, only I hope the bullet this time will not enter the youthful breast heaving with gay love of life, but bring rest to the weary old cripple."

Leo would have interposed here, but his father gave him no opportunity, and continued,—

"Let us finish this once for all. Do not interrupt me. I was sentenced to one year's imprisonment. As soon as I was free again I hastened to my father's death-bed. He gave me his blessing, and left his curse for his unworthy son, whom he would have disinherited had he possessed anything in the world save his honourable name. For a long time I heard nothing of Ferdinand. After my father's death a letter arrived from him; I never broke the seal, but returned it to him with, 'Unopened. Hans von Heydeck,' written on the envelope. The letter bore the official stamp of a Hungarian town. Some years afterwards a friend who had been travelling in Hungary told me that he had met Ferdinand in Pesth; that he was living there as tutor with a wealthy Hungarian noble; and after several more years I learned that he had purchased large estates in the Tyrol,—having become a very wealthy man by his marriage with a rich tradesman's heiress; that his wife had died about a year after her marriage in giving birth to a son, who had not long survived his mother. Ferdinand, therefore, was the sole possessor of great wealth, which, however, he did not seem to enjoy, as he lived the life of a hermit in his lonely castle, which he left only for a few weeks in the year, when his shattered health made a sojourn at one of the baths desirable.

"My last indirect news of Ferdinand I had about ten years ago. He had married some time before a very beautiful girl of an ancient and noble family. This second wife, however, whom he was said to have loved most devotedly, also died after a short time, leaving him an only child,—a daughter. He had been inconsolable for her loss, and was leading a more retired life even than before, scarcely ever leaving his castle, Reifenstein. Buried in his books, he repelled all advances from his neighbours, and was regarded in all the country round as a proud, inaccessible aristocrat. He had become a Catholic, and observed with great rigour all the duties and fasts of

his church, although, in accordance with a promise made to her Protestant mother, he brought up his daughter in the Protestant faith.

"After this indirect intelligence, which I had some time since from a friend visiting in the Tyrol, I heard nothing farther of my brother until I received a letter from himself, about a week ago. At first I was undecided whether to break the seal or to return it to him unopened, as I had done by the first I had from him. At last I opened it, and yet, after I had read it, I was more undecided than before. The memory of the disgraceful past prompted me to burn it, while reason bade me give it to you. Since I received it I have always carried it about with me. Now I am glad that I did not burn it, since that has happened which I never could have anticipated.

"I was convinced that an honourable career was assured to you; that, without any outside aid, you would have attained the highest military honours. All that is past. Here is your uncle's letter; read it yourself."

Leo took the letter which his father handed him, and eagerly ran through it. It was as follows:

"More than thirty years have passed since that miserable evening which exiled me forever from my native country. Are you still implacable, Hans? My first letter to you, begging your forgiveness, was returned to me unopened. Will this one share the same fate? If it should, we are parted forever. For humbled as is my pride I cannot, for the third time, offer in reconciliation a hand that has been twice rejected. But no; I know you will read these lines. These long years must surely have softened your hard judgment. You will remember sadly, as I do, the happy days of childhood, and no longer think with hatred and aversion of the brother whom you once loved so tenderly.

"Let us now, as old men, Hans, forget what occurred in that wretched night. Let us reflect that we, brothers, are the last of the noble race of the von Heydecks, and resolve together to do what we can to revive the half-extinguished lustre of our ancient name.

"Daring the thirty melancholy years which I have passed in exile,--by my father's curse an outcast from my family,--the consciousness of being a Heydeck has upheld me and saved me from much degradation to which want might have compelled me.

"You can never dream of the suffering I brought upon myself by refusing, as I did, to comply with a custom so long upheld by aristocratic authority. All the wretchedness of my life has been the consequence of the events of that night which drove me forth from my parents,--from you and from my country. My punishment has been bitter!

"At first I became tutor in the family of a Hungarian magnate; then I entered that of a wealthy banker. In this dependent position I was subjected to humiliations of every kind. My blood boils now at the remembrance of how I was forced to yield to the whims of others: to humour dulness on the one side and intellectual superficiality on the other. It was a terrible ordeal! After some years, I became acquainted with a young and beautiful woman, the wealthy widow of a manufacturer, who had left her all his property. Her beauty attracted me, her wealth allured me! I was fearfully punished. She made my life a hell on earth.

"I Was foolish enough at the time of our marriage to allow myself to be persuaded to sign a paper giving to her the entire right of disposal of her property, and of bequeathing it as she chose in case of her death. I had sold myself, and did not even receive the proceeds of the sale! I actually believed that love would bend my wife's wishes to my will, and went so far, in my devotion to my bride, as to change my faith for her sake,--I became a Catholic!

"My punishment was sure and speedy. My wife reduced me almost to despair. While she scarcely allowed me sufficient means for the bare necessities of existence, she indulged in the wildest extravagance. I had to resign my beloved studies to accompany her to balls and masquerades, to concerts and the theatre. If I did not go with her she found some other escort. It was a horrible time! I was pursued by continual dread lest my wife might dishonour me. And I had to endure it all, for if I had attempted a separation I should have been a beggar. Death came at last to relieve me from my wretched thralldom. She died a few months after giving birth to a son, and on her death-bed she testified her hatred of me. She made a will which gave every penny which she possessed to her son; to me she left nothing. As during her life I lived but by her bounty, I was, after her death, to be dependent upon that of her son. I say hers, for I never believed him to be mine! She died with a smile of satisfied hatred upon her lips. She thought me crushed forever; but she had forgotten to appoint a guardian for her child, and this was my salvation. In the eye of the law I was his father, and as such his natural guardian. Moreover, when after a short time he died, I was his heir.

"I will say no more, dear Hans, of that horrible time. I was a prey to the stings of conscience. The thought that I had sold myself for gold never left me. I was doubly dishonoured!

"Henceforth I lived solitary and alone, given over to my historical and scientific studies in my old castle in the Tyrol, until my health obliged me to try the waters at Carlsbad. There I became acquainted with a charming girl, Countess Hilda von Sarnstein. I won her hand, and she came with me to the Tyrol. She was an angel. If the memory of my miserable past had not still poisoned

my existence I should have been the happiest man in the world while by her side. She left me all too soon; but in my Hilda I have her living image. My daughter is my sole joy and pride; her gay, happy temperament enlivens as far as is possible my melancholy retired existence. When I hear her joyous laughter, I forget for a moment the wretched past. My dearest wish is to make her happy; and it is in the hope of doing so that I have for years nourished the scheme which I now tell you. I am rich; after my death all my property will devolve upon my child, who will bring it to her future husband. Shall it go to a stranger? Affection for my kindred has always filled my heart. In the saddest times of my life I remembered with loving fidelity my home and my parents, of whom I always contrived to procure tidings until their death; since when I have followed your career, Hans, with the deepest interest. I have never lost sight of you or yours.

"When a son was born to you, I rejoiced with you that our noble name would once more have a worthy representative. I could have wished that he had been a scholar instead of a soldier, but I am nevertheless proud of my nephew, the last genuine Heydeck. I have taken pains to learn all that I could of him, and I know how brilliantly he distinguished himself in the French war.

"I have often told my Hilda of you and of Leo; her blue eyes sparkle when she hears his name; she is proud of her cousin, and loves him without ever having seen him. Could I but see Leo and Hilda man and wife! I conjure you, Hans, forget what parted us; help me to provide a happy future for our children. We old people could depart in peace if we knew our name thus destined to flourish worthily.

"Answer me, Hans, as soon as you can, or better still send your Leo to me at Castle Reifenstein; he will be received with open arms by your brother,

"FERDINAND."

Leo dropped the letter, which he had read with the greatest attention. "Now I understand you, father," he said, sadly. "You desire me to accede to my uncle's proposition that I should go to the Tyrol and sell my freedom."

"Yes, that is what I desire," the colonel burst out; "but I see that you are minded to reject also this last means of securing to our family a dignified independence in the world!"

"Is it honourable to accept the gift of wealth at the hands of a man whom you have always heaped with opprobrium?"

"You have no right to condemn him as I do, since you have followed his example. I have had hard work to make up my mind; but now that it is made up, I will not yield one jot! Yesterday, I thought my son's marriage with the daughter of my wretched brother a disgrace; to-day, I see in it the only possible means of avoiding the shame of having the last Heydeck depend for existence upon quill-driving or daubing. I give you my honour that we are separated forever, you and I, if you do not set off for the Tyrol and your uncle to-morrow! Now you know that there is no use in one word more. Make your decision, and let me have it in writing. I will not see you again before your departure!"

The old man arose to leave the room, and Leo did not attempt to detain him. He knew perfectly well that after the colonel had given 'his honour' no power on earth could induce him to alter his determination.

Leaning heavily on his bamboo cane, the colonel hobbled to the door, opened it, and stood pondering for one moment upon the threshold. Then he turned once more to his son, and, in a much gentler tone than he had hitherto used, said, "We part, Leo, certainly for a long time, perhaps forever. If you hear that sudden death has overtaken me, do not think hardly of your old father; but if you have a spark of love for me obey me and go to the Tyrol!"

CHAPTER VI.

The door closed behind the colonel, and Leo was once more alone, free to indulge in his own reflections. What troubled him most was his father's resolve to fight Bertram. It was but too certain that the obstinate old soldier would act upon his determination as soon as possible. In imagination he saw his father fall in a conflict with the man who had so insulted himself, and forgetting his own future, he thought only of how this duel might be prevented.

A sudden idea flashed upon him, showing him he hoped a means of attaining this end. In the

greatest haste he changed his dress, laying aside his uniform forever,--since he had already handed in his resignation and received leave of absence, he no longer considered himself as belonging to the service, and he hoped, moreover, in the dress of a civilian to escape immediate recognition on the part of his former comrades.

Once more he paused before the picture on the easel, and murmured as he gazed at it, "All this is your work. You drive me forth into the world; you have destroyed all my hopes; and yet I cannot chide you,--not even although you turn from me those dark, enchanting eyes! Farewell! I dare not gaze longer into their depths: they bewilder my heart and soul, and now I need every faculty I possess to help me to carve out my future. Farewell, forever! I must see you never again!"

After one long, last look, he took the portrait from the easel and leaned it with its face against the wall. Then he hurriedly left the room and the house.

In the street, seeing Count Waldheim in the distance, and wishing to avoid all discussion of his affairs with any one for the present, he turned in an opposite direction, called a fiacre, and was driven rapidly to a retired and extremely handsome villa in the suburbs. Here a footman in rich livery instantly appeared, opened the carriage-door, and evidently had been taught to regard Leo as an honoured guest.

"Is Herr Delmar at home?"

"To you, Herr Lieutenant, but to no one else. My master is at dinner, but he has given orders that you are to be admitted at all hours. I will announce you immediately."

"No need, I will announce myself."

"As you please, Herr Lieutenant; my master dines in the garden-room."

Leo nodded in answer to the man's low bow, and then hurriedly passed through the hall and several antechambers on his way to the familiar garden-room. He paid no heed to the more than princely luxury of the surroundings, scarcely even glancing at the splendid pictures with which the walls were hung, but hurried on.

Surrounded by rare tropical plants, in a room the walls of which were almost entirely of glass, but kept perfectly cool by the constant play of a fountain, a table was spread, at which sat Herr Paul Delmar, with a liveried servant behind his chair.

The lord of this magnificent villa, of several other princely estates, and of a capital of several millions, was a young man thirty years old at most,--not strictly handsome, but of an interesting, cheerful countenance, in which sparkled a pair of brilliant black eyes. The nose was too large and the skin too sallow for beauty, otherwise the features were admirable, and the whole bearing and air of the man extremely attractive, especially when the face was lit up by the frequent half-kindly, half-ironical smile.

"Is that you, Leo?" he cried to the new-comer. "A rare guest, indeed; sit down. A place for Herr von Heydeck," he gave orders to the servant.

"No, no, Paul, I cannot; thanks," Leo replied.

"Have you dined?"

"No, but---"

"Then I'll take no excuse. Not on your account, Leo; you know how selfish I am,--my own comfort is my chief care. Nothing would taste as it should with you sitting there fasting and hungry."

"But I'm not hungry; I assure you I have not the least appetite."

"But I have, and you shall not spoil it by sitting there eating nothing and watching me. There is nothing in this world of more importance than a good dinner; I pity any man who does not know how to appreciate so refined an enjoyment. A bad dinner is the greatest of losses: it can never be repaired,--it has gone forever! He only who knows how to eat appreciates the full value of life. Here is your plate, Leo,--my Jean is an active fellow,--and now take your soup; season it as you like it, and, for heaven's sake, look like a reasonable being. Such a long face as yours is as bad for the soup as if the cook had over-salted it."

Delmar set his friend an excellent example, which Leo gradually followed. The events of the day had made him forget his dinner and turn from the idea of food, but youth and health soon asserted themselves, and to his host's satisfaction he did ample justice to the admirable repast before him.

During dinner he did not touch upon what he had come to say,--he knew that his friend disliked all disturbing emotions during his meal-times, and as he wished to secure his entire and undivided attention he waited until the servant had brought coffee and retired before he began. "I have come to you to-day, Paul, to ask you to help me."

"Indeed! I shall be only too delighted; but I mistrust you,--you know it is an old quarrel between us that you always give and never accept."

"To-day I will accept, and a great service from you too,--if you will do it for me."

"Anything in my power, Leo, is done for you before you ask it. You could hardly ask too much, as you know."

"I knew what you would say, Paul," the other cried, grasping his friend's hand cordially.

But Paul withdrew it with a smile. "For heaven's sake don't be sentimental," he said; "and pray don't imagine that I stir a finger for you out of consideration for you. Everything that I do, I do solely for my own sake. It gives me pleasure to do something for you,--it disturbs the tedious monotony of existence. I may perhaps hit upon something entertaining; that is why, and only why, you could hardly ask too much of me! You know very well that I am an incorrigible egotist, and therefore, and because I am devoured by curiosity, tell me what you want."

"You shall learn, you miserable egotist, whom gross selfishness drives to any amount of self-sacrifice for a friend; but before I tell you you must know what has happened to-day." And Leo described calmly and frankly the events of the day.

When he repeated his expressions with regard to Eva Schommer Delmar gave a nod of assent, and said, "A severe but perfectly correct summary of the heiress's character. I met her to-day just as you were discoursing so amiably about her. I rode past her carriage and had a most gracious bow. The fair Eva knows that my millions outnumber her own, and esteems me accordingly. You are right, Leo; pride of purse is more disgusting than pride of birth. Fräulein Schommer is an odious creature."

Paul gave one keen glance at Leo as he spoke, and noticed that the latter suddenly flushed as he replied, "Certainly *you* have no right, Paul, to speak thus of Fräulein Schommer. I did not know that she had injured you."

"I am not speaking of myself. I was only confirming your judgment, your own words."

"Which I acknowledge to have been hasty and unjust. You do not dream, Paul, what disastrous results they had for me. Listen!"

Paul smiled and nodded, promising not to interrupt again; but he did not keep his word, for when his friend described Bertram's interference, and repeated word for word what he had said, he started up in violent agitation, threw away the cigar which he had just lighted, and exclaimed, "What! the scoundrel dared to accuse you of dishonourable conduct? Is the fellow mad? And what did you do, Leo? Struck him across the face with the flat of your sword I trust as he deserves. At all events, I hope you were not insane enough to challenge a rogue who could not insult you?"

"You know my principles with regard to duelling."

"Of courage; but who thinks of principles in such a case? I envy you the capacity to do so. Fortunately then you did not challenge him. Of course you gave him a suitable memento of the occasion? Go on, Leo; I will control my cursed temper if I can and not interrupt again."

He lighted another cigar and leaning back in his chair kept his word this time. With exemplary patience he listened while Leo circumstantially related all that had occurred: his conversation with Colonel von Herwarth, his resignation from the service, and then his interview with his father, finally giving Delmar his uncle Ferdinand's letter to read.

As the story went on Paul was strongly tempted to break his promise. He moved uneasily in his chair when Leo told of his resignation, and when he heard that the old colonel proposed calling out Bertram he was on the point of bursting into a rage, but he controlled himself, and suppressed all comment. On the other hand, he quite chuckled over the old colonel's command that his son should forbear to earn his living by honest labour, and instead rescue the family honour by a wealthy marriage. And he read through Ferdinand's letter without a word.

"Now, Paul, you know everything," Leo said in conclusion, "and you must have some suspicion of what I want of you. It lies in your power to prevent any duel between my father and Bertram. You once hinted to me in confidence that you were privy to some disgraceful conduct of Bertram's. You have but to tell my father of this, and his principles will forbid his calling out a scoundrel. This is why I am come to you. I am sure you will relieve me of this anxiety, which is the worst that I have to endure at present."

Paul leaned back comfortably in his arm-chair and blew forth several artistically-formed rings of smoke, then sipped his coffee and proceeded to blow forth more rings, as was his custom when buried in reflection.

His silence troubled Leo. "You do not answer me, Paul. Can you not or will you not help me? I remember you were with Bertram a great deal last winter, but I never really regarded you as his friend."

"Friend of that scoundrel? I wouldn't give that for his friendship!" And he snapped his fingers. "He was my slave," he continued. "I paid him well, that I might get rid of him when I did not want to use him any longer, and I will do it now! Cast the shadow from your brow, you anxious, heavily-principled son of a hot-headed father. This nonsensical duel is out of the question. I promise you that I will prevent it. I settled that in my mind instantly, and it seemed such child's play to me that I had ceased to think of it. I was thinking of you, Leo; the fact is that I am more and more convinced that you are the strangest, most enigmatical human being on God's earth. I regard you as I should some fabled monster of prehistoric times. We have grown up together, I thought I knew you, and yet you are continually taking me by surprise."

"I really cannot see what eccentricity of mine has just at present provoked this rather unflattering outburst," Leo remarked, not very well pleased.

"I suppose not; the fact is it is useless to be surprised at you, for you are made up of eccentricities and never do anything like other people. You are an artist and a scholar, opposed on principle to war, nevertheless you became an officer in the army, and behaved like a hero in the field. You have a friend--a millionaire--who desires nothing more ardently than to serve you, and you live with the greatest economy upon your meagre pay, denying yourself every enjoyment, although I confess you never look like a poor man. You are a democrat of the purest type, and yet get along delightfully with your aristocratic comrades without ever being false to your principles."

"I should have thought all this was nothing new to you."

"True; but to-day you have capped the climax of your inconsistencies. You say yourself that it pains you to send in your resignation, and yet you do it, although you could by a single word have crushed to the earth the infamous coward who insulted you, and who of course knew that you would not call him out. You cannot fight a scoundrel any more than can your father. You might have done for yourself what you have done for him."

"That would have been cowardice, and a falsehood besides; for I refrain from calling Bertram out not because the fellow is a scoundrel, but because I consider duelling criminal. I will never disgrace myself by hypocrisy and a denial of my principles."

"Heroism! extraordinary, antediluvian heroism! I repeat, I regard you with admiring awe, Leo; although I, poor grovelling earth-worm that I am, cannot climb to your sublime heights. And this is just why I am so infatuated about you,--for if you were like me! should find you as desperately tiresome as all the rest of the world,--and why I am anxious about you, for with your prehistoric truth and honour you'll hardly have much luck in this present world. Just now for example, you are in a charming little scrape, and I am really anxious to know how you will pull through it. You have sent in your resignation and have to begin life with nothing, or next to nothing. Tell me frankly how much money you have laid by, for I am convinced that you are an admirable economist and have contrived to lay by something."

"No, I have laid by nothing, but I inherited from my mother about two thousand thalers which I have never touched, and which will be amply sufficient to support me until I have arranged my future existence."

"And you are going to diminish that pittance? Will you not at last be reasonable, Leo, and see that you can give me no greater pleasure----"

"Not a word more, Paul! You know that you can never offend me except by offering me money."

"I am dumb, but I cannot suppress the remark that you are a greater egotist than I. What the deuce is the good of my money if the man whom I love best in the world will never take a penny of it, and looks as if he would bite me if I so much as mention his doing so? But there, I am dumb. I must take you as you are. You will live on your two thousand thalers then until you have arranged your future existence,--what sort of an existence? I am greatly mistaken if you contemplate acceding to your amiable uncle's proposal."

"Never! the mere idea of marrying for money disgusts me!"

"I thought so. For my part, my sentiments are expressed in the saying, 'Wealth is no disgrace, and poverty no virtue;' but you would of course refuse your cousin Hilda's hand, just because she happened to be wealthy."

"No; if I loved her and was loved by her, I should, although I admit it would be difficult and against the grain, try to forget that she was rich; but I do not love her, and I never can love her!"

"You don't know her yet. To be sure, judging from her father, whose letter is not exactly instinct in every line with delicacy of sentiment, there is not very much to be expected of her; but she may, nevertheless, be an extremely charming girl."

"And if she were,--if she were possessed of the beauty and amiability of an angel,--still I could never love her!"

"In--deed, in--deed? You seem surprisingly secure in your knowledge of yourself. Hm! I suspected as much. I remarked, you may remember, that you were in a deuce of a scrape. You'll have, at all events, to sacrifice some one of your principles, for I suppose you number filial duty among them. Do you forget that your father threatens to disown you if you sully his name by quill-driving or daubing canvas for a living, and if you do not start to-morrow for the Tyrol to see your uncle? Take one piece of advice from me, Leo: obey this last demand of your father's. Go to the Tyrol and make your uncle a visit,--you bind yourself to nothing by doing so. It cannot hurt you just to look at your cousin Hilda--the name sounds really very pretty--besides, it is best for you to be out of the way for the present of all the gossip that there will be here. Nothing surely can be more beneficial to your art than a sojourn among the glorious Alps. Be reasonable for once, Leo. Time is everything to you now. In time your father, even though he be as thick-skulled as yourself, must listen to reason, and see that a Heydeck can work without disgrace if he has not money enough to live upon."

Paul's advice was so reasonable that Leo could not but accept it. Undesirable as nearer intercourse with his uncle and cousin must be, judging from the letter which had produced a very unfavourable impression, he could not but feel it his duty to conquer his aversion to the journey which his father had enjoined upon him. Paul was right; it was very desirable to gain time, for only with time was there any chance of combating successfully the old soldier's prejudices. And so, after a short pause of reflection, Leo declared that he would follow his friend's advice and set out for the Tyrol the next morning, if Delmar would first assure him that the duel between the old colonel and Bertram should not take place.

"You may be certain of it this very evening," Delmar said, highly delighted. "My slave is bound to me by such fetters that if I choose he will ask your pardon on his knees!"

"That I do not desire."

"What you desire does not concern me at present, but that I fulfil my promise and make this crazy duel impossible for your father, and that shall be done immediately. Do me a favour in return, I pray. Take me with you to the Tyrol to-morrow."

"You want to go to the Tyrol with me?"

"Yes, I do; it is horribly tiresome and stupid here in K----. I cannot stand it any longer. I want to breathe Alpine air."

"But, Paul, we cannot possibly travel together. Remember I must husband my means and travel third-class, and stop at second-rate inns."

"I will travel third-class with you; it will be a change, and much cooler and pleasanter in summer."

"But the second-class hotels? Do you forget what you said only a little while ago about a bad dinner?"

"For heaven's sake don't call me to account for all the nonsense I talk! In short, I want to go with you. We will travel afoot, student fashion, and sketch and amuse ourselves as we can. Of course you will have to stay with your uncle at Castle Reifenstein, but there will surely be a tolerable inn somewhere near, where I can take up my quarters. I want to be at hand to see what becomes of you."

"Do you insist then upon making this sacrifice for me, Paul?"

"For the love of heaven don't grow sentimental again! I have no idea of making any sacrifice for you. I am not thinking of you, but of myself. I shall like the joke of it, of travelling afoot instead of *en millionnaire*, I wish to study life in its various phases, with you for my companion. On the whole, you see, you are a very entertaining fellow, that is all. Pure selfishness,--nothing else, I assure you. So now go home and pack your portmanteau, that we may start early to-morrow, while I look for our mutual friend at Büchner's, where he is sure to be at this time, and where I propose to rattle his chains in his ears."

Bertram had at last attained the summit of his hopes. The lovely heiress, Eva Schommer, was his betrothed; his dearest wish was fulfilled, and yet he could not thoroughly enjoy his good fortune. He listened most amiably to the congratulations of the astonished and delighted Uncle Balthasar, and to those also of Aunt Minni, who was less astonished and less delighted, or at all events refrained from any distinct expression of astonishment and delight. He reciprocated good-humoured old Balthasar's expressions of esteem and good will, but yet he could not help feeling as if the betrothal in some way were not genuine.

And yet Eva, her resolution once taken, accommodated herself to her position with much more readiness than Bertram would, from what she had said to him, have supposed possible. She received her uncle's and aunt's congratulations pleasantly, and when Uncle Balthasar suggested that she should address her lover familiarly by his Christian name, and seal their betrothal with a kiss, she refused it is true, but not unkindly and with a smile. She gave Bertram permission to

make the betrothal public after the usual fashion, by sending cards to all their acquaintances, but insisted that all congratulations should be addressed solely to him, positively refusing to receive the usual congratulatory visits. The next day, if her kind uncle Balthasar was agreed, she meant to leave K--- for several weeks or even months.

At this unexpected intelligence Uncle Balthasar opened his eyes in astonishment. "Good gracious, Eva my dear," he said, "the thing is impossible! You can't think of going alone, and how are we all to be ready by to-morrow?"

But Eva declared that it would be very easy. She had long desired to see Switzerland or the Tyrol, and very little luggage was necessary for a journey to the mountains. Nanette and Wilhelm could easily get everything ready in the course of the evening: she herself and Aline might assist; and, if her kind uncle and aunt would only not say no, nothing should hinder their departure by noon the next day in the express train.

When did Uncle Balthasar ever say no to any request of his niece's? He could no more do so than could Aunt Minni, who with a gentle sigh resigned herself to her fate, and only asked meekly whither they were going; a question which Eva could not answer. She begged her uncle to decide where to go,—it would perhaps be best that he should consult with Aline,—there was the whole evening in which to make their choice.

Eva never asked Bertram's advice as to their destination, and when, with some hesitation, he asked whether it would not be possible to postpone for one day their departure, in order that his aunt, Madame von Sturmhaupt, might express to Eva the pleasure she would so surely feel in her nephew's betrothal, he received from Eva so quiet and firm a refusal by way of reply, that it was plain to see that he was not to found upon the fact of his betrothal any right to make requests. She declared positively that she would receive no congratulatory visits,—not one. Her intention to leave K--- on the morrow was, since Uncle Balthasar had given his consent to the plan, unalterable, and would assuredly be put into execution.

This was very sharp and decided, but the effect of it was a little softened when Eva kindly added that she hoped Herr von Bertram would spend this last evening before her departure in her home-circle, and that when he returned with the intelligence that his quarrel with Herr von Heydeck was satisfactorily adjusted, he should learn whither they intended to go.

This was a distinct dismissal and reminder that his promise was yet to be fulfilled, and Bertram thus understood it.

He kissed the hand which Eva extended to him, did the same by Aunt Minni, and took his departure, refusing Uncle Balthasar's offer to accompany him, on the ground that only the absence of all formal ceremony on the old man's part could make him really feel like a member of the family.

But this was not his reason for desiring to leave the room alone; he had a presentiment that he should find Nanette in the antechamber, and he had good grounds for wishing to see her alone. He was not deceived,—the first thing that met his eyes as the door of the drawing-room closed behind him was the waiting-maid, who was busy very near the door. She greeted him with a low courtesy; her face was crimson, and she regarded him with a malicious smile as she whispered, "I give you joy, Herr Lieutenant---"

"You have been listening!"

"Of course; what was I here for?" she replied, pertly.

"I am not blaming you, my dear; quite the contrary."

"Oh, indeed, I'm not going to listen for you. It is bad enough without that to have brought me here to this proud Zantuppy. I hate her, I do! And I'll not stand it long in this low place, let me tell you! 'Tis a sin and a shame that I must look on while you betroth yourself to the creature, and you asking me to help you, too!"

In her agitation Nanette forgot to whisper, as she had done when she first addressed Bertram. She did not speak loudly, although sufficiently so to cause Bertram fear lest she should be heard in the drawing-room.

"Do be quiet; speak softly, my dear girl," he begged, seizing her hand. "You know it is only out of love for you, and that I may be able to provide more handsomely for you, that I am forced to make a wealthy marriage. But we cannot talk here,—we may be discovered at any moment. Come early to-morrow to my aunt's; I will be there. Keep your eyes open, my dear child, for both our sakes. Farewell, my little darling, till we meet."

He looked cautiously towards the door: it was tightly closed; he then snatched one kiss from the extremely placable Nanette and was gone.

This meeting with Nanette did but increase his anxiety of mind. The tie that bound him to Eva was as yet but weak and frail; until the betrothal was publicly known it might easily be dissolved, which it certainly would be if Eva's desire with regard to the quarrel with Heydeck were not

fulfilled. It was of the first importance that this tie should be made firm and indissoluble, and to this end he must act with energy and promptitude.

He decided upon a plan of action as soon as he left the villa, but he did not proceed to its execution with any very great satisfaction, for he was staking his whole future upon a single card. He had made an appointment with Count Waldheim to meet him at the Casino, and thither he betook himself. This interview with Waldheim was the first step in the carrying out of his scheme; the first, and by no means the easiest,--he dreaded it.

Waldheim was a gay young officer, but a man of stainless honour, wherefore Bertram considered him a most important ally. He dreaded greatly lest he should refuse him his support.

When he reached the Casino he found to his satisfaction that it was nearly deserted. Count Waldheim sat solitary at a table in the large dining-hall, a cup of coffee before him, reading a newspaper. He had remained there solely to redeem his promise to Bertram. "You have sorely tried my patience," he grumbled, when the man he had been waiting for at last appeared. "I have been bored here for more than an hour."

"You will forgive me I know, my dear Count, when you learn that the hour has brought me the fulfilment of my dearest hopes. You are the first to learn from me the intelligence of my betrothal to Fräulein Eva Schommer!"

"Ah--I give you joy!"

The wish did not sound quite cordial, preceded as it was by a long-drawn-out 'ah,' not at all flattering in emphasis; but Bertram took no notice of this. He knew Waldheim's opinion of the connection, and he refrained from saying anything to induce a further expression of it.

"I am a fortunate man," he continued; "and to you, to your friendship, I owe my good fortune. Everything has happened as I had anticipated it would. After your speaking, according to your promise, to Balthasar, Eva sent for me. I should never have dared to declare myself to her if she had maintained her former cold reserve, but in this interview her pride gave way,--her heart betrayed itself. Her agitation, her maidenly terror, lent me courage. I confessed my love for her; she did not reject it, and thus I may thank you for my present happiness."

"You do not owe it to me, but to your own skilful play," the Count replied. "I only hope you will be as content in the end as you are at present; that you will not find Herr von Heydeck's friend waiting for you at your rooms."

"No fear of that; but indeed, to speak frankly, I am now extremely sorry for my attack upon Heydeck. I wish I could recall it."

"What! when it has been the means of your betrothal?"

"Yes, in spite of that, for I cannot but feel that I have done very wrong. I have attacked a man who possesses no means of defence. I thought Heydeck a coward, and was content to insult him, but I have learned better. He will not challenge me; he will bear my insult unavenged; not from cowardice, but because his principles forbid his fighting a duel, and he will sooner endure any disgrace than be false to them."

"Impossible! you are dreaming!"

"No, I am sure of what I say,--sure. If you doubt it ask Heydeck's best friend, Herr von Herwarth, who will confirm my words."

"Did Herr von Herwarth give you this extraordinary piece of intelligence?"

"No; I learned it from another source quite as trustworthy. I am not at liberty to say more with regard to it, but I am in a most embarrassing position. I have mortally insulted a man whose principles forbid his avenging the insult, which will consequently ruin his future career. He will be forced to leave the service in disgrace, and he has no fortune. In spite of his strange ideas Heydeck is an excellent officer. I cannot reconcile it to my conscience that I have been the means of driving so good an officer from the army. Advise me, my dear Count, what to do in this case."

Count Waldheim listened with increasing surprise to Bertram's words. "I advise you?" he replied. "I am utterly confused by the contradictory statements you make. Heydeck is an excellent officer and no coward, and yet his principles require him to prefer disgrace to duelling. This is incredible--a contradiction in terms. And then your sudden regret, this tender consideration for the man whom, saving your presence, you wilfully and grossly insulted to serve your own purpose. I cannot understand you nor advise you."

"I feared so, for unfortunately the whole matter is so strange that my regret must seem incomprehensible. Who can advise me if you, who saw the whole affair, cannot? I cannot be the ruin of this unfortunate man. He is capable of putting a bullet through his brains in his despair, and if by my fault he should do so I never should forgive myself. If you will not and cannot advise me, I must follow the dictates of my conscience. I must retract my offensive expressions to Heydeck in the presence of witnesses and ask his pardon."

"This then is what you wished to lead up to by the extraordinary story you have been telling me, Herr von Bertram," the Count said, with undisguised contempt in voice and look. He arose and buckled the belt of his sabre. "Do what you think best, or, as you are pleased to express it, 'follow the dictates of your conscience,' but pray do not require me or your other comrades to believe that Herr von Heydeck's unerring aim with a pistol has no share in your magnanimous resolve!"

Casting a last contemptuous glance at Bertram, the Count was about to leave him, but the dragoon detained him. "You must not leave me thus, Count Waldheim," he said, "with a suspicion in your mind of my courage and integrity. The disgraceful doubt which you have expressed gives me a claim upon your honour to see that justice is done me. I now request you to see Herr von Heydeck and learn from his own lips the confirmation of what I told you. If he announces his intention of calling me out for insulting him, I entirely resign all thought of begging his pardon. I shall gladly accept his challenge, and rely upon the fulfilment of your promise to act as my second. If, on the other hand, he confirms what I told you, and will not send me a challenge because his principles will not allow of his doing so, you will tell him from me that I shall await him at Büchner's to retract my words in the presence of witnesses. Only by fulfilling this my request, Count Waldheim, can you atone for the shameful suspicion which you have expressed of an old friend and comrade."

Bertram had his voice and countenance under perfect control, and was moreover, as we have said, an excellent actor. His simulated indignation would have deceived a much keener observer than honest Count Waldheim, and it produced the effect he had intended. Waldheim felt ashamed of his hasty judgment; he acknowledged that he had sinned against friendship for a comrade, and, in his regret for having done so, he consented to do as Bertram requested, which in any other case he would hardly have done. He promised to find Heydeck, and either to bring him to Büchner's or to return to Bertram with the intelligence that he might expect a challenge.

With a pressure of the hand, which the Count returned but half cordially, Bertram bade him farewell, and took a long and roundabout way to Büchner's, where the momentous interview was to take place.

When he reached the restaurant most of the tables beneath the awning were already occupied by the officers of the various regiments in garrison at K----. Many of those present had been witnesses of the morning's occurrence, and all were perfectly informed of what had taken place. The affair had made a great stir among the corps of officers, as Bertram could plainly see by the gloomy looks with which he was regarded by his comrades, some of whom took evident pains to avoid seeing him, that they might not be forced to return his salute.

His self-satisfied mood was somewhat impaired by the annoyance that the evident avoidance of his comrades caused him. He would have liked to turn away and leave the restaurant, but he had promised to wait for Count Waldheim and Heydeck. He looked round to find a seat. If any table had been quite unoccupied he would have seated himself at it; but there was not one such to be found,--a few single seats were empty, and towards one of these he made his way. It was at a corner table, and two of the officers of his own regiment, and his personal acquaintances, were already seated at it.

He approached, and, nodding with his usual easy familiarity, he asked, without noticing the icy acknowledgment of his greeting,--

"Is this chair taken?"

"No," was the reply, "nor the table either; we are just going." And the two men arose and with a brief salutation left the table, although their coffee-cups were scarcely half emptied. That they left simply to avoid Bertram's society was evident, since they stopped near another table, and, entering into conversation with some acquaintances, ordered a waiter to bring chairs. Thus they did not leave the place, but took their seats at another table.

Bertram bit his lips in a rage, but he was powerless to resent the silent contempt of his comrades. He could not demand satisfaction for cold glances and slighting acknowledgments of his salute. He was excessively uncomfortable among these men whom he had been wont to call his friends, but who avoided him as they would not have done had they been strangers. The minutes passed on leaden wings; he cast many an expectant glance towards the promenade outside, but full half an hour elapsed before Count Waldheim appeared--alone. The Count's humour was apparently none of the best: his brow was dark. He came up to the table at which Bertram was sitting, but did not take the chair which the dragoon pushed forward for him. As he stood beside it he said,--

"I did not find Herr von Heydeck at home; his servant told me that he had gone out just before, in plain clothes; whither he could not say, nor did he know when his master would return. From there I went to Herr von Herwarth, whom I found at home, and I asked him frankly if he knew anything of Heydeck's intentions with regard to your affair."

"Well? He must have confirmed what I told you."

"He did and he did not. At first he seemed unwilling to speak out. He believed Herr von

Heydeck had not as yet made up his mind. He displayed a certain hesitation, a reserve, which I only overcame by extreme frankness. I asked him directly whether it were true that Herr von Heydeck was opposed to duelling from principle, and he admitted that it was so, but expressed the hope that in this case his friend would prove false to his principles and comply with the law of honour. I thought myself justified after this in telling him exactly what had passed between us, and it was well that I did so, for Herr von Herwarth is a man of honour, and quite agrees with me that this matter can be honourably adjusted only by a duel. He promised to find Herr von Heydeck, and to use all his influence with him to induce him to repudiate his extraordinary principles, and only in case he should prove unsuccessful is he to tell him that he will find you here, prepared to make him full reparation. I hope I have acted according to your wishes, Herr von Bertram."

This was not precisely the case, but Bertram dared not confess that the insistence upon the duel was not at all according to his wishes, and he thanked Waldheim warmly for his services.

While engaged in conversation with the Count, he had not noticed that there had suddenly arisen an unwonted stir among the military men assembled at Büchner's. All eyes were turned towards an aged officer, who had just appeared beneath the awning. He was standing at the entrance, leaning on a stout bamboo cane, scanning the assemblage; his grave stern glance passed from table to table, apparently seeking some one whom he could not readily distinguish among the numbers of officers present.

"Gentlemen, does either of you know First Lieutenant von Bertram?" the old man asked of two young infantry officers, who were seated at a table playing dominoes.

Before either could reply, Paul Delmar, who had appeared beneath the awning simultaneously with the old man, answered, "Do you wish to speak to Herr von Bertram, colonel? Yonder he sits beneath the awning, but in the farthest corner. Count Waldheim is standing beside him."

"My old eyes are not worth much," growled the colonel. "Sir, I thank you. Your face is familiar to me, but just at present I cannot recall your name; my memory leaves me in the lurch. 'Tis the curse of old age; my senses fail me, and even my memory forsakes me."

"It is many years, colonel, since I had the honour of seeing you, and I may well be changed since then. I went to school with your son, and as his friend used to be continually at your house. My name is Paul Delmar."

"Ah, little Paul, son of the wealthy banker. It is indeed long since I saw you last. And you know Herr von Bertram?"

"I do, colonel."

"Then do me the favour to conduct me to him and introduce me. I have something to say to the gentleman, and I know him but slightly, or rather not at all. Will you oblige me?"

"Certainly, colonel; this way, if you please."

Delmar led the way, the colonel following slowly. Every step evidently caused the old man pain, but he mastered it and walked on, leaning heavily on his cane, and saluted respectfully on all sides by the younger officers, who looked after him with unfeigned sympathy.

When he reached the table at which Bertram was sitting, Delmar said, by way of introduction, "Herr Premier Lieutenant von Bertram, Colonel von Heydeck."

Bertram sprang up and suddenly became very pale at sight of the old officer, whose approach he had not noticed. A grim smile hovered upon the old man's lips as he remarked the impression he produced; his tall, slightly bent figure straightened itself proudly as he gazed scornfully at the dragoon, whose glance could not meet the eyes so bent upon him.

"I have asked for an introduction, Herr von Bertram," said the colonel, in a loud voice that was distinctly heard everywhere beneath the awning, "that I might call you to account for a scoundrelly----"

"Stay, colonel! You must not go on!" Paul Delmar interrupted the old man at this point.

"Sir, by what earthly right?" the colonel burst out, angrily.

"I appeal to your honour, colonel. I am firmly convinced that it is an unalterable axiom of yours that no man of honour can fight with a scoundrel whose word is worthless, and it is one of my axioms that no man of honour has the right to quarrel with a scoundrel with whom he cannot fight. Herr von Bertram is no opponent for you. You can no more fight with Herr von Bertram than can any words spoken by him insult your son; and, besides, there shall be not the smallest provocation for your challenge, inasmuch as the gentleman will instantly declare before all present that he recalls every offensive word addressed to your son this morning, and that he humbly begs pardon for having uttered them."

Paul's words produced a truly magical effect. Bertram upon whom all eyes were fixed, stood,

with downcast looks, like a condemned criminal incapable of any reply, the consciousness of guilt so manifest in his countenance that even the unsuspecting Count Waldheim was disgusted with his friend's cowardice, and stepped back leaving him standing alone.

The colonel was thunderstruck. That a civilian should dare to treat an officer thus in a public place transcended his power of belief; his amazement deprived him of utterance. He looked from Bertram to Delmar. What to think of it all he did not know. But one thing was perfectly clear,--that Herr von Bertram must be a scoundrel, with whom no man of honour could condescend to fight.

Delmar allowed several seconds to pass to give the old officer time to collect himself, and then continued: "Let me beg, colonel, that you will allow me to say several words to Herr von Bertram in private, after which you shall receive from him any satisfaction you may desire. Herr von Bertram, have the kindness to step into this empty room with me. You cannot but desire that what I have to say should be said in private. Go first, if you please."

Paul motioned towards the glass door of a room frequented by Büchner's guests in winter or in rainy weather. Bertram entered it, and Delmar followed him. They were quite alone in the large, empty room, and could speak in low tones without being overheard, although a hundred eyes were watching them through the wide folding-doors and open windows.

"You have heard what I require of you, Herr von Bertram," Delmar began the short interview. "I advise you to comply immediately, or you will force me to produce a certain worthless note, in which you promise to pay upon your word of honour, and to prove that you have broken that word by showing a certain check, bearing the signature of Count Waldheim, which I should like to have him verify."

"What have I done, Delmar, to provoke you to treat a friend with such cruelty?" Bertram asked, in despair.

"Do not profane the word *friend*," Delmar replied, sternly. "I never honoured you with my friendship, as you well know. I never concealed my contempt for you. I bought you with my money. It amused me for a while to be introduced to certain exclusive aristocratic circles which were closed to me in spite of my wealth. I made use of you for this purpose. When you presented me everywhere as your dearest friend, you knew perfectly well why you did so. I never said one word to you that could justify you in calling me your friend. But of what use are these explanations? They are entirely unnecessary between us. I ask now, are you willing to make the humble--I repeat the word--humble apology which I require, outside, beneath the awning? Decide quickly. I can give you no more time."

"If I do so, will you promise me to show no one my note and the check?"

"I will promise you nothing, except that in the case of your refusing to comply with my demand I will show both publicly."

"But by so doing you will destroy all chance of my ever paying you. You will lose ten thousand thalers."

"Which you never will pay in any case while you live!" Delmar replied, with a smile of contempt.

"Which I certainly will pay, and that shortly. I have been betrothed to-day to Eva Schommer."

"Indeed? I congratulate you. I never had an exalted opinion of the lady, but I should not have thought she would have chosen exactly such a husband."

"You see now that I can pay my debt as soon as I am married to the heiress, but if you ruin me---"

"You will be sent to jail as a forger, and will never refund the money which I once foolishly lent you and which I considered lost long ago. True, but that is a matter of entire indifference to me. I require you to obey me! Make up your mind! Do you hesitate? Well then your fate is decided!"

Delmar turned towards the door, but Bertram seized his hand, and cried in a tone of entreaty, "Have pity upon me! Do not ruin me! I will do what you ask,--only let me make the apology in a less humiliating form!"

"Not a word shall be changed. I insist upon a humble apology!"

"I will make it, but let me add that my betrothed has requested me to do so publicly."

Delmar laughed aloud. "A request as modest as it is extraordinary. For the sake of its oddity I will grant it."

Bertram's face, as he returned beneath the awning, followed by Delmar, was ashy pale, and there was a strange flutter in his eyes, but his demeanour was calm and composed. He stepped up to Colonel von Heydeck, who was awaiting his return with the utmost impatience.

"Colonel von Heydeck," he began in a low voice.

"Louder," said Delmar.

Bertram obeyed; he raised his voice so that it could be heard by most of those present. "It is my duty as a man of honour, Colonel von Heydeck, to atone for a wrong committed in my haste this morning, and this is the more incumbent upon me, as I have been earnestly entreated by my betrothed, Fräulein Eva Schommer, to do so."

A murmur was heard among the officers present. "Betrothed to the lovely Eva Schommer! Impossible! Scandalous! Poor girl!" These and similar expressions were uttered so loudly that for a moment they interrupted what Bertram had to say, but when curiosity had got the better of surprise, he continued: "This morning I grossly insulted your son in this place; I herewith retract the offensive expressions I then made use of, and publicly beg his forgiveness."

"Humbly!" Delmar interrupted him.

"And humbly beg your son's pardon," Bertram obediently repeated.

"Disgraceful! Infamous! Shameless! The fellow must leave the service!" Such exclamations were heard on all sides, no longer muttered in low tones but spoken aloud in disregard as to whether or not they were overheard by Bertram. The officers retreated from about their late comrade as from some plague-stricken wretch whose vicinity was contagion, and Bertram, with Paul Delmar and the old colonel, was left standing in the centre of a wide circle.

"Are you entirely satisfied, colonel?" Paul whispered to the old man.

"You were right, the fellow could insult neither my son nor myself," the colonel replied, not deigning another glance at the lieutenant. "Come, my young friend, give me your arm, I need some support, and I may well look to you for it, for you have just done me a most important service. I should like to thank you, but not here with these hundred eyes upon us. Let us go outside and walk a while beneath the lindens."

And leaning on Delmar's arm, the colonel hobbled towards the entrance, the young officers saluting him respectfully as they made way for him to pass.

Thus Bertram was left alone, shunned by every officer and stared at by every civilian present. He felt that his fate was sealed, but he would nevertheless make one more struggle against it. His last hope was in Count Waldheim, who was standing at a little distance in conversation with two other dragoons. Bertram approached him, and the Count did not retreat, but with a haughty air awaited the address of his former friend.

This was a good sign. He was not too angry then to be appeased. Bertram relied upon his smooth words, which had so often imposed upon the Count's guileless good nature,—he summoned all his impudence to his aid, and succeeded in assuming an air of entire nonchalance as he said, turning to Waldheim, "That was a hard duty to fulfil. Come, my dear Count, let us go to Herr von Herwarth that he may confirm what I know to be true. The fulfilment of my intention of which you were informed and of which you approved, has been hastened by the appearance of the old colonel, for my conscience would never have allowed me to quarrel with one so aged and so honourable. I should----"

"I beg you, sir, to spare me any further remarks," Waldheim said, interrupting the flow of Bertram's speech; "I forbid you ever to address me again. I awaited your approach solely for the purpose of saying this to you. I should else have followed the example of my comrades and turned my back upon you with contempt."

"Count Waldheim, you shall answer to me for this. I demand satisfaction----"

"You have lost all right this day to demand satisfaction of any gentleman; the only weapon I should use upon you is a horse-whip."

The Count spoke so loud that his words were heard by all the by-standers. "Bravo!" they exclaimed, while Bertram, trembling with rage, half drew, his sabre from its sheath. His brother officers, however, closed in a group around Count Waldheim, as if to shield him from attack.

Bertram stood alone. He might have had the courage to reply to Waldheim's mortal insult by a cut with his sabre; but he could not brave such numbers of antagonists. With an oath, he dashed the sabre back into its scabbard, cast a glance of deadly hatred about him, and strode away. Behind him he heard scornful laughter and loud expressions of contempt, but he did not venture to heed them or to look back.

CHAPTER VII.

In the heart of the Tyrol, where the Rothwalderbach and Schwarzenbach unite to form the waters of the Tausenser Aar, lies the village of Tausens; it is the centre of the most retired portion of the Tyrolean highlands.

In former years, before there was any railway near, scarcely a single stranger ever visited Tausens, although the village is only about four leagues distant from the nearest town, which is reached by a very good high-road. Since this town, however, has been provided with a railway station the village is somewhat more frequented, although even now its visitors are still confined to a few stout Alpine explorers, who pass through Tausens to wander up the Schwarzenbach valley and find a path over the lofty Schiechjoch to the Zillerthal, or who seek the Tauern mountain group by the way of the Rothwald valley.

The inhabitants of the valleys look after such pedestrians with a smile,—they cannot imagine what these fellows, with their long mountain-staffs and ice-picks, their knapsacks on their backs, and their hob-nailed shoes, according so ill with their city costume, can want among the mountains. That these people from the city should undertake such difficult and wearisome expeditions for pleasure, that they should at peril of their lives ascend the most inaccessible mountain-peaks to find a passage to a place which they could otherwise reach much more quickly and easily, seems to these honest countryfolk so silly that they have but one explanation for it, doubtless a harmless insanity; and they call these restless, indefatigable climbers of glaciers and snow-peaks, Bergfaxes (mountain fools). They are very fond of the Bergfaxes nevertheless, for they always need guides and carriers for their mountain expeditions, and are willing enough to pay their guilders for service rendered, thus bringing some cash at least into the retired valleys.

With the exception of the Bergfaxes, who sometimes take up their abode in Tausens for a few days to make the ascent of the Drei Maidelspitz or the Weisshorn from the Schwarzbachthal, or of the Spitzhorn from the Rothwalden, and who finally depart for the Zillerthal over the Schiechjoch, scarcely a traveller ever visits Tausens, although its magnificent situation makes it well worthy of a sojourn.

The view from the platform in front of the inn, which is also the post-office, is magnificent, and enchantingly lovely. Towards the south the eye revels for leagues in the broad green fertile valley of the Tausenser Aar, lying between two fir-clad mountain-ranges, and closed in in the far distance by the jagged and rocky peaks of the Dolomites. To the northeast lie the beautiful forests of the Rothwald, with the snowy pile of the Spitzhorn for a background, and to the northwest the two glorious glaciers of the Maidelspitz and the Weisshorn.

In this wondrously lovely country the ancient castle of Reifenstein is a most striking object, commanding as it does the entire panorama of mountain, river, and valley. The glorious old pile is still in tolerable repair,—a careful hand has stayed the ravages of time, which have buried in ruins so many of its contemporaries. Some of the old walls are crumbling, it is true, but the main structure is in thorough repair, and two huge round towers are propped from decay by a modern substructure. Although in the interior these towers are so ruinous that their summits are inaccessible, their massive masonry defies the tempests that rage against them from the south and northeast, and will still for coming centuries bear witness to the despotic sway once exercised over the three valleys by the lords of Reifenstein.

The reason why, in spite of the great beauty of the view from Tausens, to which Castle Reifenstein adds its charm, so few travellers in comparison visit the village, is partly that such comfort can hardly be expected here as is to be found in the more frequented parts of the Tyrol, and partly that the passage of the Tausenser Aar valley is rather tedious, and tourists prefer to reach the chief points of interest among the mountains by railway. All the more welcome are the few who visit Tausens, all the more cordially are they received by mine host the postmaster.

It was always a holiday for Hansel, as he was called by his friends in spite of his dignified position as postmaster, when a traveller came to Tausens; not because he reckoned upon the gain it would bring him,—he cared little for that, for the couple or so of guilders were of but small account to him. His inn was frequented sufficiently without the tourists; its comfortable room was never empty of guests, for the peasants from all the three valleys came by choice to the Post at Tausens, where the best wine was to be had for miles around. Their marriages and their burials were celebrated at the Post. To the Post came every evening, in winter as in summer, the gentlemen of the place,—the district judge, his associate, the collector, and the forester. These constant guests were far more profitable to the postmaster than any traveller could be, and besides he possessed many an acre of meadow and pasture-land, a good strip of forest, and some beautiful alms.^[1] He was accounted a wealthy man in all the country round, but his pride was hurt that so few strangers came to Tausens, while in the Zillerthal and in the Pusterthal the inns were filled to overflowing with tourists during the months of July and August. This vexed the worthy Hansel; he had so often heard the judge and the other gentlemen in his best parlour say that the natural beauty of Tausens made it well worthy to attract strangers, and hence the small number of tourists that came his way seemed to him like an unmerited neglect of his native place. The idea that he could conduce to render the village more attractive never occurred to

him. He would have indignantly rejected any suggestion that he should modify or change the ancient customs of his inn for any stranger in the world.

He was standing at his inn-door on a certain beautiful day in July very much out of sorts. The day before he had been in Niederdorf, where he had found the inns so crowded that not another traveller could be received there, and a very grand gentleman had been forced to sleep in a hayloft, because there was no bed to be had. And he had heard that the inns at Sandro, Schleuderbach, and Cortina were just as full, not to mention Brunneck, where for a week every little farm-house had been filled with tourists.

The whole valley of the Puster was filled with visitors, and not a single one, not even a Bergfax, had come to Tausens! Thoroughly vexed. Hansel blew the smoke from his pipe in short angry puffs; he swept the landscape far and wide with his glance, but it was deserted everywhere, not a traveller was to be seen.

He turned away in disgust, and was about to enter the house, when suddenly the frown cleared away from his brow. He had accidentally overlooked the Schwarzenbach valley, thence, where he had least expected them, were coming the desired guests; his sharp eye recognized them in the distance. From his point of view he could see but a short stretch of the valley-road which followed the many windings of the rushing, gurgling Schwarzenbach, but walking along this very stretch he discovered three city-clad gentlemen, followed by two peasants. The gentlemen carried long alpenstocks, and were walking briskly down the valley towards the village,--the peasants were loaded with portmanteaus and plaids.

From the point which the travellers had reached they had a glorious view of the valley of the Tausenser Aar and of the village. They paused, and one produced a glass and looked through it. For a while they stood drinking in the beauty around them, and then they strode onwards, vanishing in the Lerchenwald, through which the road ran.

But Hansel had seen enough; he rubbed his hands gleefully, and called loudly into the house, "Nanner! Nanner!"

The inn-maid, a fresh, buxom lass, came running at his call. From the tone of his voice she judged that strangers were to be received, and she gave her smooth hair a stroke and twitched down her blue apron as she ran. When however she found no one but Hansel himself, she said, peevishly, "Here I am. What are you shouting for? There's no one here!"

"But they're coming,--three Bergfaxes on the way from Schwarzenbach,--they'll be here in a quarter of an hour!"

And true enough, they did come in a quarter of an hour, the three Bergfaxes,--three broad-shouldered young men, whose city clothes, terribly dusty although it was, showed that they were gentlemen of good position.

Hansel called out a lusty "God greet ye!" as they appeared, and offered his hand heartily to each in turn in sign of welcome. The one with a black beard shook it with great cordiality, and regarded the postmaster with a friendly smile. "Hail, beloved son of the Alps!" he said, with mock pathos. "Receive us weary wanderers beneath your hospitable roof; strengthen our famished and thirsty frames with food and drink. By Jove the eternal, I am so rejoiced to get out of that dark wood and to see your good, stupid face, that I could kiss it but for the stifling tobacco-smoke."

"Do hush your nonsense, Paul!" one of his companions entreated him.

But the one addressed as Paul exclaimed, "Who dares talk of nonsense when I give vent to my pent-up emotion in a poetic greeting? Be not annoyed, oh worthy son of the Alps, by the words of this prosaic person,--he cannot help it,--there is no poetry in his soul. And would you earn from me a gratitude that shall endure till time is no more, bring us wine,--a great deal of wine,--good wine,--the best in your cellar!"

Hansel understood very little of this address, the northern German dialect was unfamiliar to his ears; but he comprehended distinctly that the black-bearded stranger was a little crazy, and very thirsty, as was to be expected of Bergfaxes.

"A bottle of the best red," he called out to Nannerl, while he relieved the three strangers of their alpenstocks and conducted them into the spacious best room.

Here the black-bearded stranger looked about him with a sharp scrutinizing glance. "Bravo!" he cried. "I like this. Here let us pitch our tents! Everything clean and shining! Not a speck of dust on the window-panes, nor a spot upon the table. If the meat and drink are good one might stay here for a while very contentedly. What think you, Herwarth?"

"I think," replied the man addressed, "that I shall surely stay some time here, even although the meat and drink are not all that could be desired."

"You see, Leo, of what sacrifices a true friend to whom egotism is unknown is capable. Noble Knight von Herwarth, I bow myself in the dust before you; it is truly great thus to remain at hand at the service of your friend, resigning yourself to devour daily the toughest beef that the

Tyrolean cow can afford. You are sublime in your self-renunciation. You have plunged with genuine heroism into all the perils that await the respectable northern German from Tyrolean cooking, and you even eat Leo's portion in addition to your own, lest the poor fellow should overload his stomach, which, sunk in melancholy as he is at present, might be injurious for him. Your efforts are Titanic. I daily bless the lucky star (I mean the golden one at Innsbruck) which brought us together. I bless it in spite of the gnats there which kept me awake all night."

"Considering that he did not sleep, poor Delmar snored very loudly. What do you think, Leo?"

"I thought he did very well----"

"Very well; that is not the right word," Herwarth cried. "Delmar snored wonderfully. There is no discord, from the thunderous groan of a heavy wagon to the shrill creaking of a rusty lock, that he did not produce. He is a master of the art. I snore pretty well after a commonplace fashion, but I bow before you, Delmar."

"'Tis a base calumny. I never snore; you heard yourself in your dreams. I could not sleep for the gnats, and for admiration of the heroism with which you have followed your friend into exile. I admire you, and I long to resemble you, but unfortunately I am made of too coarse a material. I cannot waft myself aloft to the empyreal heights of your magnanimity. Now you are determined to remain in this inn even if the cooking is bad!"

"Are you not going to stay here too?"

"I shall probably stay, not for Leo's sake, but because I like it. I am determined, in the lack of all other suitable occupation, to devote myself in future to novel-writing. I can certainly emulate in that line the many crazy women and hungry literati who fill our magazines with their intellectual abortions. Leo is to be the hero of my first romance."

"How flattering! Much obliged, I am sure."

"Not at all, not at all! A hero of romance must always be very high-toned, very exaggerated, and a little unsound in mind. You see how well it all fits. An unhappy love is desirable, but not indispensable. Also we must have a faithful friend. Here are two. Also a romantic situation. We have it. Leo ought to marry the daughter of a wealthy old uncle, but he hates the lovely Hilda, and is consumed by a secret passion for a little milliner's apprentice. Here we have the unhappy love. He is in deep despair, when his redeeming angel appears in the person of his faithful friend Kuno von Herwarth. Whilst Leo is suffering all the pangs of his unhappy love, and working away in the castle upon the mountains, Kuno, in a noble spirit of self-sacrifice, has been eating veal three times a day at the 'Post' in Tausens and drinking sour Tyrolean wine. He rushes to the castle to rescue his friend. He sees Hilda. He loves her; she loves him. He threatens to murder the wealthy old uncle if he does not release his friend. A terrible scene ensues. But he does not murder him: he overcomes him by his amiable conduct. Final tableau: the old uncle blessing Hilda and Kuno, while friend No. 2 joins the hands of Leo and his little milliner. Universal emotion and general content. End.

"There you have a romance as poetic as it is thrilling, especially if a few episodes are sprinkled about here and there, such as, for example, a small murder in the torture-chamber of Castle Reifenstein, and a combat with foils between Hilda and the little milliner, who has secretly followed her Leo and has gone mad with jealousy. Of course Kuno separates the combatants. What a scene that will make! I tell you the romance will produce a sensation. Now I am going to stay here to study up for this novel; not upon Leo's account. I yield the privilege of self-sacrifice to you, oh noble Knight von Herwarth, and cleave to my long-tried selfishness."

Leo and Kuno laughed, but were spared the necessity of a reply to Paul's long exordium by the entrance of the pretty maid-servant with the wine. "Will the gentlemen have anything to eat?" she asked.

"Indeed they will, Maidele" (Tyrolean for Marie); "they are as hungry as wolves," Delmar replied.

"Maidele?" the girl asked, in surprise. "And suppose I am not Maidele?"

"Why, then, you must be Nannerl?"

"Yes, I am Nannerl; but how could the gentleman know my name?"

"A little bird whispered it to me on the Schiechpass, of course; how else should I have known it? But never trouble your head about that, my pretty Nannerl, but tell us what you can give us to eat."

"Veal steaks, veal cutlets, veal chops, roast veal, and stewed veal."

"For heaven's sake stop! For one whole week I have heard, morning, noon, and night, nothing but that fearful word *veal*, nothing but veal. I cannot understand how there can be an ox or a cow in the Tyrol. Ah, my poor Herwarth, my prophecy is about to be fulfilled: 'veal three times a day.' If there is a feeling heart in your bosom, pretty Nannerl, try to save me from veal for to-day at

least."

Nannerl would have been very glad to do so, for she was much pleased with the stranger gentleman, but she could not, for, as she now explained, there was no beef to-day, and the chickens were all too young to kill. By night she could get a pair of larger ones from the castle, and the next day they could have plenty of beef; but for dinner to-day they must have veal, since the fisherman had happened to bring no trout; but Nannerl promised to give the gentlemen an excellent soup and capital fritters, and thus Paul's comical despair was allayed, the very good wine having already produced a soothing effect.

"You confuse these people with your nonsense, Paul," Leo said, when Nannerl had left the room.

"Not a bit of it; I shall get on with these worthy souls excellently well; they think me harmlessly insane, and they like it. Our noble Knight von Herwarth thinks the same of me, but I shall convince him that I can be very serious, and that immediately. We must now plan our campaign, for after the soup is on the table I refuse to open my mouth except to eat."

"What have you in your head now?"

"I am composing the introduction to my romance. After a week of wandering, after climbing the terrible Schiechpass, over rocks and glaciers, we are at last arrived in Tausens. We find ourselves at the foot of the rock that bears upon its summit the enchanted castle Reifenstein. High above us sits enthroned the old monster Uncle Heydeck and the wicked fairy Hilda, who intends to ensnare our Leo in her golden enchanted net; but we two, the Knight von Herwarth and the simple squire Delmar, must rescue our friend, our first duty being to learn how the land lies, so to speak. At present we know nothing of the old monster and the wicked fairy Hilda, for the little told us in the famous letter from Uncle Heydeck has, since it comes from himself, no claim to be believed. Before we can do anything we must know more of Uncle Heydeck: what he is thought of here, how he lives, what he does. We must know further what kind of a person is the blue-eyed Hilda who is to ensnare our Leo. A blue-eyed Hilda may be either pretty or confoundedly ugly, a good-natured fool or a dragon. The honest postmaster, mine host of this hospitable house, will doubtless tell us all we wish to know upon these points. And here I am ready to sacrifice myself to friendship. I will inhale the highly unfragrant smoke of the postmaster's pipe, I will treat the worthy man with the loftiest courtesy, and in spite of his shooting-jacket, short stockings, and bare knees, always entitle him Herr Postmaster, that I may learn what he has to tell. I will drink with him, lead him on to be confidential, and he shall reveal all that he knows of Uncle Heydeck and the blue-eyed Hilda. Thus we shall become familiar with the people. We will investigate the country when, being strengthened by our dinner, we conduct our friend Leo to the gate of the enchanted castle, where of course we must separate. He will take up his abode within its walls, while we, the Knight Kuno and myself, will remain here in Tausens ready to hasten to his aid so soon as he needs us. He will daily visit us here, and if possible present us to the old monster and the blue-eyed Hilda, that we may in turn visit him at the castle. This is a brief sketch of my plan of our campaign, the details must be left to the future. If any one has anything to say in objection let him speak now, or for ever after hold his peace. You first, Kuno, my noble knight; what do you think of my plan?"

"I do not see what else we can do."

"And you, Leo?"

"I agree in everything but the last part. I hope my uncle will not suffer my friends to remain down here in the inn. He will certainly invite you to stay at the castle."

"Don't reckon upon that too surely; I doubt very much whether he possesses the virtue of hospitality or indeed any virtue at all. Even should he do so, I shall not accept his invitation. I wish to be entirely free and unfettered, and am determined to live on veal sooner than stay at the castle. What do you think about it, Herwarth?"

"I agree with you. We will stay here at the Post and engage rooms, that Leo may be free to stay with us when we make excursions together among the mountains."

"Agreed; the rooms are a decided improvement upon my plan. Then it is all settled, and 'tis fortunate, for here comes the soup."

While the three strangers had been talking together in the inn parlour the postmaster had been having a gossip with the two peasants from the Zillerthal who had been their guides across the Schiechjoch. It was just such a gossip as he enjoyed.

The men, who were in the habit of seeing many strangers and of continually acting as guides across the glaciers and in difficult ascents, maintained that of all the Bergfaxes they had ever seen the gentleman with the black beard and the sallow face was the biggest fool. They had been with him and his companions four days, and he had some fresh nonsense for every hour in the day. But he had *nous* enough for all that, and he was always first in all the steepest paths. He didn't care where they walked: ice or rocks were all the same to him; he was never dizzy, and never tired either. Day before yesterday, when they went up the Drei Maidelspitz, they had had such a snow-storm that the guides themselves had been almost frozen, but neither of the three

gentlemen had uttered a word of complaint, and the black-bearded one had laughed and sung and thought it all right, and the whole expedition a capital joke.

He was teasing the others all the time, especially the youngest, whom he called 'Knight;' but he didn't mind it, he only laughed, and all three were the best possible friends. The youngest was a merry gentleman and joked a good deal, but he was not such a fool as the black-beard. The third gentleman, whom they called Leo, was the most sensible. When he was walking alone he often looked very grave, and even sad, but then Delmar would join him and talk such crazy nonsense that he had to laugh.

All three were first-rate people, but they liked Delmar best; he saw to all the money matters, and was generous as a prince. He was always deceiving the others, and in a very odd way, very different from the usual one; when for example he paid three guilders he would pretend that he had only paid one, and would go on declaring that never in his life had he known travelling so cheap as it was in the Tyrol.

Jackel, the eldest of the guides, had settled with Delmar what he should pay them. He told how he had asked for himself and for Seppel four guilders a day; how Herr Delmar had fallen into a rage and declared that two guilders a day was extortion. The two other gentlemen had reasoned with him, but he had insisted that he was a poor millionaire who could not afford to throw his money away, and that nothing should induce him to pay more than two guilders a day. Jackel had then consulted with Seppel to see whether they should go for two guilders a day, and Herr Delmar had interfered and shouted and stormed and insisted that they should go for two guilders a day whether they wanted to or no, and then he thrust a twenty-guilder note into Jackel's hand and whispered to him to divide it with Seppel, but to say nothing about it to the two other gentlemen but consent to go for two guilders a day, and he would give them something besides. And then he went on screaming and raging as if he were crazy. And when Jackel said he would go for the two guilders, then Herr Delmar boasted to the others that he knew how to manage people so as to travel cheaply, and how would the others get along without him?

And so he had gone on all the four days. He must have as much money as the king. He was a great fool; but he had *nous* enough, and was so kind no one could help liking him.

The postmaster listened to all this with the greatest interest. Especially delighted was he when he heard that the three gentlemen had talked together of staying a long time in Tausens. He instantly called to Nannerl, and told her to prepare the best room in the house,—the large corner room, with the view of the castle and the Weisshorn,—and to make up three beds in it. Such guests were rare in Tausens, and Hansel determined that they should be made as comfortable as possible.

The Zillertalers' account had made him very curious to see more of his odd guests, and especially of Herr Delmar. He was a little afraid of him, but he determined nevertheless to go to the inn parlour and have a gossip with the strangers.

He went at the right time. Delmar had just eaten his last mouthful and was about to light a cigar. The others had also finished their dinner, and that they had enjoyed it the empty dishes bore witness. The wine too, as Hansel saw with satisfaction, had been duly appreciated: the bottle was empty.

Herr Delmar—Hansel knew him at once by his black beard and sallow face—nodded kindly, and pushing another chair up to the table, said, "Sit down, Herr Postmaster. We want to spend some time with you here in Tausens, and would like to hear something about the place. But it's ill talking with dry lips. Let us have another bottle of wine; and I hope you will take a glass with us."

Hansel opened his eyes. Here was Herr Delmar talking very sensibly, and indeed courteously. "Herr Postmaster!" The title was all the dearer to the worthy man since he heard it so seldom. Friends and acquaintances always called him Hansel; the men and maids, as well as the peasants, called him 'Landlord;' but he never, or almost never, was addressed as 'Postmaster,' although he had as good a right to the title as the postmaster at Bozen. Whoever called him thus won his heart immediately, and Herr Delmar had taken it by storm.

It was not often that Hansel served the guests himself. He left that to Nannerl: it was her duty. But to-day he made an exception. He took the bottle from the table, and himself descended to the cellar, where he filled it with his very best. His round face beamed as he brought it to his guests; and when Paul again invited him to sit down and take a glass, he took his place at the table very proud of the honour.

Hansel was in the best of humours; he was ready to do anything in the world for these guests,—a mood of which Delmar was not slow to take advantage. He understood how, by skilful questioning and a remark thrown out now and then, to draw out the postmaster who was fond of talking, in the most thorough manner.

He began by asking about the various points of interest in the surrounding country; about the way to the famous Tausenser waterfalls; about the names and the height of the mountain-peaks that could be seen from the windows; thence he led the conversation to Castle Reifenstein, and of course to its possessor, Herr von Heydeck, and his daughter Hilda; and when it had arrived at

this point all went swimmingly, for this was a theme upon which the worthy Hansel, who had no idea that he was being systematically pumped, could talk by the hour together.

With ready garrulity and in the broadest Tyrolean patois, which had frequently to be explained by him to his North-German questioner, he answered all questions put to him. The Herr who lived in the castle had been for many years an object of curiosity, of admiration, and of superstitious fear to all the country-people about, and to Hansel himself no less than to the rest. They whispered many a queer thing about him and his castle among the peasants in the common room of the inn; and there were terrible ghost-stories told of the old castle. Everything--the whispers and the stories--was faithfully detailed by Hansel. He was in his element, and Delmar's skilful questions and repeated glasses of wine combined to keep him there.

The worthy postmaster's story was no connected narrative, and he often diverged to expatiate upon other themes; but Delmar always managed to bring him back to Castle Reifenstein and Herr von Heydeck, so that the breaks in his account were gradually filled up and the strangers had at last a distinct picture of the life and character of Herr von Heydeck. Only the picture, it is true, which existed in the fantastic brains of Hansel and the Tausens peasantry, and which perhaps resembled but little the original. Truth and fiction, fact, and fable begotten of superstition, were mingled in the postmaster's account in a wonderful mosaic, as was plain to be seen; but nevertheless it possessed the greatest interest for Leo and his friends.

Many many years before, as Hansel related, the old castle had belonged to a Count Menotti, who had leased it to a peasant, for the Count never came to Tausens himself. He lived at Riva on the Lake of Garda, and cared nothing for his Tyrolean estate except to see that the rent was paid punctually; of course his tenant had no interest in preserving the huge pile in good order. Large portions of the gigantic walls fell down from the rocks into the valley below, and one of the three towers which Hansel could remember, as a boy, still standing, crumbled to ruins; but the main building where the tenant lived, and in which he had his barns granaries and cattle-stalls, was still standing. Its massive masonry had defied decay.

Although there were valuable forests meadows and pasturelands belonging to the castle, besides some fertile cultivated fields, the tenant paid only a small rent; and very naturally, for the Count could hardly have found another tenant.

In fine all was not right at the castle; strange things happened there and stranger sights were seen. It was haunted! There were very few old peasants in Tausens who had not, at some time, had a scare 'up there.' From the ruined part could often be heard, far down in the valley, shrieks and groans and wild laughter.

Even by day few of those who lived in the valley willingly went near the dreadful old pile, and by night no one could be induced to go there. Old Stoffel, the tenant, could not persuade either man or maid to sleep there, although he offered them the highest wages and assured them that the ghost would do no good Christian any harm. No one would believe him; and so he and his three sons and his two daughters had to live by themselves in the haunted castle. He had to pay high for day-labourers. In the brightest sunshine no one liked to enter the castle, and the bravest fellow would not have taken any money to go inside either of the great round towers.

Old Stoffel was afraid of these towers himself. Not of the ghosts, he said with a laugh, but of the stones that might fall from their crumbling walls. Still the people in Tausens knew better; they did not believe him; they were sure he had been frightened by the ghost there, and would not confess it for fear of getting no men to work for him.

Old Stoffel was a wild daring fellow who feared neither God nor the devil. Indeed, many people thought he had made a bargain with the Evil One. He never went to church, but frequented the tavern, where he drank up all his gains. He made his children work for him; he never did anything himself, and although he was a very old man, he spent his time in going from tavern to tavern until he died. One morning he was found dead on the road from Tausens to the castle,--his corpse was perfectly blue.

The postmaster remembered well that Dr. Putzer said that the old man had had a stroke, but no one in Tausens believed it, for the doctor was as great a blasphemer and tippler and as bad a Christian then as he is at present. Stoffel's time was up, and the devil had wrung his neck, which was why his corpse was blue,--every Christian knew that.

After the old man's death the Count could find no tenant for the castle, for no one could be found to pay rent for it. Stoffel's sons, although they could work, had not sense enough to know how to manage, and the daughters were not much better. They stayed all together at the castle, however, although Count Menotti never got much rent out of them. He tried to sell the estate, and offered it for almost a nominal price, but who wanted to buy a haunted old nest on a misty mountain in the Tyrol?

A couple of years had passed, when one day, how long since the postmaster could not exactly say, but nearly thirty years he should think, a grand gentleman with his beautiful wife had driven to Tausens. They stopped at the old Oberwieser's, the postmaster's father's,--the inn had not then been named the Post. The stranger was Herr von Heydeck, who had bought the castle of Count Menotti and had come to inspect it.

Hansel was then a young fellow about eighteen years old, and he had been bidden by his father to show the strangers up to the castle. He did not like to do it, but there was no joking with the old Oberwieser, and so he obeyed.

On the way he told Herr von Heydeck and the handsome lady-wife about the ghosts in the castle, and how the devil had wrung old Stoffel's neck when his time was up, and they both laughed,—the lady laughed most. She often paused on the way up and looked around. She thought the country lovely, and when they had reached the summit of the rocks and saw the view from the balcony of the main building of the castle, she was enchanted. The whole castle must be repaired and newly furnished, she said, and then it would be a delightful place to invite one's friends to in summer-time.

In a few days the old place was turned inside out; an architect arrived with numbers of workmen, and they all went to work. They began rebuilding in the middle of May, and by the middle of July everything was finished, and the whole castle splendidly furnished ready for the master and mistress, who were not slow in making their appearance, with quantities of servants and numerous guests, mostly officers. There were but a couple of ladies among them.

And now began such a life in the castle as no one in Tausens had ever seen before; no emperor and empress could have lived more splendidly. Every evening almost all the windows in the old pile blazed with light, and down from the rocks came floating the sounds of revelry and wild dance-music. In the old baronial hall there was singing and playing and dancing and feasting and carousing until deep into the night.

In the mean time nothing was heard of the ghost,—the devil was probably highly content with the goings on, for they were surely far from correct. Why the mistress and the couple of ladies went about in the evenings with their shoulders all bare and never minded the men, but danced and jested with them.

The mistress outdid them all: she was the gayest, and was always friendly and kind to her guests, and to the servants, and even to the country-people, to every one except to her husband; he must have felt very uncomfortable in the splendid castle, and he went alone among the mountains as often as he could.

Madame, too, often made excursions with her guests, to the waterfalls in the Rothwald valley, to the lake on the Frauenalm, and to other beautiful places, but she never went with her husband. She was a capital mountain-climber, but she was always accompanied by one of the other gentlemen, most often of all by Count Menotti, a younger brother of the former possessor of the castle. The Count and madame were always together, so that even the villagers talked about it. Whether they were right in declaring that there was sinful intercourse between the Count and the lady the postmaster did not know: he had never seen anything wrong, but there was plenty of malicious gossip about them, when one day there came to Tausens a travelling merchant, who said he had known madame before her marriage to Herr von Heydeck.

In a gossip over a can of wine he told of how the Count, although a married man, had been madame's lover for a long time, and that she had married Herr von Heydeck because it was the only way in which to avoid public scandal. And certainly all was not right between madame and the Count and Herr von Heydeck, for the latter's face would grow gloomier than ever when he chanced on his walks to meet his wife with Count Menotti. He avoided them as far as he could; accompanied by a guide only, he explored the loneliest parts of the country, and while madame was making merry with her guests he was collecting all kinds of herbs butterflies ugly worms, and even venomous snakes and vipers, which he would bring home to a room he had had arranged for himself in the castle.

This wild life lasted for four weeks, and then every one departed,—leaving however a theme for gossip in Tausens during the whole ensuing winter. Nothing else was talked of in the inn parlour among the gentlemen, or in the common room among the peasants. The postmaster, a young fellow at the time, had to serve the gentlemen who came in the evening to drink their wine at the inn, and he heard all they had to say among themselves. Of all the gentlemen there was only one. Dr. Putzer, who had ever been to the castle while its possessors were there, and he had gone only because one of the ladies had been slightly ill and there was no other physician to be had. Herr von Heydeck had received him very politely, but madame had hardly looked at him, and so he hated her, and had all sorts of bad stories to tell of her.

About a year had passed since the gay doings at the castle, when one day Dr. Putzer brought a piece of news to the gentlemen in the inn parlour that excited them greatly. He had just had a letter from his brother, an advocate in Vienna, and he read it aloud. The Vienna man wrote that madame had died in her confinement, and had left an immense fortune, not to her husband, but to her new-born child. Castle Reifenstein belonged to him now, and Herr von Heydeck was only his son's guardian. After the letter had been read, the gentlemen made many malicious remarks,—the worst came from Dr. Putzer, who in his tipsy mood boasted that if he were Herr von Heydeck he would tie a stone about the little bastard's neck and drown him like a kitten, but Herr von Heydeck had no *nous*. As he had shut his eyes for fear of his wife and Count Menotti, and taken no notice of what all the world knew, so now he would patiently acknowledge the Count's son, and live on as the brat's steward.

About four days after this conversation Herr von Heydeck arrived at Tausens, this time accompanied by no brilliant company or numerous retinue. Only one servant sat beside the coachman on the box of the carriage inside of which was Herr von Heydeck and opposite him a woman with a child carefully wrapped in shawls and blankets; it was the nurse with his dead wife's child.

The Herr only stopped in Tausens long enough to leave word at the inn for Dr. Putzer to come to the castle as soon as possible, and then drove on to Reifenstein. Here he took up his abode in his old room, while the nurse and child lived in another wing of the building. He sent to the farm in the valley for old Stoffel's two daughters. Trine and Lene, and the youngest son, Melcher, the stupidest of all, a perfect blockhead, and they were hired to do all the work of the household.

Henceforth Herr von Heydeck led the life of a hermit in the castle; the only man with whom he had any intercourse in all the country round was tipsy Dr. Putzer, whom he often sent for to visit the child and report to him the state of its health, for the Herr himself never saw it. The nurse was strictly forbidden ever to take it out of the apartments appropriated to her; if she was obliged to leave them herself, she was ordered to leave the child in the cradle and lock the door after her. Except the doctor, nobody in Tausens ever saw the baby; even the servants were not allowed to go into the room where it was.

The nurse was a very proud person; she never condescended to speak a word to any one except the doctor; she was always polite enough to him. They two understood one another extremely well; they would sometimes sit together for hours, while the master was in his room buried in his books. Once Trine saw him kiss her.

One evening--it was in the beginning of the winter--the doctor came to the inn parlour and told the gentlemen who were sitting there over their wine that he had just come from the castle, where matters looked badly; the child was seriously ill. He could not yet say what was the matter with it, but he thought it had the smallpox.

The gentlemen were greatly surprised at this intelligence. There had been one or two cases of smallpox in the neighbouring valleys, but none in Tausens or its immediate vicinity. It seemed impossible that the child should have taken it, living as he did in one part of the castle and seeing no one but his nurse and the doctor. But nevertheless it was the case, for a few days afterwards he proved to have the smallpox in its most malignant form, and within a week he was dead.

He was buried the day he died. The doctor ordered this for fear of contagion. Herr von Heydeck spared no expense. The child had a splendid funeral, and the master paid a lot of money for masses for his soul, besides giving the priest a large sum to distribute among the poor. But for all that he could not stop people's mouths. There were strange tales told in the village. No one spoke out loud; they only whispered among themselves. But one and all, gentlemen as well as peasants, thought that all had not been right at the castle. They did not believe in the smallpox. The child had died some other way, of which the master, who was his heir, would know nothing. That was why no one had been allowed to see the little corpse. This which was whispered at first was soon talked of loudly, and the doctor confirmed the tale, for he married the nurse. The wedding was celebrated scarcely two months after the child's death. The doctor bought the house in Tausens where he still lives with his wife. Where he got the money no one knew, for until the boy died he had more debts than hairs on his head; and when Herr von Heydeck furnished and fitted up the house for the newly-married pair as if a count and countess were going to live there, every one in the village said plainly that the master had good reasons for doing so. He had to show his gratitude to the doctor and his wife, who had made him a wealthy man.

In the inn parlour the matter was thoroughly discussed in the doctor's absence. The forester boldly declared his belief that the doctor had poisoned the poor little boy; but the district judge took him sharply to account for his words. He had no right to accuse the doctor of what would warrant the interference of the law; the gossip of the villagers was unworthy of repetition, and the doctor would be justified in dealing hardly with whoever did repeat it.

After this warning from the judge, which was soon known throughout the village, no one dared to utter a suspicion aloud, but the peasants thought that if a poor labouring man, and not a rich gentleman and a Herr Doctor, had been suspected of such a crime, the district judge would have spoken differently.

Herr von Heydeck was a very wealthy man after the death of the boy, but he altered nothing in his manner of life. He lived just as solitary as before in the old castle, only leaving it for a few weeks in the year to visit the baths, for the sake of his health, the doctor said. Then occurred what surprised every one. Many years had passed since the boy's death, when, just nineteen years ago, Herr von Heydeck returned from one of his summer excursions that had lasted longer than usual; and this time he was not alone. In the carriage beside him sat a lovely young wife, looking like an angel with her blue eyes and golden curls. "The gentlemen can see now how she looked," the postmaster remarked, "for our Fräulein Hilda is very like her."

And the young mistress of Reifenstein was an angel. The village priest acknowledged that, although she was a heretic. No one in the village believed it when the doctor told them so until the Herr Pastor had confirmed it.

At first the people shook their heads and declared that such a thing had never been heard of in the Tyrol,—that a heretic should be mistress of Reifenstein. But the Herr Pastor himself comforted them, and he had good reasons for doing so, for a golden time had come for the poor in Tausens with the new mistress's arrival. Before long the people had forgotten that madame was a heretic. Although she never went to mass or to confession, she used often to go to church to listen to the sermon, and no one there could be more devout than she.

She never was haughty to any one, but had a kind word for the poorest. The only people she could not endure were the doctor and his wife. She made the first visit herself to the wife of the district judge, and begged her to come often to the castle, but although the doctor's wife went up to the castle the day after the bride arrived there, Madame von Heydeck could not have liked the former nurse from the first, for she never asked her to repeat her visit; and never as long as she lived did she set foot beneath the doctor's roof. She could not endure the doctor himself either. She told the judge's wife that she was afraid of his cunning gray eyes, but since there was no other physician in the country for miles round, she had to send for him whenever there was sickness at the castle. He never went there at other times, although they said he was still good friends with Herr von Heydeck, else how could he live as he did? He could hardly buy the wine that he drank with the couple of hundred guilders that he got from the peasants yearly; and certainly they would not have paid for the silk dresses and ornaments that his wife wore even on weekdays, not to speak of the show she made when she went to church on Sundays, or took a journey to Vienna, which she did two or three times every year.

All the villagers loved the mistress, and the master perfectly idolized her; he had become another man. There never were again such doings at the castle as there had been during the first mistress's reign. Herr and Madame von Heydeck lived for the most part a very quiet retired life, but they were not entirely without society. The judge and the collector, with their wives, were often invited to the castle, and sometimes there were grand visitors from Germany, relatives of madame, who was a countess.

But this happy life in the castle lasted only a few years. The second wife began to sicken: she lost her fresh colour; the doctor said the keen mountain-air did not agree with her, but she would not leave the beautiful country where she was so happy. At last, one autumn, she had to follow the doctor's advice. It is just twelve years ago now; her cough grew so bad that she herself saw that she could not spend another winter in the castle, around which the cold northern blasts swept continually. She went away with her husband and her little daughter, then six years old.

When the carriage drove through Tausens, all the villagers crowded about it to have a last word from the lovely lady, and she spoke to every one as kindly as she did to the judge himself.

She never came back. The doctor said she followed his advice too late. In Italy, at Nizza, they buried her. She died there hardly a year after she took leave of Tausens.

In a short time the master and his little girl returned. He brought a governess with him for his daughter, but she found it too lonely at the old castle. She soon went away again, and the master lived on alone, and the poor child would have had no woman to speak to if the judge's wife had not taken pity on it. She talked seriously to the Herr about his duty to his child, and told him how wrong it was to pay no attention to her education. And so the Herr took the little girl to Vienna to school. After that he led a more solitary life than ever at Castle Reifenstein, never leaving it except to go to Vienna three or four times a year to see his child; the rest of the time he spent without one human being to speak to: even the doctor was not allowed to go often to the castle.

And thus it has gone on until the present day, for even when a year ago Fräulein Hilda came home from Vienna, her father never altered his way of life. He sits up there in his gloomy old room with his books and plants and worms; he has grown old and feeble, so that he cannot take long walks among the mountains, but only in the castle garden, and he studies all day long,—his daughter is with him only at dinner and in the evenings.

But if he is not changed, the Fräulein's return has brought back the golden time for the poor people in Tausens; the same time that there was while her mother was alive. Fräulein Hilda is the image of her mother; just as lovely, but fresher healthier and stronger; just as kind, but merrier and a wee bit wild,—no rock is too steep and no mountain too high for her. Not a boy in the village can outstrip her in a mountain walk, and she clammers about everywhere by herself, looking for the plants which she thinks will give her father pleasure. If any one is ill, she is upon the spot to aid wherever help is necessary. She is a heretic to be sure like her mother, but every one loves her, and the poorest most of all.

During his narrative the postmaster had emptied many a glass, and when he described the fair Hilda, her golden curls, her frank blue eyes that looked for all the world like those of the Holy Mother in the picture over the altar in church, he grew very earnest, and would have gone on expatiating upon a theme so dear to him had he not been called away.

His wife had several times timidly opened the door of the parlour a little way and peeped through the crack, but had quickly withdrawn when she saw Paul turn and look at her. She did not dare to call her husband while he was talking so earnestly with the stranger gentlemen, but at last she lost patience, and sent the maid into the room for him.

"What do you want, Loisel?" the postmaster asked his wife, impatiently; he would have liked to talk longer with the gentlemen who listened so attentively to what he had to say; he had quite forgotten that the post-bag was not yet locked, and that the wagon was waiting that carried the mail to town once a day.

Quite vexed Hansel set about this duty,--almost the only one which his office of postmaster imposed upon him,--and in a quarter of an hour it was concluded. His wife stood quietly by his side while he clumsily made the necessary entries in the books, then counted over the letters and locked them up in the old leather bag, which he handed over to the driver of the wagon. She waited patiently until the crack of the whip was heard and the wagon rolled off, and then she said to her husband, "Did you take a good look at the stranger gentlemen, Hansel?"

"I did."

"At the one with the black beard and the yellow face? My mind misgives me I've seen his face before!"

This remark of his wife's made Hansel very thoughtful. He too when Delmar first spoke to him had thought his face and figure familiar, and yet he could not remember ever having seen the stranger before. And when in the course of conversation it appeared that neither of the three gentlemen had ever been in the Tyrol, it was plain that he never could have seen Delmar, since he himself had never been farther from home than Linz, Bozen, and Innsbruck.

During the long conversation Paul had been the principal speaker; the others had listened in silence. It was Paul who by a timely remark now and then had recalled mine host, when he was disposed to be discursive, to the interesting story which was thus related quite connectedly. Therefore to Delmar Hansel had always addressed himself, and again and again he found himself wondering why this peculiarly keen face seemed so strangely familiar to him. Now that his wife had remarked the same thing, he once more puzzled his brains to remember where he could have seen the stranger before; but in vain, and Loisel could not help him.

Meanwhile the three friends had taken counsel together in the postmaster's absence; his recital had given them food for reflection.

"My poor Leo!" said Paul, as soon as the door had closed upon Hansel's sturdy figure. "Fine stories these! Your uncle appears possessed of even less honour and courage than your father gave him credit for; but then on the other hand the fairy Hilda seems worthy of a trial,--she spurs us on to conquest. What shall we do?"

"Yes, what is to be done?" said Leo. "I am more irresolute than ever. After what we have just heard of my uncle I am very unwilling to present myself at the castle."

"But you promised your father."

"Unfortunately, yes."

"Your visit to the castle is settled, and you will soon see what next ought to be done. Be sure matters are not so bad as they seem from the gossip of the bare-kneed postmaster. The noble Herr von Heydeck, it is true, does not appear to suffer from an excess of amiability, but the devil is never so black as he is painted."

"Do you forget the suspicion that rests upon him with regard to the death of his child?" said Herwarth.

"Nonsense, my noble knight! mad inane nonsense, such as is only conceived in the superstitious stupid heads of Tyrolean peasants. That suspicion of murder is of a piece with the ghost-stories which every old ass in Tausens--our worthy postmaster among them--believes firmly, and with the highly probable explanation of the death of the old tenant when 'his time was up.' The judge and the doctor seem to be the only sensible men in the village. We must try, and I suppose it will not be very difficult, to make their acquaintance."

"You take the suspicion of murder confoundedly coolly," Kuno rejoined.

"I take it as such nonsense must be taken,--not coolly. I attach a certain significance to it as showing the low estimation in which uncle monster is held. It is certainly significant that he should be suspected of murder; but this may be only a consequence of his misanthropy and his tastes for herbs, worms, and poisonous reptiles. Nothing is essentially changed by the postmaster's narrative; therefore I think we had best adhere to our plans. I, as quartermaster of the party, will inspect the accommodations of the house and select our rooms. We will then remove as far as is possible the traces of our glacier tour, so that Leo at least may present a respectable appearance to his uncle and the golden-haired Hilda. The Knight Kuno and I will accompany him as far as the castle, and then leave him to his fate for a while and return here to rest upon the laurels which we have won upon our wanderings. Are you agreed?"

Leo and Herwarth had no objection to make, and Paul proceeded to carry out his plan. He went to the postmaster, whom he found in conversation with his wife. Both greeted him with a gaze of keen scrutiny, to which he paid no heed, informing Hansel that he with his friends was

mind to spend some time at the inn if they liked their quarters.

The postmaster highly delighted displayed the accommodations that his house afforded, and Delmar found the rooms far more numerous and spacious than he could have anticipated. He engaged the largest and finest with a glorious view from the windows, of the castle and the snowy peaks in the background, for a sitting-room, and also a huge room adjoining with three beds in it, and then, after a short conversation with Hansel, returned with him to the inn parlour and informed his friends that they might inspect and approve his choice.

"So everything is arranged," said Paul, rubbing his hands, "except the price we have to pay. What do you want for the two rooms, Herr Postmaster? Don't ask too much; be reasonable, and we shall stay here all the longer."

The postmaster regarded him with a sly smile. "Would two guilders a day be too much for the two rooms?"

"Two guilders a day! Man, do you think we are made of money? One guilder is enough, and I will not give more."

"But, Delmar, pray----" Herwarth interposed, but Paul would not let him speak.

"I am quartermaster, and allow no interference in my affairs. Are you satisfied, postmaster, with one guilder?"

"'Tis not much, but it will do," Hansel replied, apparently not greatly disappointed at this reduction in the rent of his rooms. In fact he laughed when Paul explained that he would have no money transactions with an underling, but would settle with the postmaster himself daily. He assured the gentlemen that they should be well provided for and not overcharged, and then he went off grinning to the kitchen, and told Loisel that he had rented his two best rooms, and that the gentleman with the black beard had offered him four guilders a day for them, but the others were not to know it, to suppose he was only paid one guilder.

The gentlemen's portmanteaus were carried up to their rooms, and half an hour later the three friends, having changed their dress, appeared, and inquired the way to the castle. Hansel advised them to go by the road, which--although it ran circuitously around the base of the mountain--would take them to the castle in an hour, and upon which there was no danger of their losing their way, rather than by the much shorter foot-path which led from the last house in the village, and upon which they might easily go astray. He described the foot-path to them, but counselled them, if they should decide to go by it, to hire some lad in the village to act as guide.

"Thanks, we will," Paul rejoined; and then the three walked briskly off up the valley in the direction of the castle.

Hansel gazed thoughtfully after them. "I have seen the black-bearded one somewhere!" he exclaimed to Loisel, "but I cannot for the life of me remember where."

CHAPTER VIII.

This eleventh of July was an eventful day for the Post inn at Tausens, and certainly merited to be underscored with a red pencil, as it was that very evening by Hansel in the almanac.

The postmaster was still standing at his inn-door looking up the valley after the three friends, when, just as a winding in the road hid them from sight, he rubbed his eyes which he had lazily turned in another direction, and thought he must be dreaming. No, it was no dream, he saw advancing upon the high-road towards the village the realization of his most extravagant hopes. Two equipages, each drawn by four horses, were coming rapidly along the highway.

Since the death of the first madame, for more than a quarter of a century no four-horse equipage had been seen upon the road to Tausens, and here were two, one behind the other, and each, as Hansel's sharp eyes discerned even at a distance, laden with large trunks, while the light dresses of ladies were visible inside the carriages. These were certainly grand and wealthy travellers, and that they meant to stay in Tausens was plain from the quantity of luggage.

With intense eagerness Hansel awaited their arrival; he did not have to wait long,--the first carriage was close at hand; all right: it turned aside from the road, and with a sharp turn the coachman reined in his four fiery steeds before the door of the Post.

A servant in rich livery sprang from the box to open the door and assist the occupants of the carriage to descend. They consisted of a very stout elderly lady, a gentleman also elderly, and a young gentleman who had been sitting on the back seat.

The young man refused the footman's proffered aid; he sprang out, and turned to assist his elderly companions. With the greatest care and attention he helped out the stout lady, who descended from her seat with difficulty, and then he gave his hand to her companion. The lady thanked him with a pleasant smile, the gentleman in words. "Thanks, my dear Guido. Here we are at last; my legs are positively stiff, and my clothes are sticking to me with the heat. There comes the other carriage. Eva looks as red as a cherry."

The second carriage now drove up; two young ladies were sitting inside, and on the box beside the driver sat a third, much more showily dressed than the others. The liveried footman hastened to help this last to descend from her high perch, and his aid was accepted most willingly, the young person leaning on his arm as if loth to leave his support.

The young gentleman who offered his aid to the occupants of the carriage was not as fortunate as the footman; one of the young ladies said, coldly, "Thank you, Herr von Bertram, I do not need any help," and the other said nothing, but the glance of her dark eyes spoke plainly enough,—his assistance was rejected.

"Why will you not allow me to render you even the small service you would accept from your servant?" Bertram whispered, quite aggrieved by his repulse.

"Because I do not wish services forced upon me which I do not require. When I need your aid I shall certainly request it," was Eva's sharp reply, as she swept past him towards her Uncle Balthasar, who was in eager consultation with the postmaster.

Poor Hansel! He stood there like some convicted criminal. He had taken his short pipe from his mouth out of respect for the grand arrivals, and in the other hand he held his black cap, with which he repeatedly slapped his bare knee in his embarrassment. For the stranger gentleman had demanded three rooms with five beds, with two smaller rooms for the servants, the one for the lady's-maid near her young mistress, and two sitting-rooms besides; and with the best will in the world Hansel could not accommodate him, for the entire inn did not contain so many rooms.

If the three 'Bergfaxes' had not already been in possession! Hansel had three unoccupied rooms, and beds enough. The servants could also be taken care of, but that was all the accommodation the house could afford, since the two best rooms were already occupied by the three 'Bergfaxes.' This Hansel told the stranger gentleman, who was in great consternation at the intelligence.

Uncle Balthasar gazed in despair at the various huge trunks which the coachman was taking from the carriages; where could they all find room in the two apartments? for one of the three must be given up to Bertram. And what in the world would become of Aunt Minni if she had no sitting-room where she could recline comfortably all day on the sofa? And was Eva to be cramped up in one room with Fräulein Aline? The thing was impossible!

Poor Uncle Balthasar contemplated with horror the tedious drive back to the town,—five long hours of jolting,—for he thought he foresaw that Eva would never consent to remain here a single night. He imparted to her the sad intelligence that the two best rooms had been appropriated by three gentlemen, who were going to remain some time, so that only three sleeping-rooms were to be had.

"Only three rooms? That is not very pleasant, to be sure," Eva said, much less alarmed than Uncle Balthasar had supposed she would be. "What can be done with Wilhelm and Nanette?"

There was room for the servants. The maid could sleep in the same room with Nannerl, and the footman in the garret, the postmaster said.

At this arrangement, and at the word 'maid' from worthy Hansel's lips, Nanette made a wry face, and her anger was great when Eva said quietly, "That might be arranged. If the rooms are clean and neat we might manage to stay here for a while."

For a while! The postmaster's face shone at the prospect of a visit of some duration from such grand guests, while a corresponding gloom settled upon Uncle Balthazar's countenance. "Well, yes, my dearest Eva," he assented with a resigned air, "if you say so we will try it. It will be a little crowded, but just as you say, my dear."

"We will contrive to make ourselves comfortable. The country is enchanting, and I hope we shall be able to spend some weeks here very pleasantly and quietly in the enjoyment of nature in this retired valley, undisturbed by the hordes of detestable tourists that make so much of the Tyrol odious at this season of the year. First of all let us see the rooms; the largest and most convenient will of course be yours and Aunt Minni's, uncle dear. Aunt Minni must be comfortable. There will surely be a place in her room where we can put a nice sofa; and if there is no sofa here, Wilhelm must drive to the town before night and buy one."

"Oh, we have a sofa," the postmaster declared.

At this joyful intelligence every cloud disappeared from Aunt Minni's face. If she could have a good sofa, where she could doze away most of the day, and if the cooking was good, she was abundantly content.

"There is another thing that can be done," Bertram remarked. "The host might ask the three gentlemen to give up one of their rooms. Men do not need a special sitting-room in an inn; they can make use of the inn parlour in the daytime. If the host insists, they will consent to vacate one room, and if they do not, they must be forced to do so!"

Eva cast a look of great disapprobation upon the speaker. "We are not so selfish as to wish to interfere with the rights of others," she said. "We shall certainly confine ourselves to our three rooms."

"I don't think Herr Delmar would give up the room," the postmaster remarked.

The name of Delmar produced an electric effect upon Eva and Bertram. Guido's face suddenly became leaden in hue, and across Eva's there flitted a crimson flush, but she quickly recovered herself. "Is one of the gentlemen who have taken the other rooms called Delmar?" she asked the postmaster.

"Yes, one of them."

"Is he a northern German?"

"I think so."

"A young man about thirty years old, with dark eyes, black hair and beard, and an olive complexion?"

"Just so; I think I knew him once somewhere, but I can't tell where."

"And the two other gentlemen? Do you know their names?"

"One I do; they call him Leo. I didn't hear the other's name at all."

"Herr Paul Delmar and his friend Herr von Heydeck!" Eva exclaimed in some agitation. "What an unfortunate encounter!"

Bertram was not less moved; he bit his lips and did his best to preserve his composure and not betray the dismay that he felt in discovering that his two hated enemies, Delmar and Leo von Heydeck, were in Tausens, and that he might at any moment be brought face to face with them.

What terrible consequences might ensue from such a meeting if any explanations should be made! If Delmar should ever give Eva an account of the odious scene beneath Büchner's awning; if she should learn by what means Bertram had been forced to make his disgraceful apology,—that it had not been made in compliance with her wish but for fear of ruinous revelations,—all would be lost!

He breathed more freely when Aline took Eva's hand and said in a voice full of tenderness, "We cannot stay here, Eva dear; such a meeting, such unavoidable encounters in this retired place would be too painful for you and for all."

"I must say, Eva my dear, that I think Fräulein Aline is right. Let the trunks be taken out again to the carriages, landlord; we shall not stay here."

Uncle Balthasar gave this order, quite convinced that Eva would immediately desire, as he did himself, to leave Tausens; and it almost seemed as if she agreed with him, for she did not object to his directions to poor Hansel, when suddenly Bertram, by an imprudent word, prevented what he himself most desired. He meant to reinforce Aline's words and Uncle Balthasar's remark, and to confirm Eva's wavering resolution. "We must go, go instantly, my dear Eva," he said. "We cannot possibly expose ourselves to a meeting with that man and his friend Delmar. We cannot subject ourselves to fresh insults, which I must not even avenge. You owe it to yourself, you owe it to me, to avoid such an encounter!"

His remark was most unfortunate. It decided Eva to act in direct opposition to his wishes. "I am the best judge of what I owe to myself," she said, proudly. "I will not have Herr von Heydeck believe that I avoid meeting him because I am afraid of him. We shall certainly remain here for the present."

"Eva, I entreat you not to be headstrong," Aline interposed. "Herr von Bertram is quite right in this instance. You owe it to him and to all of us to avoid all chance of a meeting which might have disastrous consequences. Let us leave here, if we only go as far as the next village. We can rest there and then continue our tour. Do it for my sake, Eva!"

Eva would certainly have yielded to Aline's entreaty if coward fear of an encounter with Delmar and Heydeck had not been plainly imprinted upon Bertram's pale face. This fear seemed to her so pitiable, so despicable, that her pride revolted at the idea of flight. No, she would not retreat; she would not grant such a triumph to the man who had insulted her.

"I cannot comply with your request, Aline," she said firmly. "Do not urge it: my resolution is fixed; I shall stay. Come, dear, let us see the rooms; the landlord will show us to them." She followed the postmaster into the hall, and the others could do no less than imitate her example. Guido alone was left standing in front of the house. His portmanteau was not yet taken from the foot-board of the carriage, and one of the men was busied in untying the rope that bound it there. Should he order it to be left where it was? It was not easy to decide. Like a flash of lightning all that had lately occurred passed through his mind. Eva had indeed thanked him when he brought her the intelligence that the duel had been made impossible, but then she had asked for particulars with regard to what had occurred at Büchner's, and he had been forced to give her an account that had some similitude to the truth lest she should hear of it elsewhere.

He told her that after an interview with Count Waldheim he had awaited Leo von Heydeck at Büchner's, to make him the apology which he had promised Eva should be made, but that the execution of his design had been hastened by the intervention of the old colonel and Delmar. He had skilfully interwoven truth and falsehood in his narrative, but it had not escaped him that Eva's countenance betrayed a certain distrust of him while he spoke. He had begged her to allow him to accompany her upon her tour, and she had not refused, but this journey had been to him a daily source of the greatest humiliation. He would have liked nothing better than to withdraw, but he could not leave the field to his enemies; he must stay.

"Take the small leather trunk to my room," he gave orders to the man, and then followed the servant into the house.

Meanwhile, Eva had subjected the three vacant rooms to a thorough inspection, and had found that their neatness and comfort far exceeded her expectations. One was very spacious; besides two beds it contained a sofa, wardrobe, bureau, washstands, and two cushioned easy-chairs. It would be easy to be comfortable here for a while. The second was considerably smaller, and contained neither sofa nor wardrobe, but then the prospect from the windows was perfectly enchanting. They looked out upon the picturesque ruins of Castle Reifenstein, which here intervened between the eye and the inhabited part of the building. In the background the view was bounded by the snowy peaks of the Weisshorn and the Drei Maidelspitz, with the blue shimmering glaciers of the Schiechhorn between them. The third room, between the first and third, and connected with each by a door, was small enough, with only one window; a bed, washstand, and two chairs were all it could contain.

Such were the apartments which the postmaster placed at the command of the travellers; in addition they could have the exclusive use of a balcony, upon which a door opened from the wide hall. The magnificent view from it of Castle Reifenstein and the glacier background made it seem a most attractive resort, and even in bad weather it might be used, since it was protected by a broad roof.

Eva's arrangements, after she had seen the three rooms and the balcony, were soon made. "We will stay here," she said; "we can make ourselves very comfortable here for a while. The large room with the sofa is yours and uncle's of course, Aunt Minni; Aline and I shall do very well in this next largest room, and Nanette can have the one with one window if Herr von Bertram leaves us."

"Which he certainly will not do," Guido rejoined, having overheard the last words.

"Then Nanette will sleep in Nannerl's room, and the little room is yours."

Guido made no reply.

"Come, Aline," Eva said to her friend, "let us arrange our room." With these words she left the spacious hall in which the conversation had been held and entered her apartment. Then, while Aline closed the door after them, she examined the door leading to the room she had assigned to Bertram. To her satisfaction she found it provided with a heavy iron bolt, which she pushed home, and then turned to her friend.

Hitherto she had exerted herself to preserve an appearance of quiet composure, while all the while her heart was beating so violently that she could scarcely bear it. Now that she was at last alone with her friend and there was no need longer to control her emotion, she threw her arms around her and leaned her weary head upon her bosom.

"My poor, poor Eva!" said Aline, with tender sympathy.

"Oh, Aline, I am so wretchedly unhappy!"

With a gentle hand Aline stroked the dark curls from her friend's brow and kissed her. "Cry, my poor Eva, as much as you want to," she said lovingly; "the tears which you have so long restrained will soothe your pain. And then you shall bathe your eyes and compose yourself. Your betrothed must not see that you have been weeping."

"My betrothed! Why do you torture me with that word? You know how from the very depths of my soul I hate it!"

"Then it is your duty to break this miserable engagement," Aline rejoined gravely. "You would

not listen to me when you gave your hasty promise, and therefore I have been silent until now, but I cannot bear to see you so unhappy. It is my duty as your friend to advise and to warn you even although I should offend you by doing so. I will not quietly look on when I see you obstinately determined to seal your unhappiness forever!"

"But what shall I do, Aline?"

"You must make up your mind to break the fetters which you yourself forged."

"But I have promised."

"Promised? And is this wretched promise to annihilate your happiness for life? You used to be indifferent to Bertram, and that was bad enough; but now I can read in your eyes as in an open book, he becomes more odious to you every hour of every day, and you would give yourself--swear love and fidelity before the altar--to this man whose very touch inspires you with loathing. Will it not be perjury and a far greater wrong to Bertram than if you should break your hasty promise?"

"He knows well that I do not love him."

"So much the worse. If he does not wish for your heart, for your love, he is speculating upon your money. Give him a share of your fortune,--you are rich enough,--but do not sacrifice yourself!"

"How gladly would I do so, but he will not release me. Do not urge me further. Aline, you only make me more unhappy. I have had a hard struggle with myself; indeed the fulfilment of the duty I have undertaken demands all the strength I am mistress of, but it must be fulfilled. Bertram has sacrificed his future to me. Can money requite him for the honour he has lost? I cannot retreat. My destiny must be fulfilled!"

CHAPTER IX.

The road to Castle Reifenstein, upon which the three friends had started, ran through the village of Tausens and the isolated dwellings of the peasants on the bank of the Schwarzenbach. After passing the last of these it left the broad beaten valley road, turned to the right, and passed around the mountain crowned by the castle, gradually ascending on the northern more gentle slope until, after many windings, it reached a bridge leading across a broad, deep chasm in the rocks to the ancient portals of the castle.

Before the invention of gunpowder Castle Reifenstein had been an impregnable fortress, although it owed little of its impregnability to art. Nature had provided for the discomfiture of any possible besiegers by the inaccessibility of the steep rocks that formed its base on the southern side.

If the ancient Counts of Tausens, whose nest it was, raised the drawbridge they were secure from any attack, for on one side it was as impossible to climb the smooth, straight wall of rock, on the summit of which stood the castle, as it was to spring across the broad and ugly chasm, several hundred feet deep, across which the bridge was flung, and which cut off the rock from the gentle declivity of the mountain on its northern side. Thus a few archers, placed behind the walls and in the round tower, could command the entire road up from the valley.

On the eastern side alone the rock was connected with the mountain. A green meadow, which had latterly been converted into a garden, extended from the forest upwards to the wall. Art had here contributed towards rendering the fortress impregnable. A single huge door opened out of the castle courtyard upon this garden. At either end of the wall had stood a huge round tower; of one of these nothing remained but the base in ruins, while the other, in good preservation, stood proudly erect in close vicinity to the inhabited wing of the castle.

The two towers and the wall of the court-yard formed a more than sufficient protection for this eastern side of the castle, for only a few besiegers at a time could approach it through the irregular and broken masses of rock that covered this part of the mountain. Even the peasants seldom ventured to approach the castle on this side. They used the broad road from Tausens almost exclusively, and only a few stout mountaineers preferred the narrow foot-path that left the broad road just behind the last house in Tausens and led straight up the mountain, then turning to the left cut off many of the windings of the road until it joined it again on the summit at the bridge.

Paul paused at the spot where this foot-path left the road. "Is there anything more tiresome in the world than a broad, well-kept road like this?" he said. "All the world can use it,--any fool may walk along it and go dreaming on to his destination. I hate the smooth white dusty thing! Look at this inviting foot-path, Leo; it is wonderfully attractive. Suppose we leave the stupid road?"

"The landlord warned us against it," Leo replied. "He said we should surely lose our way if we took it."

"Bah, nonsense! These peasants always think that city men will lose their way; we have the castle always in sight, how can we go astray? Noble Knight von Herwarth, what do you think?"

"I am for the foot-path."

"Forwards, then! The majority carries the day."

Paul struck into the foot-path which, leading through thick alders, was too narrow to allow of the friends walking abreast. Leo followed Paul, and Herwarth came last, but he had hardly gone a few steps before he stepped upon a loose stone and almost fell. He recovered himself instantly, but when he attempted to proceed he felt a violent pain in his ankle. He stood still for a moment and then tried again to walk, but the pain was too severe: he could not go on.

"What is the matter, noble knight?" Delmar called back to him.

"I do not know: I must stop a moment; my foot pains me. I hope it will pass away in a moment."

But it did not pass away. The pain, on the contrary, increased with every attempt to walk. Herwarth had to sit down upon a fallen tree: he could not go on.

This was a most unpleasant interruption to their expedition. They consulted what had best be done. Paul proposed to go back immediately to the village to procure surgical aid, but this Kuno would not listen to; he was sure that rest would bring him relief; it would be quite time enough to consult a Tyrolean village doctor when the hurt was proved to be serious, which he was quite certain was not the case. He begged his friends to proceed quietly without him, and he would wait here a couple of hours until Paul should return, after having accompanied Leo to the castle-gate. By that time the pain would have abated sufficiently to allow of his walking back the short distance they had come. It certainly was no misfortune to lie on the soft moss for a couple of hours and enjoy the lovely landscape.

At first Paul and Leo refused to agree to Kuno's plan, but after they had examined his ankle, and convinced themselves as far as was possible for the uninitiated in the science of surgery that the leg was neither broken nor seriously injured, they consented to do as he desired. They left him lying comfortably on the grass lighting a cigar, and once more Leo advised Paul to pursue the road where they could not go wrong. This, however, the latter was less inclined to do than before.

"Can I leave our wounded knight alone in the desert for so long?" he asked. "The foot-path is much shorter than the worthy postmaster said. As soon as I have delivered you safely to your uncle I shall return by the same path to Kuno."

The shortest road! Many a one among the mountains has found that the shortest road to his destination has proved the longest for him in the end. Thus it was with Delmar and Leo.

As long as the foot-path led through the bushes it was easy to trace; it was evidently not much frequented, but the grass was worn upon it and it could not be missed; the case, however, was different when it emerged upon a steep, stony waste,--here it suddenly vanished, and even Leo's practised eye could find no signs of it over the stones.

"I think it would be better to go back to the road," said Leo, after vainly searching about.

"Then we must retrace our steps, for we cannot turn to the left, where it lies, because of that deep chasm."

"Better go all the way back than lose our time and our way, as the landlord warned us we should among these stones."

"We have come a quarter of a mile at least, and as we have been always ascending we must be half-way up. I cannot see how we can go wrong,--there is the castle always before us to point the way. The nearest way is the best. Let us scramble directly up over these stones, and we must reach the castle."

Leo was not convinced, but he yielded and followed Paul, who began to clamber sturdily over the stones.

It was a wearisome ascent. At first the stones were small, often slipping and turning beneath the feet; but gradually they grew larger, until they became huge blocks, between which it was often very difficult to find a way.

It was no longer a stony waste which they were trying to traverse, but a chaos of immense masses of rock piled one upon another. There was not the slightest trace of a path; and Delmar, who went first, had to turn to the right and left continually to advance a single step upwards. "Leo," he said at last, stopping to wipe his heated brow, "I see now that you were right, and that I am an ass,--a discovery, by the way, which I have made frequently during my life. This climbing is the very devil!"

"If it only led somewhere!" Leo replied; "but I am afraid we are among the rocks against which our host warned us. I cannot see the castle any longer."

In fact the castle had vanished. In vain did Paul look in all directions for its massive proportions. He had forgotten to keep it in view lately, absorbed as he had been in the difficulties that beset their progress, and now he noticed for the first time that it was nowhere to be seen.

In the direction in which Delmar had thought to find it there arose perpendicularly from among the chaos of rough blocks of stone, a smooth wall of rock. It might be that the castle was upon its summit, but they were too near to it to decide this question.

"We're in a deuce of a scrape!" Delmar exclaimed in irritation. "We are positively lost. I can see no way forwards or backwards. The enchanted castle has vanished, and I have no idea where it is. I believe the evil fairy Hilda has conjured it away."

A clear, merry laugh answered this outburst of irritation. Leo and Paul looked startled in the direction whence it proceeded; but in vain: no human being was to be seen. So melodious a peal of laughter could have come only from the throat of a young girl, and she must be hidden by some one of the giant masses of rock that barred both way and vision on every side.

Paul thought he knew exactly whence the sound came. His curiosity was strongly excited, and without reflecting he left the spot where he was standing with Leo and began forthwith to climb a huge rock upon his right, from the top of which he hoped to have a more extended view. It was a difficult undertaking, and not without peril; but Paul's frame was lithe and his muscles steeled by constant gymnastic exercise. He succeeded in gaining the summit, and the result amply rewarded his exertions; for not only could he see far and wide over the chaos of rocks, but he found himself face to face with the girl whose gleeful laughter had just resounded in his ears,--she was sitting on this very rock, a little beneath the summit, on the other side. As she looked up at the young man there was evident in her eyes an admiration of his strength and agility which did not escape him and which flattered his vanity.

"Excellently done. Cousin Leo!" she said, laughing. "You have atoned for your blunder in losing your way among the Reifenstein rocks by your agility in climbing them."

Paul was startled by the frank, fearless tone of this address. 'Cousin Leo!' Hilda von Heydeck then was sitting at his feet, and she took him for the expected cousin whom she thus familiarly accosted. Even had she not spoken he would have recognized her, remembering the postmaster's description, by the masses of golden curls beneath her picturesque straw hat, only she was far more charming and lovely than he had anticipated. He had smiled when Hansel, in his enthusiasm, had compared Hilda to an angel; now he thought the comparison admirable. There was a rare and wondrous charm in the expression that animated the young girl's lovely features; and nevertheless the merry, unrestrained laughter became her well, and did not disturb the truly feminine grace of her whole bearing.

For the first moment Paul was so surprised by the girl's extraordinary beauty that he, usually so ready with an answer, could not find a word to say in reply. His amazement, so evident in his face, increased Hilda's merriment. She sprang up lightly from where she was sitting and made a profound courtesy, saying, "I see I must introduce myself, or my cousin Leo will not deign to say one word to me. Fräulein Hilda von Heydeck has the honour to receive her cousin among the Reifenstein rocks. In her own distinguished person she has descended from the enchanted castle to guide her bewildered cousin into the right path. And now give me your hand, Leo; we shall soon be the best of friends, if you are only half as delightful as papa says you are."

She held out her hand to Paul, who took it and kissed it, whereupon she withdrew it hastily, saying, with a blush, "That is not the custom with us, cousin!"

"In Germany a man has a right to kiss his lovely cousin's cheek," Paul replied, having quickly recovered from his first surprise; "but I dare not lay claim to such a privilege, since I am not the happy man you think me, but only his poor friend, Paul Delmar."

Hilda blushed crimson. "You are not my cousin Leo?" she asked, in great confusion.

"No, unfortunately not; I wish I were. My friend Leo is down below somewhere trying to find a path out of this rocky labyrinth. Leo! Leo! where are you?"

"Here!" Leo's voice replied, from a considerable distance. He had mistaken the direction whence the sound of Hilda's laugh was heard, and had consequently plunged more deeply into the bewildering labyrinth. Paul's repeated call told him where his friend was to be found; he scrambled over several rocks and finally reached the foot of the huge mass upon which Paul and Hilda were standing.

"Most fortunate of mortals!" Delmar called down to him, "come up here. I will give you a hand, that you may display all the grace you are master of in ascending. Here you will find the lovely fairy who reigns in the enchanted Castle Reifenstein, and who has descended to aid us miserable mortals."

With no less astonishment than Delmar had experienced Leo now looked up at Hilda, who was standing beside his friend; he, too, recognized her from the postmaster's description, and he, too, thought her extremely beautiful. Still her beauty made no extraordinary impression upon him; he thought the worthy innkeeper's enthusiastic comparison of her to an angel rather exaggerated; nevertheless he was most pleasantly surprised by this encounter with his cousin.

Before Paul could hold out a hand to help her she sprang lightly down from rock to rock until she stood beside Leo, to whom she held out her hand with the same easy grace with which she had offered it to his friend. This time, however, although it was grasped cordially, it was not kissed, and was instantly relinquished.

Leo had anticipated with a certain anxiety his first meeting with the cousin whose hand had been destined by the will of her father and of his own to be bestowed upon him. He now stood face to face with the destined bride whom he had made up his mind never to marry, without any of the embarrassment he had expected to feel when he should first see her. No; any uncomfortable sensation of the kind was entirely dispelled by Hilda's easy frank reception of him as a near relative. She evidently saw in him, not a future lover, but simply her cousin Leo, to whom she was ready and pleased to show all the familiar kindness warranted by their close relationship, and he was instantly as much at his ease with her as if they had known each other for years.

"It is a very extraordinary but none the less delightful chance. Cousin Hilda, that led you here to us in the midst of this rocky waste, where, of all places in the world, I least expected to meet you."

"It is no chance," she replied, looking with a smile at Delmar, who had just made his descent from the rock. "Papa and I have been expecting you for some days; a letter from your father told us that you and one of your friends were coming to the Tyrol. When a little while ago I saw from my window two strangers coming up to the castle, I instantly divined that you were one of them, and when I saw you go astray among the Reifenstein rocks I made haste to join you to show you the path, which it is impossible that any stranger should find. I had just climbed this rock to see where you were when I heard voices close by. I sat down instantly I confess to play the part of eavesdropper, and when I heard that the 'evil fairy Hilda' had 'conjured away' the castle I could not help laughing aloud."

As she spoke Hilda gave Paul an arch smile. "To be sure, the 'evil fairy' afterwards became a 'lovely fairy,' but she will always remember the first adjective bestowed upon her."

"Be merciful to a poor sinner," Paul begged, "and do not reckon against him words wrung from his despair in finding himself lost in such a labyrinth."

"We shall see hereafter whether I can exercise mercy for justice; first of all I must guide these two erring wanderers up the mountain and into the foot-path."

"Did you not come down from the castle by some other way, Fräulein Hilda?" Delmar asked.

"I did, it is true, come by another and a much shorter way," Hilda replied; "but it is fit only for the feet of the evil mountain-fairy of an enchanted castle, and not for two fashionable men from the city; I cannot show you that way."

"Do you suppose that a path you can use will be too difficult for us? You show very little confidence in our powers. Pray show us the nearest path."

"I will do so in punishment for your presumption, but upon one condition. Promise me that the instant you are dizzy you will say so, that we may turn back; the path lies along the very brink of an abyss."

"I promise; but I shall not have to redeem my word."

"Will you promise too, Cousin Leo?"

"Yes; but you need have no fear, neither Delmar nor I know what it is to have vertigo."

"Then follow me."

Hilda walked on before. In perfect security, and with an airy grace that enchanted Delmar, she sprang from stone to stone, and in a few minutes they had reached the base of the wall of rock, which here ascended nearly perpendicularly several hundred feet. Here she paused. "There is still time to turn back," she said, seriously, "and I beg you, Herr Delmar, and you, Cousin Leo, to do so; I ought not to show you the path up the rock, an accident might so easily happen for which I never should forgive myself."

"You shall have no cause for self-reproach," Paul replied, "for I see the path clearly now. You do not show it to me, I choose it myself. It leads up the rock just here; it has been worn by the goats, and is just what I like,--perfectly easy to follow."

The path was certainly plain to be seen by any one who chose to follow it. It was scarcely a foot broad, and went directly up the side of the mountain; on one hand was the perpendicular wall of rock, and on the other the abyss, and the higher it went the steeper and dizzier the path became.

Paul had taken in at a glance the difficulty and danger of the ascent; but he did not hesitate a moment to begin it, nor would he have done so had the path been twice as steep and giddy as it was.

"Herr Delmar, I pray you turn back!" Hilda exclaimed, anxiously; but he continued to advance fearlessly.

"Let us follow him, cousin," Leo said, with a smile. "Make your mind easy about Paul; he will carry through whatever he attempts; no power on earth can stay him. I am convinced that he would take that path even although he knew that he should fall into the abyss. But he will not fall; he has no fear, and he is never dizzy."

"And you, Cousin Leo?"

"I? Why should I fear? Only those who love life fear to lose it."

"What can you mean, cousin?" There was a genuine compassion and ready sympathy in her words that soothed Leo. Hilda looked at him very reproachfully. Did she know that her father had destined her to be his bride, and was she wounded that he could speak thus?

"Well, Leo, are you going to stay down there?" asked Paul, who had already ascended about fifty feet of the path, and who now turned and looked down at the two cousins. As he looked he leaned forwards so far over the abyss that Hilda experienced a sudden vertigo. Hitherto she had never known the sensation even when looking from the dizziest heights; but when she saw how carelessly Delmar leaned forwards so far that it seemed as if he must fall, she fairly trembled. "For God's sake, Herr Delmar, turn away!" she exclaimed.

"Have no fear, lovely fairy!" was the reply. "'Tis true that a magic power draws me towards you, but I will not choose the direct way to reach you at present. Indeed, you have calumniated this path,--it is as easy as possible, and commands a glorious view. Well, Leo, are you not coming? Do you not like it?"

"I am coming," Leo cried, and quietly walked on after his friend.

Hilda followed him up the height. How often she had ascended the rock by this path! how often, when, only the hardest mountaineer could follow her, had she descended by it into the valley, and never before to day had she thought of its danger! Now she was fairly tormented by anxiety.

Not upon Leo's account; he walked on before her with as firm and even a step as if he had been upon level ground. He, however, neglected no necessary precaution, testing the firmness of the stony soil, as Hilda saw, at every step; for him the path had no danger, but it was full of peril for Delmar, who seemed to challenge it in the wildest fashion.

Where the path was so narrow that there was almost none at all, and the greatest caution was necessary at every step, Delmar walked as carelessly as if he were upon a broad road, and at the very most perilous point he stopped, coolly relighted his cigar, and then walked on, not even looking down to pick his way, but with his gaze riveted upon the distant view.

Hilda's heart throbbed as she observed his careless demeanour; she had warned him, but she did not venture to call to him again. The ascent of the rocks had never seemed to her half so long, and only when she saw that Paul had reached in safety the small but secure strip of meadowland that intervened between the old castle-wall and the edge of the precipice, did she once more breathe freely and with an easy mind follow Leo, with whom she soon joined his friend.

Paul received her with a laugh. "Thanks, charming fairy," he said, again advancing to the edge of the precipice and leaning forwards so as to overlook the entire path up the rock; "thanks for the greatest enjoyment I have had in our mountain tour. I delight in a path like this; it is inspiring to climb the rocks by it. One false step is certain death. Life is the meed only of strength and sureness of foot. Let fear once assail the climber, vertigo is sure to follow and he is lost; but for a steady brain and strong muscles there is no danger; and what a glorious prospect we have had over the fertile valleys to the snowy peaks that bound the horizon on the south! If I lived at Castle Reifenstein I should choose no other path save this by which to reach the valley, and I am sure that you also, Leo, will visit us in Tausens by no other."

"You are much mistaken," Leo quietly replied. "I have come once by this path, and I shall not again pass over it, least of all in descending to the valley. I shall take the safer footpath or the road, even although it be somewhat longer."

"How can an artist be so terrible a Philistine!" Paul exclaimed, indignantly.

"If not to run into unnecessary peril is to be a Philistine, I certainly am one. You will admit, I know, that I am not backward in facing danger when any good end is to be gained thereby."

"I should be the last to dispute that. Do I not know that you, my unattainable model and example, are all compact of the strongest and loftiest principles? Do I even try to emulate you? I should be the most tiresome fellow in the world if but the half of your virtues were mine, although I confess that they suit you remarkably well; so keep them all, I pray. Trust one who knows, lovely fairy; your excellent cousin is the embodiment of pure principles and strong good sense; he has only one fault: he chooses his friends very foolishly."

"Are you not one of them?" asked Hilda.

"Exactly; that is just it. His reputation suffers from my friendship. I am principled against principle. My aim in life is to do what I like. I am a thorough egotist, who has no idol but self. Now is such a man a fit companion for Leo von Heydeck? He should blush to own such a friend, by whom he may be judged by others. But here we are safely arrived at the castle, and I will take my leave. I must bid you farewell, Fräulein von Heydeck, only asking permission to return and visit my friend Leo at Castle Reifenstein."

They had, in fact, reached the garden, which lay on the eastern declivity of the mountain, and before them was the colossal old pile.

"You are not going to leave us, Herr Delmar?" Hilda asked, in surprise. "You cannot be in earnest. Rooms were arranged for you and Leo two days ago. Of course you will stay at Castle Reifenstein with my cousin?"

"A most kind and amiable invitation, and so tempting from such lovely lips that I should not perhaps be able to refuse it had I not promised to return immediately to Tausens. As, unfortunately, I have so promised, there is nothing for me to do except to thank you most sincerely for the hospitality, which, to my regret, I cannot accept."

"To whom can you possibly have made such a promise?"

"To a third friend, the noble knight Kuno von Herwarth, who, but for a slight accident upon the way, would have accompanied us to the castle. I promised him that I would return to him as soon as possible, and hard as it is, I must keep my word."

"Paul is right," Leo added. "Kuno expects him, and I know that his peculiar egotism would make all persuasion to stay useless. His selfishness will not permit him to allow Herwarth to wait for him longer than is absolutely necessary."

"Not at all; you have no comprehension of good sensible selfishness. I don't trouble myself about Herwarth one whit; but it gives me an uncomfortable sensation to know that he is lying down below there upon the grass, looking up at the castle, pulling out his watch every few minutes, and thinking I might have returned long since. And so for my own sake--what is Herwarth to me?--I shall hurry back to him."

"Exactly; that is the very kind of egotism in which you excel particularly."

"If you suppose your sneer will have any effect in detaining me, you are mistaken. It only confirms my purpose. The delightful goat's track will take me to our unfortunate friend in half an hour."

Hilda's heart beat afresh as she heard Delmar announce this intention; she knew how much more dangerous was the descent than the ascent of the steep path. True, she had fearlessly tripped up and down by it many a time; but then she knew every stone, every dangerous spot, and was, besides, accustomed to mountain-climbing. The peril was twice as great for a stranger, and she trembled at the thought that if his foot should slip he was lost. She had known Delmar but one half-hour; but his odd talk and manner interested her much, and he was her cousin's friend. Surely she might treat him with some degree of familiarity. So when Paul lifted his hat by way of farewell, she held out her hand to him with a slight blush at the remembrance of the kiss bestowed upon it half an hour before. The blush made her look lovelier than ever, and Paul absolutely lost his heart as he slightly pressed the little hand thus graciously offered.

"I cannot ask you to break your promise to your friend, Herr Delmar," the girl said, not without a shade of embarrassment. "I can only hope that both you and my cousin Leo's other friend will consent to be my father's guests at Castle Reifenstein. This I trust my cousin will arrange with you and your friend to-morrow morning. In the mean time I have a request to make of you. Perhaps your selfishness will allow you to grant it."

"Oh, my selfishness is a very convenient selfishness; of course it allows me to do whatever gives me pleasure, and nothing, I am sure, could give me greater pleasure than to fulfil any request of yours, Fräulein von Heydeck."

"It is certainly a most courteous selfishness," Hilda said, with such a bewitchingly merry

glance that Paul registered a silent vow upon the spot to bring her the moon from the skies if she asked for it.

"Only tell me what you desire, Fräulein von Heydeck," he exclaimed, "and I will make impossibilities easy!"

"I am not quite so exacting," Hilda replied. "My desire can be easily complied with: it is only that you should return to Tausens by the usual way. Since you are such an admirable mountaineer, I will allow you to take the common foot-path, and show you myself where it is; you cannot miss your way by it in descending the mountain. Will you do as I ask, Herr Delmar?"

"Ah, here I recognize the lovely but evil fairy who has already cast her spells upon me! Nevertheless, a promise is a promise, and must be kept."

Hilda thanked him merrily, especially for the title of "evil fairy," and declared herself quite ready to act as his guide to the foot-path down the mountain, the shortest way to which was through the garden and court-yard of the castle. She went first, Leo and Paul following.

Paul could see nothing but his lovely guide; he had no eyes for the beauty of the garden through which they were passing, and he scarcely noticed that as they entered a shady walk an old gentleman appeared walking towards them. Only when Hilda paused and, addressing the old man, cried joyously, "Papa! here is Cousin Leo with his friend!" did he turn to scrutinize with a certain curiosity the man of whom he had heard so much.

The old gentleman was evidently not prepared for the encounter: he had a book in his hand, and was walking in the garden, reading; apparently he never would have noticed the strangers if Hilda's exclamation had not called his attention to them.

When he heard the name of Leo a smile passed over his withered face, but it vanished in an instant as, with an expression of positive horror, his eyes opened to their utmost extent, he gazed at Paul, who approached and, lifting his hat, bowed courteously.

This was an extraordinary reception. For a minute the old man seemed incapable of speech; he gazed silently at Delmar, whom he waved off with his hand, retreating a step at his approach. He never even looked at Leo: Paul absorbed his entire attention.

"Oh, papa, what is the matter?" Hilda asked, in surprise.

But her father did not seem to hear her; the longer he looked at Paul the more intense was the expression of terror upon his face and in his eyes; several seconds passed before he could so far control himself as to stammer in broken words, "What do you want of me?--How did you come here?--Who are you?"

Delmar had, it is true, cherished no expectation of any particularly kind or courteous reception at the hands of "uncle monster," and the picture formed of him in his imagination had not been very flattering, but what he now saw and heard transcended his expectations: he had not believed in such a monster as this.

Herr von Heydeck, once tall and handsome, was now a sickly, emaciated old man, his tall figure was bent, his withered features showed no trace of their former beauty, and were entirely wanting in the expression of dignified repose which makes an aged face attractive. The working of the lips, the protruding light-gray eyes the uncertain glance of which always avoided your own, made the spare wrinkled countenance positively ugly.

Paul experienced actual repulsion at first sight of this old man, and the sensation was heightened by the strange broken questions addressed to him.

It was not Delmar's habit to show much consideration towards those whom he disliked, and a sharp reply to the inhospitable queries was upon his lips, when his glance fell upon Hilda; he saw in her face the terror and surprise which her father's reception of him was causing her. Could he wound her? However ugly and unpleasant this old man might be, he was nevertheless the father of the lovely fairy, and Leo's uncle. In consideration of this he suppressed the angry retort upon his lips and replied quietly, "My name is Delmar; I am a friend of your nephew Leo, whom I have accompanied upon his journey to the Tyrol. I do not know what further particulars I can give you with regard to myself at present, Herr von Heydeck."

The old man did not hear his last words, the name alone riveted his attention. "Delmar! Paul Delmar!" he muttered to himself "I knew it must be he! What do you want of me?" he continued, aloud. "I must know what you want. Do not imagine that I am afraid of you! It was only the first shock of surprise; but I am not in the least afraid of you, not in the least. Speak! what do you want of me?"

Paul listened with increasing astonishment to these unconnected, unmeaning words. Had the old man a sudden attack of insanity? It must be so, else how could he thus receive his nephew's friend? Such a reception was utterly inexplicable, and least of all could Paul conceive how Herr von Heydeck had got hold of the name Paul, which he had muttered to himself. He did not trouble himself, however, to ponder this, but, seeing Hilda's distress, resolved to cut short so

disagreeable a scene.

"I want nothing of you, Herr von Heydeck," he replied, courteously; "on the contrary, I bring you something in the person of your nephew Leo,--my dearest friend. And now I must beg your permission to leave you, as I must immediately return to Tausens to a friend who awaits me there."

This quiet reply had the effect of partially allaying the horror that had filled the old man's mind, and with a degree of self-control he recovered the consciousness which had nearly forsaken him. He still regarded Paul with a strange, scrutinizing look, without venturing to meet his eye. But his composure returned by degrees; his glance fell upon Leo, and remembering Hilda's words and Delmar's explanation, he was conscious that he had been guilty of discourtesy and had not yet spoken to his nephew. "Welcome, Leo!" he said, offering him his hand. "Yes, I should know you anywhere, you look so like your father, my Hans. Welcome to Castle Reifenstein. And you, sir, are Leo's friend? Yes, I remember my brother's letter mentioned that Leo was coming to the Tyrol with a friend. You, then, are Leo's friend? Herr Delmar? Herr Delmar? Is that your name?"

"It is; my name is Paul Delmar."

"Paul Delmar; exactly, I knew it; and it is only as Leo's friend that you come here? you have no further intentions?"

"What further intentions could I possibly have?"

"Of course, of course! What further intentions could you have? Forgive me for my strange reception of you: my mind sometimes wanders; you must not take it ill of a feeble old man. I hope, Hilda, that you have the rooms ready for Leo, and Herr Delmar, Leo's friend?"

"Certainly, papa; they were all ready two days ago; but Herr Delmar refuses to stay with us, and says he must return to the Post at Tausens."

"Indeed? I am very sorry."

The 'very sorry' did not sound genuine. The old man's mind was evidently relieved when he heard that Paul had declined to be his guest at the castle. Apparently the coldness of his expression of regret struck him also, for he hastened to atone for it by a request that Paul would reconsider the refusal. But upon receiving Paul's courteous excuse for not complying with this request, he forbore to urge it, and when Delmar expressed his regret in being obliged to return immediately to Tausens, he did not press him to remain, but gave him his hand in token of farewell, and expressed, although with some hesitation, a hope that he would frequently visit his friend Leo at the castle.

Hilda fulfilled her promise; she accompanied Paul through the garden, the castle court-yard, and the large gateway, across the bridge to the foot-path, which, lying to the left of the road, passed down the mountain at some distance from the steep rocky side. She walked beside Delmar in silence; her father's strange conduct had filled her with vague anxiety. She felt that there must be some relation which she did not understand existing between him and Herr Delmar, and she vainly wondered what it could be. She knew that her father was misanthropic and inhospitable, but with regard to Leo and his friend he had not been in the least so until a few moments previously, but had given express orders that everything should be done to make the young men's stay at Castle Reifenstein agreeable to them.

What reason could he have for such terror at sight of a stranger, and for receiving him so disagreeably? She longed to say some word to Delmar in excuse: she was afraid that he was offended; but what could she say? In vain she tried to find words suitable to the occasion, and while she was trying they had crossed the bridge, and she had accompanied the young man as far as was fitting, and not one word had she uttered.

Paul, too, who was not often at a loss for words, had been vainly searching for something to say during their short walk; and thus both went on together in silence until Hilda held out her hand to him by way of farewell, when he asked, "Has the lovely fairy no word for me that I may take as a permission to return?"

Hilda blushed. Why should the words 'lovely fairy' move her strangely at this moment? She had heard them and laughed at them repeatedly in the last hour, but now she could not laugh,--she was confused,--for the tone of Delmar's voice was far more serious than before. She did not reply directly, but asked in her turn, "Oh, Herr Delmar, what will you think of us? I do not know what papa had in his mind, but I am sure he did not mean to offend you. I beg you not to be angry with us!"

"How could I be angry? Your father was under some mistake with regard to me. What puzzles me is how he should have known that my name is Paul. Perhaps Colonel von Heydeck mentioned it in his letter."

"No; he wrote only a few words to say that my cousin Leo had gone to the Tyrol accompanied by a friend, whose name he did not mention, and that in a few days he would arrive at Castle

Reifenstein."

"And yet your father knew my first name, Paul, although I only told him of my family name."

"I cannot understand it!" Hilda said, dejectedly.

"A riddle indeed. But time will surely bring its solution, and of one thing I am sure: that I have never given your father any reason to be angry with me."

"Most certainly not; and I entreat you not to be vexed with papa for his unkind reception; the next time you come he will be kinder."

"May I come again? Will you allow me?"

"Assuredly; Cousin Leo will be delighted to see you often at the castle."

"And the lovely fairy?"

"Will never be an evil fairy for you. Adieu, and come soon."

She nodded smiling, and hurried back to the castle much lighter of heart than she had been a few minutes before.

While Hilda was acting as guide to his friend, Leo had remained in the castle garden with his uncle. The strange scene of which he had been a witness had made a disagreeable impression upon him also. While it lasted he had observed his uncle narrowly, the profound horror he had testified at sight of Delmar, a horror increased by hearing his name, and the effort it had cost him to regain his composure. At last the morbid interest with which the old man watched Paul while he was present, and with which he followed his retreating figure until it disappeared behind the wall of the courtyard, vanished. For the first time Herr von Heydeck seemed to breathe freely, although his mind was apparently still occupied with Paul alone; he did not turn to welcome the nephew who had come upon his pressing invitation to visit him from distant Germany; he did not ask after the brother whom he had not seen for thirty years; his first words were of Paul.

"This Herr Paul Delmar is your friend?" he asked Leo, with a keen, suspicious glance.

"My dearest friend from my childhood."

"Ah? from your childhood? You have known him, then, a long while?"

"We were playmates and schoolfellows; we grew up together. He is a few years older than I, but the slight difference in our ages never interfered with our friendship."

Again the old man shot a sharp glance of suspicion at his nephew; but seeing that Leo met his gaze freely and frankly, he shyly averted his eyes. Lost in thought, he walked silently by Leo's side, forgetting that the duties of hospitality demanded that he should conduct his nephew to the castle; he was lost to the present and buried in recollection of a time long past. Tormenting memories which he had long laboured to forget, but which would not be forgotten, arose within him more distinctly and more tormentingly than ever: they filled his mind; his nephew was forgotten.

Leo did not disturb his uncle's reverie, and was very glad not to be expected to converse. He watched keenly the varying expression in the features of the old man, who was all unconscious that a scrutinizing eye was endeavouring to read his very soul. He would else have put a force upon himself; his hand would not have been clenched, nor would so gloomy a frown have appeared upon his brow. And certainly he would have controlled the angry twitching of the thin lips that gave so hateful an expression to the wrinkled face.

What was going on in this man's soul? Leo asked himself. He no longer inclined, as he had hitherto, to excuse his uncle's faults, to think more kindly of him than his knowledge of the past would warrant. Although he could not divine the mystery that enveloped the old man's reception of Paul, although he had no conception of what cause his uncle had to hate Delmar, Leo nevertheless felt that he did hate him with a fierce hatred that he strove in vain to conceal. The ugly face was animated by an expression of such savage malice, that Leo could no longer be in doubt as to the character of this his nearest relative. The man had no heart; he could not love; he could only hate,—hate with all his soul!

But no; Leo was wrong! Suddenly there flitted over the sullen, wrinkled face a smile like a ray of sunshine,—a gentle, loving smile that transfigured it. Leo, startled by such a contradiction to his thoughts, looked up to see what had caused such a transformation. The cause was plain: Hilda was coming quickly towards them.

"But, dearest papa," she called out from some distance, "why are you and Leo still in the garden? I could not believe you were here when old Melcher told me. Cousin Leo must be hungry and tired, and you keep him walking in the garden!"

Herr von Heydeck passed his hand across his forehead as if to smooth away the ugly frown, and really he almost succeeded in doing so. He could hardly look kind, but he looked far less

sullen and angry, as he said, in a tone meant to be amiable and gay, "Forgive me, Leo; the child reminds me of my duty; I was wrong not to take you into the castle to your room. I am a feeble old man and very forgetful. I have so much sometimes to confuse me, you must not take it amiss if I have sinned against hospitality; my Hilda will atone for my omissions."

And Hilda did so; with graceful cordiality she conducted Leo into the castle and to the rooms that had been prepared for himself and his friend, her charming face lit up by a happy smile as she saw his pleased surprise.

Leo was indeed no less surprised than pleased at sight of the bright, cheerful room they reached after traversing various rooms and a long dark corridor, and of the glorious view, through open windows, of the wooded Schwarzenbach valley and its magnificent background of glaciers.

A careful, feminine hand had evidently been busy here in providing every luxury that could make the expected guest comfortable. Leo was most touched, however, at seeing a new easel set up by one of the windows, and beside it, leaning against the wall, a couple of canvases ready stretched.

"Ah, how kind!" he exclaimed. "A northern room with a glorious view,--an easel and canvases all ready! I am indeed surprised. How could you know of my love of painting, my dear Hilda?"

"I know you better than you think, Leo," Hilda replied, gayly. "I have long known that you were an artist, and I look forward with delight to overlooking your work. I draw a little, and you must give me some lessons; my father has told me all about you. Although he shuns all personal contact with strangers, he is in constant correspondence with the principal naturalists in all the larger European cities. He has long made use of his extensive acquaintance among scientific men in K--- to procure tidings of you and of Uncle Hans. In every letter he sent there he asked about you both, and nothing pleased him so much as to receive good news of his only brother and of his nephew. His friends faithfully replied to him, and thus he has followed your career, even all through the war; and when I came home from school to live here in this lonely castle with him, he told me everything that he knew of his dear relatives. Now you understand how I know that you are not only a brave officer, but an excellent artist."

"I am no longer an officer, and I only wish I were an artist," Leo rejoined.

"You are no longer an officer?" Hilda asked, in surprise. "We had not heard of that."

"Very naturally; I only sent in my resignation a few days ago. My reasons for doing so I will shortly give to yourself and your father. I hope he will find them sufficient."

Hilda gave a little nod of assent. She had no doubt that his reasons for resigning were good, and it never entered her head to imagine that he had been forced into it by any fault of his own. Desirous as she naturally was to know what had induced him to quit a career in which, as her father had informed her, a brilliant future awaited him, her sense of delicacy prevented her from all further question.

Once more she cast a glance around the room to see that nothing was wanting, and then took her leave, begging Leo to establish himself thoroughly in his new home, and assuring him that his luggage would arrive from Tausens in less than an hour, since she would instantly despatch a messenger for it. After which, she added, she would await him in the garden, where the table would be spread in the large summer-house, and whither she begged he would come to partake of some refreshment.

Leo was now left alone to occupy himself with a careful examination of the apartment which was for some time to be his. Everywhere he observed proofs of kindly loving care. By one window stood a writing-table, provided with everything that he could require in that line. A paint-box filled with water-colors and pencils and brushes of all sizes lay open upon it, and two vases of mountain-flowers adorned a shelf in the corner of the room.

In a bookcase he found a fine collection of German authors, and the preponderance of historical works showed that Hilda and his uncle had been aware of his preference for the study of history.

This regard for his peculiar inclinations, this evident desire to make his stay in Castle Reifenstein pleasant to him, awakened in Leo a feeling of remorse. He remembered how unwillingly he had complied with his father's imperious desire that he should visit these relatives who received him with such affection. How charming had been the kindly familiarity of Hilda's manner to him! How evident her desire, by her care for his comfort, that he should feel at home beneath her father's roof!

But this father! Leo had never met a human being who had impressed him so disagreeably at first sight; and yet had not this very uncle given convincing proof of his friendly interest in his nephew? Would Hilda ever have been able so to minister to her cousin's tastes and inclinations if her father had not first taken the trouble to ascertain what those tastes and inclinations were? Leo reflected that, disagreeably impressed though he were by his uncle's conduct, the strange harshness of his first words had borne reference to Paul, and not to his nephew. What cause the

old man could have to hate Delmar Leo could not guess, but it was none the less certain that, in the sudden terror caused by Paul's appearance, he had given vent to his hatred in those first few broken words. The coldness of his uncle's reception of himself was due entirely to his hatred of Paul, and Leo had no right to be aggrieved by it,—he had reason to be grateful to the old man for the kindness shown in the provisions made for his comfort.

True to the principle which forbade his yielding undue influence to first impressions, Leo was no sooner convinced that he had no cause for resentment towards his uncle than he exerted himself to conquer all feeling of repulsion for the old man, or rather to transform any such feeling into gratitude for the kindness shown him. Although he could not comply with his wishes in regard to a union between Hilda and himself, he could at least do his part towards establishing friendly relations between his nearest of kin and himself, and pave the way for his father to be reconciled to his only brother.

Filled with this resolve as the result of his short season of reflection, Leo went into the comfortable sleeping-room adjoining his sitting-room to remove from his dress all traces of his dusty walk among the Reifenstein rocks. After which he set out to join his cousin and uncle in the garden, in compliance with Hilda's invitation.

The way thither, however, after he had left his rooms, was not so easy to find. He remembered passing through numerous apartments, decorated partly in mediæval style and partly according to modern ideas, but how many he had seen of these, or in what direction he had come after reaching a large central room into which numerous doors opened, he could not say. He trusted to his luck, however, and from this central apartment, which he easily reached, he entered a small room, which he thought he remembered. The beautiful old wainscoting on the walls had struck his artistic eye, and he now paused to examine it more leisurely. The work must have dated from the end of the fourteenth or the beginning of the fifteenth century, and the carving had evidently been executed by a master's hand. Around the wall, directly under the ceiling, ran a long inscription cut into the wood-work. Leo tried to decipher it, but it baffled him, and he determined to devote himself to the task when he should be less hurried; at present he would not keep his cousin waiting for him.

He wandered through a long range of rooms. In each he found interesting and extremely valuable relics of mediæval splendour, and many precious works of art, upon each of which he would have gladly bestowed attention had he had the time. One room in especial interested him greatly: it was Herr von Heydeck's study; a large, gloomy apartment, into which the narrow windows admitted so little light that a dim twilight reigned in its remote corners although the sun outside was shining brightly. Its rays could not penetrate the thick octagonal panes of glass, set in leaden frames, which had apparently not been cleaned for years and were hardly transparent any longer. All the walls were covered with wide shelves filled partly with old books, partly with boxes and bundles of papers, and partly with bottles; these bottles, containing all sorts of snakes, lizards, and fish, preserved in spirits, might well have inspired the uninitiated with disgust.

Close by a window, in a deep embrasure of the wall, stood Herr von Heydeck's writing-table. It was half covered with open books, and a microscope placed just against the window and several magnifying-glasses bore witness to the industry of their possessor.

Leo would have greatly enjoyed a thorough examination of the various objects of interest that made this old room the very ideal of the magician's den of an enchanted castle, but he preferred to do so in his uncle's society, and at present what he most desired was to find the way to the court-yard. He opened a door in this room, and discovered a dark, steep winding staircase, which he descended, quite sure that it would lead him into the open air; but when he reached the bottom he found himself in a dim, deserted kitchen, only so far lighted by a window high up in the wall as to enable him to distinguish where he was. Opening an opposite door, he was disappointed to find, not another room or hall of entrance from the court-yard, but a narrow, dim passage, which evidently did not lead out to light and air. Probably this was the way to the round tower of which the postmaster had had so much to tell.

Leo's curiosity was now excited. He could not withstand the temptation to go on and have a look at the haunted tower, especially as he found that the passage was only a few feet long in the thickness of the old wall, and that a door at the other end was secured only by a large bolt. This bolt, although as rusty as such old bolts are sure to be, he managed to slip quite easily, with a noise that sounded ghostly enough in the dim, low passage, and the door opened without any difficulty, but his hopes of finding any interesting mediæval relics here were disappointed. He had entered a huge round room, evidently occupying the entire basement of the tower, which must have served in former times for the dwelling of the warder of the castle, although it had apparently not been inhabited for many years. The room was lighted by the old loop-holes, that had been glazed in modern times, and were high up near the ceiling of the apartment.

Several old pieces of furniture, a dilapidated table, and a child's crib, in which there were still some dirty pieces of bedding, were standing in disorder about the room. The thick coating of dust that lay everywhere upon everything was evidence that for years no one had used the apartment.

Leo made haste to leave so uninteresting a spot; he closed the door behind him, producing, as he bolted it again, the same unearthly creak that had startled the echoes a moment previously, and soon found himself once more in the spacious deserted kitchen. Here he now discovered a

second door unbolted, by which he entered a large room with windows opening upon the courtyard. The coarse furniture and arrangement of this room bore evidence to Leo's mind that it was probably the abode of the old servant of whom the postmaster had made mention in his narrative. He would have passed through it to reach the court-yard by the opposite door, when this was suddenly opened from without, and an old man appeared upon the threshold with features inflamed with rage. He shouted out several words in utterly unintelligible German, and then threw himself upon the young man, clutching his throat with both hands with a strength and ferocity which could never have been looked for from his age and appearance. As he did so he uttered a shriek of rage that sounded more like the howl of a wild beast than any sound from human lungs.

For a moment Leo was confused by so unexpected an attack. He recoiled as the man rushed upon him with the evident intention of throttling him; but in the next instant he freed himself from the griping fingers at his throat, and threw off his assailant, exclaiming, "Take care! What do you mean?" words which received no reply save the same unmeaning howl and a second attack on the part of the old man. This time however Leo was prepared, and he repulsed his assailant with such vigour that he staggered backwards and fell on the floor.

Nothing daunted however, the furious creature was on his feet in an instant, and looking wildly about him, found what he sought,—a broad-bladed knife that lay upon the window-ledge. This he seized, and with another cry, rushed once more upon the young man.

It was a struggle for life. Hitherto Leo had only acted in self-defence; he could no longer spare his assailant. He avoided his savage thrust by stepping aside, and felled him to the floor with a blow on the side of his head. He fell headlong and for a moment lost his hold of the knife; it was but for a moment however: he had not lost consciousness; and again he would have imperilled Leo's life, when, "What is the matter here? Melcher, are you crazy?" was heard in a deep voice, and Herr von Heydeck appeared at the open door. The old man's hand, raised to strike, fell by his side, and the knife dropped from his grasp.

Left at liberty by his furious assailant, Leo could see what manner of man he was. The vacant, animal expression of the old fellow's coarse features placed it beyond all doubt that he had been attacked by a maniac. Leo remembered now that when he heard the name 'Melcher' the Tausens landlord had spoken of this son of old Stoffel's as a 'Troddel,' a name synonymous in the Tyrol with idiot.

Yes, old Melcher was an idiot; the vacant face and the protruding, watery blue eyes were idiotic; the sudden change in the countenance so lately animated by bestial rage, and now smiling a dull, unmeaning smile, was idiotic, and so also was the unintelligible, stammering speech in which he replied to Herr von Heydeck.

Was there any sense in what he said? Leo could not understand a single word, but he saw Herr von Heydeck's face grow dark, and noticed that he glanced anxiously towards the door of the old kitchen and then keenly at his nephew.

It was evident that his anger was roused by the old man's words; he turned hastily to Leo with, "What are you prying about here for? Why should you intrude here?"

"I do not understand you, sir," Leo replied, haughtily. "What possible motive could I have for 'prying'? Accident led me hither. I was seeking some means of egress into the court-yard when this old maniac assaulted me."

"Accident? Melcher tells me he heard the bolt creak."

"He did. I found a door in that deserted kitchen leading to the old tower. Curiosity prompted me to penetrate its depths, as I would have explored any other mediæval dungeon. I had no idea you could be angry about it or I should not have done so."

Herr von Heydeck grew pale as he heard that Leo had penetrated to the room in the tower. He paid no heed to his apology, the only thing that interested him was the fact that Leo had seen this room. "And what did you find there?" he asked in a trembling voice.

"A wretched, uninteresting, deserted peasant-room, which you however must know far better than I do, and I cannot conceive why my harmless curiosity should have so vexed you."

Leo's frank quiet explanation had its effect upon Herr von Heydeck; he saw that he had been hasty with his nephew, and in a much more composed manner "You are right," he said, "a wretched, uninteresting, deserted peasant-room; Melcher used to sleep in that tower-room, but it was too damp, and so it has not been used for years. There is nothing to see there. There is indeed no reason for my being vexed, but I do not like to have people ranging all over the castle, and I cannot see how you came here, since your rooms are in the other wing."

"I lost my way in the labyrinth of rooms as I was looking for the stairs leading to the courtyard, and I found myself in your study, whence I thought to descend into the court-yard by the winding staircase, which however brought me to the old kitchen. Thence I penetrated to the tower-room."

"I see, I see. Any one not familiar with the castle will very likely lose his way, but I advise you to be more careful in future. Melcher will not suffer any man except myself in his quarters. He is an idiot, but old as he is his muscles are iron; and if I had not chanced to come into the courtyard to look after you, you might have had the worst of it. It was fortunate that I came."

"It was indeed, for the old man and for myself, for I should have been sorry to do him an injury, and yet I might have been forced into it. How, sir, can you allow so dangerous a maniac to go at large in the castle?"

"He is not dangerous; he is a harmless idiot. There is no need to mind him, except when he is irritated and falls into a rage. Take no notice of him, and be careful to avoid this part of the castle, and he will not molest you. Look here, Melcher; this gentleman is my nephew; he will not come here again; you must let him alone."

With a vacant smile Melcher nodded to his master, and picked up and laid aside the knife, uttering, as he did so, some unmeaning sounds which were entirely unintelligible to Leo, but which Herr von Heydeck, acquainted with the Tyrolean patois, and used to the old man's indistinct utterance, seemed to understand, for he replied to them, "That's right, Melcher; only lock the door, and I will see you again by and by."

Then turning to Leo his uncle continued: "The old fellow is afraid you will intrude upon him again. Be careful not to do it, for it would throw him into a rage in which he would be quite capable of murder."

"I am not afraid of him," Leo quietly replied; "but I shall certainly not provoke him intentionally."

"Promise me that you will never try to open that door into the tower again," Herr von Heydeck said to his nephew as they passed out into the court-yard.

"Certainly; your wish is quite sufficient."

"Thank you. Then you will have nothing to fear from old Melcher. You have had but a sorry reception in Castle Reifenstein, Leo, but I trust you will forget it and yet feel yourself at home here. Now let us go directly to Hilda, in the garden."

Leo followed his uncle through the court-yard to the shady summer-house, where Hilda was awaiting them at the head of a delicately-spread table. She reproached her cousin laughingly for spending so long a time over his toilette,—her father had grown so impatient that he had gone in search of him.

Leo's excuses gave his uncle a pretext for inquiring more closely into the manner in which he had gone astray, and while Hilda poured out his coffee, Leo described minutely the way he had taken upon leaving his room. It appeared that instead of taking the door opening upon the staircase from the large centre apartment he had left it by one leading to the wing in which Herr von Heydeck had his study. This simple explanation entirely banished the mistrust which had been evident in his uncle's manner. The old man saw clearly that it had been with no desire to pry, but from accident, that Leo had penetrated into the hidden recesses of the castle. The frown on his brow disappeared, and he became genial and cordial.

Hilda listened eagerly to her cousin's account of his error; and when he told of reaching the deserted tower-room by the narrow passage from the old kitchen, she was greatly amazed. She had never even heard of such a room; she had been no farther than into Melcher's kitchen, and had not gone even there since her return from school, for she could perfectly remember, as a child, making the old servant very angry by going once alone into his kitchen and looking about her. Why he should be so jealous of the solitude of his kitchen, and why he should make such a mystery of the tower-room, Hilda could not divine.

Herr von Heydeck showed uneasiness at the continuation of the discussion with regard to Melcher and his tower-room, and he several times tried to change the subject of conversation; but Hilda's curiosity was excited, and she would recur to it. She was no less surprised by Melcher's outburst of insane fury than by the existence of the tower-room. She had always known the old servant as a good-humoured, harmless old fellow, ready to fulfil her every wish, and she asked so many questions about the attack he had made upon Leo, that her father, after fruitless efforts to change the subject, at last lost patience.

"Do not tease Leo with any more questions, my dear," he said. "The disagreeable scene is over; do not let us discuss it further."

"But I cannot imagine, papa, why Melcher, who never does harm to any one, should attack Leo with such fury just because he found him in his room."

"Why should we try to imagine the motives that rule the actions of an idiot?"

"But, papa, you know very well that Melcher is no idiot. He knows perfectly what to do and what not to do, and he certainly would not guard this tower-chamber, of which I never heard before, so jealously if he had not some reason for it."

"Perhaps he hoards his savings there, and is afraid of being robbed; perhaps he keeps some articles of special value to him hidden there. Who can tell what fancies he may have in his feeble brain? If he is not entirely idiotic, he is certainly not a responsible person: he has not the usual amount of intellect. It would be impossible to conceive of the workings of his small amount of mind. But indeed we have wasted too much time upon him. I do not want to hear another word about him. We have far other things to talk of with our Leo than of old Melcher, and his deserted tower-chamber with which we certainly have nothing to do."

Hilda could not gainsay so determined an expression of her father's will; she questioned Leo no further upon the forbidden topic, but listened attentively to the conversation which her father skilfully led to the subject which interested him most at the moment. Leo had to give an account of his life in K---, of his father the old colonel, and of his friends.

It was a matter of course that Delmar's name occurred frequently in his discourse.

This was what Herr von Heydeck wanted. For good reasons he was very anxious for exact intelligence concerning Paul's past life, intelligence which he could procure nowhere so easily as from Paul's most intimate friend, and to learn all possible particulars with regard to Delmar he had given the conversation its present turn.

The old man now had his features under perfect control; his face betrayed no emotion beyond a justifiable curiosity as he said, "Your friend interests me; he is very like a man, now dead, with whom I had relations at a most eventful period of my life. The memory of that time always agitates me, and therefore the sudden appearance of the young man was such a shock that I lost my self-control and transgressed the duties of hospitality. I should like to know whether the resemblance that so struck me is accidental, or whether your friend is really distantly connected with my old acquaintance."

"Delmar has no relatives; he is alone in the world."

"But he certainly must once have had relatives. Where was he born and educated? What are his circumstances? You would oblige me very much if you would tell me all you know of him, for, as I said, I am greatly interested in him."

Should Leo comply with this direct request? He called to mind the expression of intense hatred and of horror with which his uncle had regarded Paul. The quiet manner in which the old man now questioned him with regard to his friend's past did not impose upon him; he divined that the information he asked for had a deeper interest for his uncle than that excited by a chance resemblance, and yet he saw no reasons for concealing what he knew about Paul. Therefore he made up his mind to accede to his uncle's desire. He told all that he knew of his friend, and as he did so he involuntarily warmed with his topic; his love for Paul, and the esteem in which he held him, lent glowing colours to the picture that he drew. He observed with pleasure that not only did his uncle listen to him with interest, but that Hilda's eyes sparkled as she leaned forward in eager attention.

Leo had known Delmar from childhood; they had gone to the same school, and as they were near neighbours at home, they had grown to be inseparable playfellows, and afterwards loyal friends.

Paul's father had not been a wealthy man in the old schooldays. He had come to K--- with his only son to invest a small capital in some business. He lived only for this business, which he established and conducted with great success. He was so engrossed by it that he had not much time or attention to bestow upon little Paul, whose mother had died a few hours after the birth of her child.

Thus the boy, who was full of talent, grew up in his father's house over which an old housekeeper presided, left entirely to himself, and his heart would have been fairly starved had he not found in Leo a faithful friend upon whom he could lavish the tenderest affection.

During his school-life, however, a great change took place in his circumstances. His father embarked in daring speculations, and they were successful. Herr Delmar grew rich; the small business he had founded became the greatest banking establishment in K---. The merchant's time was more than ever absorbed by the cares of business in his unceasing efforts to accumulate wealth; he saw his son only at meal-times.

When Paul passed through his college examinations he devoted himself to the study of history and philosophy. He had pursued these with ardour for about a year, when his course of life suddenly changed. The young student had noticed for some time that his father's manner had been absent, and his air grave and even depressed; the reason of this was explained to him in a conversation he held with the head book-keeper of the banking-house. It appeared that Herr Delmar, with unequalled daring, had, in the hope of doubling his wealth, embarked in a giant speculation, involving not only his every penny, but also all the credit that he possessed. If it was unsuccessful complete ruin was unavoidable, and at present affairs looked gloomy. The money market was uncertain; the credit of the house was shaken. Herr Delmar was anxiously awaiting what the future might bring forth.

One day, as the banker was sitting, silent as usual, opposite his son at the dinner-table, letters

were brought to him so unfavourable in their contents that he broke the silence to say to his son, with a glance of irritation, "If you had turned your attention to business instead of studying philosophy and such stuff, you might now have been of some service to me!" He made no further remark, but arose from table, leaving his untouched dinner, and shut himself up in his office.

The next morning when the office opened, Paul was standing behind a desk,—he had applied himself to his father's business, and he then received from Herr Delmar the first look and smile of affection that he could remember in his life.

The young man was endowed with so keen an intellect, so excellent a memory, and such power of ready comprehension, that he soon mastered the difficulties of a commercial career. Under the skilful tuition of the head book-keeper he soon became an admirable business man, and when, a few weeks later, his father, oppressed with care, was stricken down by illness, he was perfectly capable of conducting his affairs, with the assistance of the faithful book-keeper.

This time of trial developed all the strength and intellectual vigour of Paul's character. Under his prudent but brilliant direction the great banking-house passed successfully through the dangerous crisis. As bold, but not as venturesome, as his father, he avoided all too daring speculations: he established the business upon a firm basis; and when Herr Delmar, though only half convalescent, was driven by anxiety to leave his bed for his office, he found, to his astonishment, that all peril was past. The great banking-house had emerged from the crisis with greater wealth and firmer credit than ever.

But Herr Delmar had left his bed too soon. A relapse was the consequence: recovery was impossible; although too feeble to take any part in the conduct of his affairs, he lived on confined to his couch for three years longer. At the end of this time, in the midst of a night of intense suffering, he felt that his last hour was at hand. He had Paul awakened and summoned to his bedside. He was in entire possession of his faculties; his long illness had been powerless to weaken his vigorous intellect and the conviction that he was dying never for a moment disturbed the repose of his mind.

He smiled affectionately at Paul when he entered the room, and replied to his inquiries by a cordial pressure of the hand. "I sent for you," he said, in a failing voice, "because I know I shall not live until morning. I want to thank you for the filial affection you have always shown me. To you I owe all that I possess; through you I have been enabled to establish my house; your unselfish devotion preserved my wealth for me when my previous good fortune threatened to leave me. Your care and prudence have tripled my property during these years of sickness when I have been unable to attend to business, and it is no more than just and right that you should be the only heir to the fortune you have so contributed to make. There is no one in the world with any just claim upon my estate. While I was poor my distant relatives took no notice of me, and since I have grown rich I have treated them in the same manner. You alone therefore, my dear Paul, will inherit my property, and with my lawyer's help, I have made a will to confirm you in the possession of your inheritance if any unjustifiable claims should be made upon my estate.

"I see that you do not comprehend why a will should be necessary when, as my only son, you are legally my only heir. I could explain this to you, but I beg you not to require me to do so. You have always honoured and loved me as a father should be honoured and loved by a son. I thank you for it from my very soul, and my last wish is that you should retain the same affection for my memory."

Paul would indeed have liked some explanation of his father's strange words, but he did not venture to ask for them, and a few more words of gratitude for this forbearance were the last uttered by the dying man. He soon after fell asleep with a smile upon his pale lips, and did not wake again.

The day after his father's death Paul received a visit from one of the best-known lawyers in K---, who came to read to him the will which he had drawn up a year before at Herr Delmar's desire. To Paul's disappointment it contained no explanation of his father's last words, but on the contrary surprised all who were present at the opening. In the introduction to the will Herr Delmar stated that Paul had always performed all the duties of a son with the greatest self-forgetfulness; that the maintenance and increase of his business were owing to the young man's skill and devotion; and that therefore, and not because he was his son, the testator declared him his sole heir. At the close of the will Herr Delmar expressly mentioned that he left behind him no relatives legally entitled to any portion of his estate or who could have the slightest claim upon Paul.

The singular wording of the testament caused considerable talk in legal circles in K---, and the lawyer who had drawn it up was of course applied to by many people, and indeed by Paul himself, for an explanation, but he assured every one that he knew nothing; he had strictly followed Herr Delmar's instructions in drawing up the will, the wording of which was the testator's own.

Why Herr Delmar should have taken such pains to secure his property to a son who was legally his heir remained a mystery, since no one appeared to put forward any claim to the young man's inheritance.

Thus Paul entered into undisputed possession of his father's immense wealth. There was no

longer any reason for his continuing to carry on a business, in which he had never had the least interest, merely to accumulate money. To the surprise of every one on 'Change, he disposed of the entire business to a stock company at a very reasonable price, and invested his capital in safe government securities, in bonds, mortgages, and real estate. This done, he devoted all his energies to scientific research.

He lived in K--- the life of a man of wealth. He filled his magnificent villa with the finest paintings and statuary, and spent enormous sums upon his library. The greater part of his income, however, was expended in satisfying what he called his egotism,--his love of self,--which prompted him to purchase whenever he could the pleasure of assisting the poor in the quietest manner possible.

"And as an egotist to whom no sacrifice seems great in the interest of a friend,--whose aid is always ready whenever aid is necessary,--Paul Delmar lives in K---, where every one who knows him loves and respects him. I am proud that he honours me with his friendship." Thus Leo concluded his account of his friend.

Herr von Heydeck had listened to every word, and when his nephew had finished he nodded in approval; his face wore a very different expression from that which had animated it while he was questioning Leo with regard to Paul. He even smiled quite gayly. "Your friend seems to be an admirable fellow," he said. "I am very glad, doubly so, for I think I have some reason for special interest in him. I will tell you about it hereafter. Very rich you say he is,--a millionaire, eh?"

"I do not know the amount of his wealth; he never speaks of it, and seems to value it but little. In K--- he is said to be worth four million thalers at least. He is the wealthiest man there."

"Four millions!" exclaimed Herr von Heydeck. "That is enormous! I had no idea of it! Four millions! Then he certainly does not need any more. He would not care for a few hundred thousand guilders, and therefore will not---"

Herr von Heydeck suddenly paused and cast a timid glance at Leo, who looked inquiringly at him expecting the end of his remark. The old man did not finish it, but arose and, half turning away, said without meeting Leo's eyes, "But what nonsense I am talking! What is this Paul Delmar to me? He is your friend, and as such shall be a welcome guest at the castle; but don't ask me to interest myself about him. I am an old man, often ill, and unaccustomed to social intercourse. My head aches if I converse for any length of time, and then I grow very confused. That is why I receive no visitors. My head aches to-day. You must forgive me if I retire to my room. To-morrow we will talk more together; to-day I must leave you to Hilda. Good-evening."

He waited for no reply, but nodded to Leo without looking at him, and left the summer-house. Passing quickly through the garden, he was soon lost to sight among the shrubbery.

CHAPTER X.

When Hilda left him, Paul Delmar walked on quickly down the mountain. The pathway was charming and well worthy of more attention than Delmar bestowed upon it. It passed by turns through groups of tall larches, and then through low shrubbery, where there were continual glimpses of the lovely valley, with the shining snow-peaks in the distance. But sensitive as Paul was to the charms of mountain-scenery, just now his mind was too much occupied with his late reception at Castle Reifenstein to allow of his enjoying this walk down the mountain as he would have done at another time.

And yet what most occupied his thoughts was not what one might have supposed would have made the deepest impression upon him,--the strange and unjustifiable dislike shown him by Herr von Heydeck,--no, the farewell words of his charming guide were what he dwelt upon,--"At least I will not be an evil fairy to you. Good-bye, and come soon again."

How lovely Hilda had looked as she said those words! They were not a merely conventional phrase: they were sincere. Of course he must do her bidding; he should indeed have to repeat his visit to the castle on Leo's account. Only on Leo's account?

He suddenly experienced a sensation almost of pain. Leo had, it is true, come to the Tyrol only in compliance with his father's desire, and firmly resolved never to further his uncle's scheme. But could he remain faithful to this resolve after he had seen Hilda, the 'Fair one with the golden locks'? Surely her grace and loveliness must conquer the distaste Leo had for the union desired by his uncle; he never could withstand such charms.

Paul sighed profoundly as he reflected thus. "He is a lucky fellow,--Leo!" he said to himself. "Happiness drops into his grasp without any effort on his part. He needs no help from me. He must soon see that the union he would have avoided will be his greatest blessing. What have I to do at the castle? It is better that I should escape from the enchanted ground before I am too surely entangled in the spells of the enchantress! It would be base in me to place a pebble in Leo's path towards happiness,--I, who came to serve him if I could. Happy Leo!"

He sighed again. He was sorry, near as he was to Castle Reifenstein, not to be able to avail himself of the invitation of the charming fairy of the place, but loyalty to Leo forbade his seeing Hilda again.

Still, would she not have just cause for offence if he took no notice of her kind invitation? Oh, she would soon forget the stranger, who was to her only her cousin's friend. And he would try to forget her, although he doubted his power to succeed in the attempt.

Paul was so deep in reflections of this kind that he hardly thought of where he was going, and was greatly surprised at a turning in the path to see before him the grassy opening where he had left Herwarth. At the same moment he was hailed by Kuno, who had thought him long in returning.

"Here you are at last!" he exclaimed. "I was afraid you had lost your way among the mountains."

His call aroused Paul completely from his reverie, and he was instantly himself again. Herwarth must not guess at the gloomy nature of his thoughts, and he replied,--

"You are a model of wisdom, noble knight, and a true prophet, who must of course be without honour in his own country. We did lose our way up there among the rocks, where we should have been at this moment if a golden-haired angel had not descended and borne us aloft to Paradise, where I left our Leo, while I returned to this sordid earth to succour a wounded knight. How are you? Is your foot better?"

"You did get to the castle then? And you have seen Leo's lovely cousin? Tell me about it."

"All in due order; you shall hear everything, and the account shall be as full and detailed as you desire, but you must wait for it until we are back at the inn. First answer me, as a docile patient should, how is your foot?"

"Better; it does not pain me now. I think I shall be able to walk very well after my rest."

Herwarth arose, but his first attempt to walk renewed his pain. "It is worse than I thought," he said. "I must beg you for your arm to help me even on the short way back to the inn."

"Shall I not get some of the people from the village with a litter?" Delmar asked anxiously. "The injury seems graver than we suspected. I am afraid your ankle is broken."

"No, it is not; I am sure of that. I shall certainly not be carried through the village on a litter like a dying warrior because of a slight sprain or bruise. If you will give me your arm I will hobble back to the inn without more delay."

"As you please. His own way is a man's kingdom of heaven; and if you choose to hobble through Tausens, you shall do it."

Propped upon Delmar's arm, Herwarth contrived, although with great pain and frequent pauses for rest, to walk back to the inn. Just before reaching it he paused once more, not however to rest this time, but in astonishment. "I must be dreaming!" he exclaimed. "Look up, Delmar, at the fourth window of our inn. Is it possible? Fräulein Aline von Schlicht, and Fräulein Schommer."

Delmar, whose eyes had been fixed upon the road, in his desire to help his companion, looked up, and laughed aloud when he recognized the two young girls. "Fräulein Eva, sure enough!" he said. "What a charming meeting we shall have! 'Tis a pity that Leo did not take up his quarters down here with us; he would take such a childlike delight in the happy chance that has brought the fair Eva to Tausens. The presence of my friend Bertram is all that is wanting to make the party quite perfect."

"It is not wanting: there the scoundrel goes!" Herwarth cried eagerly; and he was right. Delmar recognized Bertram in the distance walking along the road, his head bent as if lost in thought.

"True! there goes the worthy soul!" Delmar said, laughing. "What say you, Kuno? shall I bestow a few more attentions upon him for the sake of his fair betrothed? The fellow ought to be punished for his insolence in crossing our path again."

"Let him alone, Delmar. Why provoke gossip? He probably does not cross our path intentionally."

"As I have before had occasion to remark, you are a model of wisdom, noble knight. You are

right; we will let the rogue alone. Let us leave him to all the joys of his betrothal,--to the lovely Eva. It is an admirable match. Lean more heavily on my arm, Herwarth. It is time you were on the sofa. Come!"

Kuno summoned up all his resolution to endure the violent pain in his foot that he might not seem a weakling in the eyes of the ladies, who were regarding him with great compassion. He could not bear his weight upon it, however, and even with Delmar's assistance he had great difficulty in gaining the house, where he took what consolation he could from Aline's pitying smile as she returned his salutation.

More carried than led by Delmar, he reached the apartment Paul had engaged for their sitting-room, and sank exhausted upon the sofa. Delmar did all that he could to make him comfortable, relieving the foot of its boot and swathing the ankle in wet bandages, after which he declared his intention of going in search of medical aid. "If the postmaster's tale be true," said he, "the physician here, Dr. Putzer, although a thorough-paced vagabond, is a man of skill and experience. I am going to find him."

"What trouble you take for me, Paul! How shall I thank you?"

But Paul had already left the room. In the hall he met the postmaster, who showed him the way to the doctor's house. At the inner door he encountered Bertram just returning from his walk, and saluted him after his usual mocking fashion.

"Rejoiced to see you, Herr von Bertram. The tender regard which has prompted you to follow me thus touches me and deserves recognition. I trust your charming betrothed is well. What refreshment I shall have in the contemplation of your new-born bliss! It will be a lesson in the noble art of love."

Bertram replied to this sneer by a furious glance, but he suppressed his rage and only asked humbly, "May I ask for a few moments of conversation in private with you, Herr Delmar?"

"What can we possibly have to discuss in private, sir?"

"I beg you to listen to me for a few minutes."

"Your modesty shall receive its reward. You may accompany me in a short walk I am obliged to take through the village, and on the way you can tell me what you have to say. I have no more time for you."

With these words Paul left the inn, leaving Bertram to follow him, and rightly suspecting what the ex-lieutenant (he had been forced to leave his regiment) had to say.

Bertram walked at his side for some time without speaking. He had been debating with himself for the last hour as to how he should approach his detested enemy, how induce him to be silent. He had prepared himself for this interview with the greatest care, and yet, now that he found himself confronted with Delmar's mocking smile, he forgot all the fine phrases he had made ready, and did not know how to begin.

"Well?" Delmar asked, when the two men had walked for some distance without one word from Bertram. "You are silent? If you have anything to say to me, I advise you to do so quickly, or you may lose the opportunity."

"I will not detain you long, Herr Delmar," Bertram humbly replied. "Have patience for a few minutes. As unhappy chance will have it we meet thus unexpectedly in this retired spot."

"Chance! and you call it unhappy? Then it was not a desire for my amiable society which attracted you hither? Herr von Bertram, it wounds me to be thus undeceived."

"You sneer, Herr Delmar, and I cannot answer you, for I am powerless against you. Is it honourable thus to triumph over the defenceless?"

"No; you are right, and I take shame to myself that I have deserved the reproof. Tell me briefly and without circumlocution what you desire of me, and you shall be safe from my contempt for the next few minutes, but take care not to cross my path again; my promise holds good only for this interview. What do you want? Answer me at once and to the point."

"I wish to implore you not to let my betrothed know of the means by which you forced me to make the declaration to Herr Leo von Heydeck which drove me from the army. Have compassion upon me, Herr Delmar!"

"Do you deserve compassion?"

"If I sinned my punishment has been great. I never injured you, and yet you have been the one to give the deathblow to my honour. Do you wish to rob me of my last hope in life? You have terribly avenged the insult to your friend. I cannot resent your doing so, but I implore you not to drive me to despair. Do not take from me the last thing left to me in life,--the love of my betrothed!"

"Be honest, Herr von Bertram. If you really wish me to spare you, answer me frankly. Is it really the love of the fair Eva which you prize so highly? Is it not her millions which are so dear to you?"

"I give you my word of honour, Herr Delmar----"

"Let your honour alone if you wish me to believe you. I want a frank answer."

"I assure you that I love my betrothed from the depths of my soul. It is this love that drove me to the course that ruined me. I hoped by a duel with Herr von Heydeck to win Fräulein Schommer's gratitude and affection."

"You knew that Leo was principled against duelling."

"I was convinced that he would prove false to his principles. You may judge of the sincerity of my love for Eva by my submission to her wishes. Without your intervention I should have offered an apology to Herr von Heydeck, the same in substance with the one you insisted upon, although couched in language less humiliating to me. Fräulein Schommer required this of me when she consented to our betrothal."

"Really? That then was no empty subterfuge of yours. Fräulein Schommer required that you should make an apology?"

"She did. Only upon this condition would she yield an assent to my suit."

"Strange! I had not credited the young lady with such delicacy of feeling. This information so exalts her in my opinion that I doubt whether I have a right to conceal from her what manner of man he is to whom she has entrusted her future happiness."

"You will not use my frankness against me? You will not ruin me because, in accordance with your wish, I have told you the entire truth? You could not take so mean an advantage of me, Herr Delmar? On that terrible day you gave me hopes that you would spare me if I complied with your demand. I did comply, to the annihilation of my future career. Will you take the last thing that I possess from me, when you promised to spare me?"

"I expressly told you that I would promise you nothing."

"But you justified me in hoping."

"That I dispute; nevertheless, I will consider the matter. I have made you no promises, and I will make you none. For the present I see no reason for pointing out to Fräulein Eva the worthlessness or the excellence of the man upon whom she has bestowed her fair hand; if time should develop any reason for my doing so, I shall act as I see fit. And now, no more of this. We have reached the house I came to seek, and I have no desire to prolong this interview. One more question. Are you going to stay any length of time at Tausens?"

"I do not know; Fräulein Schommer seems to think of doing so."

"Does Fräulein Schommer know that Herr von Heydeck is staying here?"

"Yes; and for that very reason she has determined to remain. She does not wish to appear to avoid Herr von Heydeck."

"She shows pluck, upon my word! Then we can hardly avoid seeing and speaking with each other occasionally; but I would advise you, Herr von Bertram, to spare me such annoyance as far as you can. The seldomer we meet the better it will be for you." And not waiting for a reply, Delmar, having reached Dr. Putzer's house, left Bertram without another word. Then, opening a gate in the low iron railing, he entered a front garden, at the end of which was an arbour, where sat a lady and gentleman.

Dr. Putzer's house, the style of which was more pretentious than that of most of the houses in the village, lay at quite a distance from the road, from which it was separated by a large, carefully-cultivated garden, that, with its tasteful flower-beds and various rare plants certainly not to be found in any other of the village gardens, was worthy of more attention than Delmar now bestowed upon it. Without a glance at the fragrant and beautiful shrubs on either side of his path, he walked directly along the white-pebbled way leading to the arbour, where, as he suspected, the doctor was.

His approach was unnoticed. The lady sitting in the arbour was busy with some embroidery,--so busy that she did not look up; the gentleman was leaning back in one arm-chair with his feet resting upon another, comfortably resigning himself to the enjoyment of a cigar. He sat, or rather he reclined, with his back towards the approach from the garden.

Delmar paused at the entrance of the arbour; although he had taken no pains to tread softly, neither the lady nor the gentleman had heard his step. If he had ever cared to imagine what this couple were like, the reality would have accorded well with the fancied presentment.

The doctor's wife was still an imposing woman; indeed, her well-preserved features would

have been beautiful if they had not been disfigured by her girlish cap with pink ribbons, and quantities of pearl-powder and rouge. The old woman's efforts to look young destroyed the charm that her regular features might else have possessed.

Her youthful dress, fluttering all over with ribbons and fringes and lace, bore testimony to a craving for admiration, all the more ridiculous because, in the retired village where she lived, there was not probably a man, woman, or child who was not perfectly aware that she had long passed fifty.

In striking contrast to the extreme elegance of his wife's appearance Dr. Putzer's dress displayed no care whatever. The white summer coat that covered his broad shoulders was rumpled and dirty; two buttons were gone from the front, and it hung loosely about his huge figure. His still abundant coarse sandy hair was in wild disorder, and the spectator was led to suspect that the doctor did not often come in contact with soap and water.

Dr. Putzer was not handsome, although one could see that he might once have been a personable man. His fat, flabby face had the purple hue of an habitual drinker; his light-gray eyes were dull and watery, and his figure, which must formerly have been good, was marred by corpulence.

Paul took in this worthy couple at a glance; he did not need to scan them long to come to a conclusion with regard to them. Their distinguishing characteristics were patent to view,—the ridiculous vanity of the woman and the man's indolence and love of eating and drinking.

For one moment Paul hesitated. Could he confide his friend to this drunkard's surgical skill? On the table beside the man was a half-empty bottle of wine; he had evidently been partaking freely. But Delmar called to mind that the postmaster, in his story, had laid great emphasis upon the fact that the doctor, in spite of his dissipation and general worthlessness, was a skilful physician,—the best in all the country round,—and this reflection confirmed his resolve. "Have I the pleasure of seeing Herr Doctor Putzer?" he asked courteously, lifting his hat.

The doctor's wife looked up at this unexpected address, and at sight of Paul uttered a slight scream of surprise; the embroidery dropped from her hand, and she stared at the stranger with wide-open eyes. If her cheeks had not been plastered with white and red paint, Paul, who noticed her startled look, would have seen her become ghastly pale.

The doctor, too, seemed strangely startled by Paul's appearance. Upon first hearing himself addressed he turned his head heavily and clumsily, but with one glance at his visitor he started to his feet with a celerity that was almost comical in so corpulent a personage. He ran his hands through his dishevelled bushy hair, and his little gray eyes were riveted upon Paul's face. "Holy Apostles!" he cried, in terror. "Who are you, sir? What do you want of me?"

Here was another strange reception, precisely similar to that accorded to Delmar by old Herr von Heydeck. Was Tausens then so secluded from the world that the appearance of an ordinary stranger brought with it terror and dismay? Just as the doctor and his wife were now doing had Herr von Heydeck stared Paul in the face.

Paul could conceive no reason for the extraordinary manner in which he was received in Tausens: he would have liked to make some inquiries with regard to it; but all that he wanted at present was to procure medical aid for Kuno as quickly as possible, and he therefore answered, "My name, which can possess but little interest for you, is Delmar. I come to request your services for a friend who has injured his foot among the mountains; will you have the kindness to return with me to the inn, where he is in great need of your skill?"

"Delmar?" the doctor muttered, seeming to heed nothing but the name in the young man's reply. "Your name is Delmar, then,—not Menotti?"

Delmar gazed at him in surprise; what made the man think of this name of Menotti? Paul remembered to have heard it, but he could not recall at the moment when or where; he only knew that he had heard the name lately of a Count Menotti, if he were not mistaken.

"Why do you mention the name of Menotti?" he asked, curiously.

"Then it is not your name?" the doctor repeated, without answering.

"No; as I told you, my name is Delmar,—Paul Delmar."

"Strange! The resemblance is most striking. But what am I thinking of? Young Count Menotti cannot be more than twenty years of age, and the younger brother is a cripple. But the resemblance! Rosy, what do you say to it?"

The doctor's wife said nothing, she only nodded her head, never turning her eyes away from Delmar. She scanned his features with eager scrutiny, as if to stamp them upon her memory.

For Paul the whole scene was extremely annoying, he especially disliked being stared at by this odious woman; he did not like charades, and to find himself a principal actor in one was very disagreeable. He asked rather sharply, "Who is this Count Menotti whom I so strangely

resemble?"

"A very distinguished nobleman," the doctor replied, continuing to regard Delmar with curiosity, although he had regained his indolent calm of manner, out of which it needed some special occurrence to startle him. "You need not be ashamed of the resemblance, Herr Delmar, Count Menotti was a very handsome man."

"Was a handsome man? Is he no longer living, then?"

"He died a few years ago. 'Tis strange that you have never heard of him. Your resemblance to him is so great that I could have sworn you were akin to him. No son could look more like a father. And you know nothing of him,--you never heard of him?"

"I think I have heard the name, although I cannot now remember when or where. But let us drop this resemblance at present, Herr Doctor; at some future time I hope you will tell me more of Count Menotti. I shall be some weeks here in Tausens, and shall have abundant opportunity of conversing with you about this Count whom I so greatly resemble. At present let me beg you to come to the inn with me as quickly as possible to the assistance of my friend."

"Excuse me; in my astonishment at sight of you I forgot. Injured his foot, you say? Pray tell me as briefly as possible how it occurred."

Paul told, and the doctor listened attentively, now and then interrupting him with an intelligent question. He then declared himself ready to accompany Paul immediately to the inn, only asking him to wait until he should fetch some bandages from the house, whither he repaired with more briskness than could have been expected of his ungainly form.

Paul was left alone with the doctor's wife. He tried to converse with the lady, but in vain; he received such curt replies to his few general remarks as made it plain that she did not mean to be drawn into conversation with the stranger, although she continued to regard him with the same wearisome curiosity. Therefore Delmar was more than content when the doctor's clumsy tread was heard approaching from the house. He had hurriedly made a kind of toilette, and the dirty linen coat was replaced by one of cloth, rather more respectable in appearance.

"Here I am, at your service, Herr Delmar," he said. "I am ready to accompany you, but I must beg you to walk slowly as my size forbids speed."

Delmar took leave of the lady with a courteous inclination, which she did not return, and then walked beside the doctor down the pebbled path to the road. At the gate he turned and saw that Frau Putzer had arisen from her seat and was standing at the entrance of the arbour, still watching him.

Paul was annoyed by so disagreeable a degree of attention, and walked on in silence, while the doctor also seemed to feel no inclination for conversation; and thus they reached the inn with the exchange of but very few words upon the way.

They found Kuno sitting at the open window, awaiting them impatiently. He arose to greet the doctor, but violent pain in his foot made him wince as he did so. The doctor saw this, and immediately took charge most intelligently of the case. "The pain is severe," he said. "Let us see what is the matter. The bone is not broken; that I could see as you arose. Lean upon me as heavily as you please, my shoulders are broad, and I will lead you to the sofa, where we will make a thorough examination."

He spoke with calm and kindly decision. As a physician he perfectly understood how to inspire confidence in his skill and experience. Kuno, although he had been prejudiced against the man by what he had heard of him from the postmaster, could not but yield to the influence exerted by him upon all his patients. He did just as he was bidden, and a thorough examination of the foot was made.

"Well, doctor, what is it? Is there any serious injury?" Delmar asked anxiously, when the doctor had at last finished his investigations.

"No, I can reassure you; it is only a sprain. If Herr von Herwarth is a docile patient all will be right in a couple of weeks; if not, I cannot say when the foot will be well again. For two weeks you must not use the foot at all. You ought to lie in bed. But this would I suppose be asking too much, and I will allow you to recline on the sofa, begging you upon no account to touch the injured foot to the floor. If you will follow my directions, I will promise that you shall walk again in two weeks, and that after a month you will hardly remember the injury."

"Am I not to walk for two weeks?" Kuno asked.

"Not for two weeks. I will not assume any responsibility in the matter unless my orders are strictly obeyed."

"They shall be obeyed. I will answer for it," Delmar interposed. To his own surprise, he found himself agreeably impressed by the doctor's manner. "A patient is not an individual, but a case; he should have no will of his own. I will take care of him. I shall see life from a new point of view."

I will enact my part of nurse well. It will be a fresh sensation in this everlasting monotony. Do not be anxious about this amiable young fellow, doctor. He shall obey orders, put on bandages, hobble or sit still, just as you command."

"Excellent! Then I will answer for the result," the doctor said. "I see that my patient is in good hands. I may leave him. To-morrow afternoon I will come again and bandage the ankle. Until then, farewell!"

CHAPTER XI.

Dr. Putzer yawned and stretched his huge limbs as he left Herwarth's room and the door was closed behind him. In a sick-room and in intercourse with strangers he was a different man from the Dr. Putzer of private life. Towards a patient and with those whose rank in life was superior to his own and with whom he had not yet become familiar, he displayed a gentle courtesy which was entirely foreign to his usual manner, and which was quite attractive. Whenever he pleased he could thus assume the air and bearing of a man of refinement and culture; but as soon as he was left to himself, or to his daily associates, he threw off all such self-restraint and took no pains to conceal his innate coarseness of nature.

He descended the stairs, which creaked beneath his heavy tread, and opening the door of the parlour, called, in thundering tones, "Nannerl! Where the deuce is the lazy hussy! A half-measure of red!" he added, as the maid came hurrying from the kitchen. "And send the landlord here. I have something to say to him."

As he finished he pinched the girl's red cheek with an ugly leer and laughed coarsely as she recoiled from his familiarity. Then turning into the parlour he settled himself comfortably in his usual position,—leaning back in one of the large strong chairs, with his feet on another of them.

Nannerl soon appeared with the wine, which she placed upon the table, carefully avoiding, as she did so, any contact with the man whose coarse familiarity she dreaded.

While she was thus setting out the wine Hansel entered the room, and observing her annoyance, said angrily, "Let Nannerl alone, Herr Doctor; your old head ought to teach you better than to tease a poor girl."

The doctor was not at all offended by the rough rebuke, but with a laugh, offered a glass of wine to the postmaster. "That's right. Hansel," he said. "Keep strict watch over your maid's virtue. Take a sip to cool your anger, and then we'll have a gossip. Fine doings here. Hansel! Two four-horse carriages have not been seen together for many a year in Tausens; and a couple of strangers into the bargain. I have just left one of them, who has sprained his ankle."

"I know it. Herr Delmar asked me where you lived."

"Exactly; Herr Delmar came for me. Do you know Herr Delmar? where he comes from? who he is?"

"No, I don't, but I know his face, although I can't remember where I have seen it."

"Do you remember Count Menotti, Hansel?"

Scarcely had the doctor uttered this name when Hansel struck the table with his fist and exclaimed, "That's the man! The Count Menotti! Yes, yes; just so he looked with his black eyes and yellow face! Now I see! He may call himself Delmar if he will; he's a Count Menotti for all that. That's why he wanted me to tell him all those old stories,—about Herr von Heydeck, and his first wife, and Count Menotti, and the child that died of smallpox."

The doctor suddenly started from his reclining posture and frowned furiously at the postmaster. "And you told him all that, you cursed old blab!" he exclaimed angrily.

"It's no secret. Herr Delmar may as well know what everybody else knows," Hansel replied stoutly.

The doctor's wrath was not at all appeased, but he made an effort to control any further expression of it, and rejoined, "True, Hansel, it is no secret, but where's the use of raking up such old forgotten tales? Well, it can't be helped,—only I should really like to know what you did tell him."

The postmaster was not perfectly comfortable at this request. When he called to mind his long conversation with the strangers, and the extraordinary eagerness that Herr Delmar had shown in inducing him to tell all that he knew of the life at the castle and of Herr von Heydeck, he could not help thinking that the stranger who was so very like Count Menotti had cross-examined him very skilfully, and the doctor's request strengthened him in this conviction.

Why had the doctor been so vexed to learn that Hansel had told of Herr von Heydeck's dead child? Try as he would to seem composed the Herr Doctor could not conceal his agitation. He was evidently afraid that the postmaster had told too much, and honest Hansel began to share this fear himself.

The poor fellow found himself in a very disagreeable situation; if he refused to tell what he had told the strangers, the doctor would suspect matters of being worse than they really were, and yet if he informed him of all that he had said, matters were bad enough, for he had told enough to make the doctor his bitter enemy. It was very hard to give the right answer, but something must be done, and Hansel did his best, extricating himself from his dilemma with greater cunning than would have been thought possible for him. He told the doctor faithfully of all he had said to Herr Delmar about Herr von Heydeck, the life at the castle, about the first mistress, and her relations with Count Menotti. He reported also that he had spoken of the report that Herr von Heydeck was by no means sorry for his child's death, but he never hinted that he had once made mention in the narrative of the doctor or his wife.

Hansel had the reputation in Tausens of being so honest and simple-minded a fellow that it never occurred to the doctor to doubt his frankness, and his mind was set at rest with regard to the extent of Hansel's revelations; not so, however, as to the stranger's motive in questioning the postmaster. It could not, the doctor was convinced, have been ordinary curiosity.

What could have interested the strangers in Herr von Heydeck? Delmar's striking resemblance to Count Menotti could be no mere chance freak of nature. Such resemblances between strangers in blood do occur, it is true, but they are very exceptional, and Delmar's curiosity regarding matters connected with Castle Reifenstein showed plainly that this was not one of the exceptions.

But if Delmar were related to Count Menotti, and had not come by chance to Tausens, what could he want there?

A sudden suspicion flashed upon the doctor's mind, but he rejected it immediately,—it was so wild and improbable; still, Delmar's presence made him excessively uncomfortable. To conceal this discomfort from the postmaster, he talked and drank incessantly. The measure of wine was emptied and refilled several times, while the doctor's bloated face grew redder and redder, his eyes more watery, and his speech thicker. He tried to learn more of the strangers from Hansel, but in vain; the postmaster knew nothing of them except what he had heard from their guides from the Zillenthal, and this he freely imparted without in the least satisfying the other's curiosity. In his good humour the innkeeper was recounting every particular for the fourth time, although he could not conceive what interest it could have for the doctor, when he was interrupted by a message from the doctor's wife.

A servant reported that her mistress was very much annoyed that the doctor was staying so long from home, and that she begged he would return thither immediately, since a message from the castle was awaiting him.

The doctor started up and, pouring down a last glassful of wine, set out for his home, but his progress thitherward was not of the swiftest, for his gait was unsteady and his head was confused,—he could not collect his senses when he tried to divine whether this message from the castle had any connection with Herr Delmar's arrival at Tausens.

The doctor's wife awaited her husband in the arbour, where she had been ever since his departure. She was standing at the entrance looking out for him; but as she saw him approach with a heavy, unsteady gait, she received him with anything but a smile of welcome, and the words, spoken in a tone of profound contempt, "The brute is drunk again!"

The doctor was perhaps not entirely unaccustomed to such tender addresses, at all events he did not resent her words, but replied quite humbly, "No, Rosy dear, sober,—perfectly sober,—'help me God,' the thickness of his utterance belying his words.

His wife took no notice of his reply, but, with the expression of contempt upon her face intensified, she ordered him harshly, "Go to the brook this instant, and when you are fit to hear it I have a message for you."

The doctor ventured no word of remonstrance; with wavering steps he went towards the spot where, to the left of the arbour, a mountain-brook was pouring through a hollow tree into a stone basin in the grass. He held his hot hand under the icy stream and hesitated for a moment, but at the sound of a sharp 'make haste' from the arbour he delayed no longer, but stooped and let the water pour over his head. His breath came in quick, loud pants, his face grew dark purple in hue, and his limbs trembled,—it was a hard ordeal, but he bore the shock bravely, and let the icy water stream over his brow and temples for several minutes. Then he stood erect, and shaking his

dishevelled shock of hair like a dog emerging from the water, dried his face with his cotton pocket-handkerchief, and went back to his affectionate wife in the arbour. The cold bath had produced its effect,--his gait was steadier and his head clearer.

"Are you sober enough now to understand what is said to you?"

"Sober enough; but I shall have a stroke one of these days."

"Drink less then, and you will not have to resort to such violent measures to make yourself sober. You are to go to the castle. Herr von Heydeck has sent for you."

"I am not his slave; let him wait."

"You'd better go to the brook again,--you can't be sober yet."

"I am sober, I tell you; but I can't see why I should always dance to his piping. Let him come to me if he wants to talk with me."

"You'll never be anything but a blockhead in spite of all your book-learning. Don't you see that we must keep straight with the old man? We are all in the same danger, and must stand together."

"What danger?"

"What danger, stupid? Have you no grain of understanding? Don't you know who this man is who calls himself Delmar, and what he wants here in Tausens? You recognized him at once as the son of Count Menotti!"

"Yes; but I can't for the life of me see----"

"Of course not,--but I can tell you! He is the son of Count Menotti and the noble Frau von Heydeck, the heir of Castle Reifenstein, and he has come for his inheritance!"

His wife's words did not surprise the doctor; the same idea had occurred to him, but he had rejected it as impossible. Now the uttered words gave it distinct form in his mind, and he began to yield it credence. "I thought of that," he said, reflectively; "but it is impossible. The boy died long since."

"The old fellow invented that tale for us. Rely upon it he is alive, and has come to claim his own. It is for this the old man wishes to see you, and you must go to him, but take care what you say. You must make him confess that he lied to us. You must threaten him,--you can do anything with such a coward. But you must not break with him, for we are all alike in danger. You wrote the certificate of death,--the man will revenge himself upon you as well as upon the old scoundrel at the castle. Try to get as much money as you can out of the old fellow. If the worst comes to the worst we must leave Tausens,--I have no mind to end my days in a jail."

"It wouldn't be as bad as that."

"It would be bad enough. That man will have no pity for us. I saw that in his bold black eyes. And you in your stupidity made matters as desperate as you could by letting him see that you recognized him at once."

"I was so startled----"

"That's no excuse. But that's over, and we can't help it; we must do as well as we can. If you are really sober, go immediately to the castle. Speak as little as possible, and get all that you can out of the old man's cowardice. I wish I were going in your stead, for it's likely you'll spoil all. Now go!"

The doctor's wife thus dismissed her liege lord, who did as he was bidden, although he had but little inclination at present for an interview with Herr von Heydeck. The fumes of the wine he had drunk were still clouding his intellect; he could not collect his thoughts as he wished, and the way to the castle was long and steep.

The warm July day had hardly grown cooler at its close. The sun, it is true, had already set behind the mountains, but the air of the valley was heavy and sultry, and made every step a weariness to Dr. Putzer's massive frame.

He was frequently obliged to rest while on the way, and heat and fatigue combined to increase his irritation against the lord of the castle. When at last he gained the bridge leading across the chasm, old Melcher met him, and in the broken babble which few could understand, but which was perfectly intelligible to the doctor's accustomed ears, gave him to understand that his master had been impatiently awaiting him for more than an hour.

A savage oath was the doctor's only reply, but he hastened his steps, and passed directly across the court-yard to Melcher's quarters. He well knew the most direct way to Herr von Heydeck's study; he had been familiar enough with it in years long gone by. By the winding staircase from Melcher's room he mounted to the master's study, which he entered without

knocking.

"Here you are at last!" the lord of the castle exclaimed. He had been pacing the room to and fro for a long while in extreme impatience. "Could you not come sooner? I sent for you more than two hours ago!"

The imperious tone in which Herr von Heydeck spoke irritated the doctor still more deeply. "Am I your slave?" he asked angrily. "I ought not to have come at all in obedience to a command which should have been a request. A pretty reception you give me! I've more than half a mind to turn round and go home again."

These words, spoken in a coarse, loud voice, had a strange effect upon Herr von Heydeck. He recoiled timidly from the angry man; his wrinkled features twitched nervously, and it was not until he had moved, so as to place the heavy round table, covered with books, between himself and his visitor, that he said in a changed and gentle tone, "You need not be offended, doctor. I did not mean to be cross. You must not take it amiss that I am a little impatient. I have waited more than an hour, and have very important matters to discuss with you. Pray be seated."

The doctor threw himself into an arm-chair, that creaked in every joint with his weight. "I know what you want," he said sullenly; "but get me some wine first. My tongue fairly rattles in my mouth."

Herr von Heydeck rang a bell, and old Melcher, who answered the summons, was sent for 'a measure of red' for the doctor. When it was placed upon the table, Putzer poured out a glassful, emptied it at a draught, and then, after settling himself comfortably in his chair, said, "Now I am ready to listen. What do you want of me?"

Herr von Heydeck did not reply. He had waited for the doctor with the greatest impatience, but now that he had come he could not find words in which to tell him of what was weighing upon his mind. Startled and terrified by Delmar's appearance at Castle Reifenstein, Leo's narrative had banished his fears but for a short time. As soon as he was alone in his room they returned to torture him. While he gazed into his nephew's frank, honest eyes, he gave him full credence, but when left to himself to review the dark past, he was haunted by suspicion lest other reasons besides friendship for Leo had brought Delmar hither. He felt himself suddenly menaced by a peril which he had indeed dreaded many years before, but which had long since ceased to trouble him.

What should he do to avert disaster? He was helpless; a terrible future was present to his excited imagination. He saw himself driven forth a dishonoured beggar from the castle which he had for so long considered his own; saw the gates of a prison open to receive him, condemned to a disgraceful punishment for a deed which he hoped and believed had been buried in oblivion.

And there was no one to aid him in this extremity! Suddenly he thought of Putzer, the accomplice in his schemes,—the man who must suffer with himself if their secret was discovered,—and he despatched a messenger to Tausens to require his immediate presence at the castle. The doctor alone could advise and assist him. But now, when the man sat opposite to him, and he looked into the bloated face, the leering, watery eyes, he lost all hope of any support or aid from such a source, and hesitated to ask him for advice, since in doing so he must confess that for years he had deceived him.

The doctor waited for a while in vain expectation that Herr von Heydeck would begin what he had to say. He divined what was passing in the old man's mind, and inwardly exulted in the terror and embarrassment plainly to be seen in his face. At last however he grew weary of waiting, and bringing his fist down heavily upon the table, exclaimed with brutal violence, "Well! are you going to speak or not? Did you send for me to come here to be stared at? Tell me what you want of me."

The doctor knew perfectly well that it was only by brutal violence of manner that anything could be done with Herr von Heydeck. Smooth words had no effect upon him; but every violent gesture, every menacing word, inspired him with fear, and fear made him docile. Cowardice was Herr von Heydeck's distinguishing characteristic, and influenced all his actions.

Thus the doctor's angry words did not now fail of their effect Herr von Heydeck moved uneasily. "Why should you be so violent, doctor?" he asked timidly. "I did not mean to offend you. I was only thinking how best to put into words the important intelligence I have to communicate."

"Have you not had time enough for that? If you are puzzling your brains with the invention of fresh lies with which to impose upon me, you may spare yourself the trouble. Do you suppose I don't know that you have sent for me because you are afraid of this Herr Delmar?"

"How?—You know?" Herr von Heydeck asked, his anxiety increasing with every word uttered by Putzer.

"I know more than you care to tell me. You are afraid of this fellow; and well you may be, for he knows what he wants. Have you seen him?"

"Yes."

"Then there's no need to warn you. One look into his black eyes will tell you that you've no mercy to look for there. I don't know whether I can help you. You deceived me and lied to me; you told me your son had died in Switzerland!"

"My son!" Herr von Heydeck exclaimed indignantly. "You know perfectly well----"

"Well then, your wife's son. What is that to me? You needn't look so furious,--I'm not afraid of you. Your cunning has overreached itself, that's all. If you had been honest and open with me you would have had nothing to fear now. I could have settled the boy so that you would never have heard from him again."

"Perhaps that would have been best," Herr von Heydeck said humbly; "but I could not make up my mind to it then, nor could I now. I hated the boy whose undeniable resemblance to his father was a constant disgrace to my name. My dearest wish was for his death, but by natural means, not by poisonous drugs. If I had left him to you, as you advised, I should never have had another peaceful moment. Murder!--the very sound of the word freezes the blood in my veins! I should have been frenzied by the thought that I had permitted the deed, even although I had not caused it to be done."

"Who talks of murder? I forbid all such expressions as far as I am concerned," the doctor rejoined angrily. "Do you imagine that to make you a rich man I would have stained my soul with blood and put my neck into a noose?"

"But you offered the first time I spoke to you of the boy----"

"I offered nothing except to relieve you from all anxiety. And that I would have done if, after I had made out the certificate of the child's death, you would have handed him over to me instead of keeping him here in the basement of the tower, in care of Melcher, for a year, and then carrying him off yourself. What is done should be done thoroughly. But you are a coward, too timid to act decidedly. You were afraid of me, and so you cheated me with the story that the boy died a year after you had put him to board in Switzerland. Now, when he suddenly appears here to claim his rights, you are trembling again in terror."

"He has really come then to claim his rights? Oh, what do you know about him, doctor?" cried Herr von Heydeck, wringing his hands.

The doctor gazed with a scornful smile at the despair of the old man, whom fear seemed to deprive of the capacity for thought. Putzer felt vastly superior,--his blood was quickened by the wine, his pulses throbbed feverishly, but his brain had regained more than its wonted clearness. He had suddenly and advisedly uttered as fact what was only suspicion, and thus won from Herr von Heydeck an indirect confession; but this was not enough,--he must know the whole truth, and he was sure that he could extort it by increasing to the uttermost the coward's terror.

"Time enough by and by to tell what I know about Herr Delmar, as he calls himself," Putzer continued. "You will find to your cost that I know more than you ever meant I should. Perhaps I can devise a means of getting you out of the scrape, although your affairs do look black enough; but not one step will I take in the matter, rely upon it, unless you treat me with entire frankness. You must tell me exactly what you did with the boy, where you put him to board, and everything else that you know of him."

"But if you know all about it----"

"That is no affair of yours. I want to hear it from you, and I advise you not to try to deceive me. I have already meditated whether to offer my services to Herr Delmar or to stick to you. If you lie to me you will force me for my own sake to go over to the enemy's camp, and you know best what that means!"

"For the love of heaven, doctor, you would not betray me?"

"Not unless you force me to it by lies or concealment. Come, begin! Tell me all that you know of this Herr Delmar, from the moment when I saw the boy for the last time until the present day."

Herr von Heydeck sprang up from his seat and paced the room to and fro in the wildest distress. He tried to reflect, to come to some determination, but his mind was confused; the doctor's threat had so terrified him that he could think of nothing but the wretched consequences of such a betrayal, and he lost sight of the fact that his guilty accomplice had an equal interest with himself in preserving his secret.

The doctor allowed him no time for reflection. "Will you do as I say, or not?" he asked roughly. And his threatening manner was, as ever, effectual.

Incapable of further resistance, the old man again sank into his arm-chair, and, in the fear of offending the doctor by suppressing some fact that he might have learned from other sources, gave him the full and circumstantial account that he demanded.

After Herr von Heydeck had, with the help of the doctor and of the woman who afterwards became Frau Putzer, established the fact of the death of the child of his late wife by means of the

mock funeral and the false certificate of death, he kept the boy, whom he loathed doubly as the child of Count Menotti and as the obstacle to his own fortune, in the basement of the old tower, tended by Melcher and his half-idiot sister. Herr von Heydeck never saw it, but, as he sat in his study at night, he could frequently hear its cries, and they not only awakened in him the stings of conscience, but tortured him with the dread lest, if heard by other ears, they should lead to detection and punishment. The false certificate of death had given him all the wealth that should have been the child's.

Again and again the doctor's offer to rid him forever of the detested infant recurred to him, but he recoiled from a crime that seemed to him far more odious than the child's concealment.

Thus a year passed amid pangs unspeakable for the lord of the castle. He had cherished a secret hope that the child would not live long in the gloomy tower, but this hope was blighted by Melcher's account of the boy's thriving condition. He was almost in despair. He had not sufficient courage for a fresh crime; and yet it would be impossible to keep a growing child in the basement of the tower much longer without discovery. His cries had already been heard by the villagers in the silence of night, but superstition had lent its aid to protect the guilty.

"The devil is at his pranks again in the castle," the peasants in Tausens would say, and they avoided the haunted tower as far as was possible,--crossing themselves with a muttered prayer if they were ever near enough to it to hear any inexplicable sounds.

Thus far their superstition had shielded Herr von Heydeck; but who could say when some man, more courageous than his fellows, might not attempt to explore the source whence the ghostly cries proceeded? And then? Why, then discovery, disgrace, and misery were the inevitable consequences.

The wretched man had almost made up his mind to have recourse once more to the doctor's aid, when chance pointed a way of release for him. He saw an advertisement in a paper offering a child for adoption. An unnatural mother, pleading extreme poverty, appealed to the compassion of any generous individual who would adopt her child, and consented, if any such were found, to relinquish all her maternal rights.

As Heydeck read he thought of the hidden child. If this woman had been successful in only appealing to human compassion, could he not be far more sure of success in invoking the aid of man's cupidity? And he devised the scheme which he proceeded to carry into execution.

He put an advertisement in a Berlin newspaper offering a sum of ten thousand thalers to any one who would adopt an orphan boy and so educate him as his own that the child should never learn that he was not the genuine offspring of his adopted parent.

He used every caution with regard to this advertisement. He went to Berlin, and there, under an assumed name, he himself received all the answers to his offer,--destroying them after he had read them.

Among these one seemed especially desirable. A merchant by the name of Delmar, residing in a distant provincial town, declared himself ready to take the boy. He wrote that he had had the misfortune a short time before to lose his wife and only child, Paul. The care of another child would soothe his grief, and by a judicious outlay of the promised capital he trusted he might insure the boy's future welfare.

That this letter seemed less than the rest the result of greed of gain would hardly alone have decided Heydeck to accept it as the answer to his offer, but he was also moved thereto by the consideration that it came from a small provincial town so distant from the Tyrol that it could never have had the slightest cognizance of Castle Reifenstein.

Herr von Heydeck went to H---, and made inquiries at the inn there concerning the man who had written to him. The intelligence that he received was satisfactory. Delmar was a small tradesman, living very quietly, but with an excellent reputation. He was a solid, sensible man, but had been very unfortunate. He had not only lost his wife and only child, but the bankruptcy of a large Berlin house had so imperilled his business that his townfolk were afraid he would be obliged to dispose of his stock in trade to satisfy his creditors.

After learning these particulars, Herr von Heydeck called upon Delmar. He introduced himself as a Herr Steineck, commissioned by a lady of rank to provide for her illegitimate child. If Herr Delmar would bind himself never to inquire after the child's parents, but to bring him up as his own son, giving him his own name,--if further, in order that the boy might never learn from strangers that he was an adopted child, he would consent to leave H--- and establish himself in another place, whither he could take the child as his son Paul, the boy should be immediately handed over to him and also the ten thousand thalers.

Delmar gladly acceded to all these conditions. He promised to leave his present place of abode, which was full of sad memories for him, to sell his business and go to some other German town, where he hoped to invest the ten thousand thalers with success, and where he might make use of his dead child's baptismal certificate to legitimate his adopted son, so that no one could have the slightest cause for suspicion that he was not really and truly his son.

Delmar and Steineck were thus soon agreed; the latter paid down a thousand thalers for a retainer as it were, and it was settled that Delmar should immediately proceed to close up his affairs in H---, and should inform Steineck when he was ready to move elsewhere by an advertisement in a certain Berlin newspaper. It was made a principal condition of their agreement that Delmar should never make the slightest attempt to discover Steineck's place of residence.

A month later Herr von Heydeck read in the Berlin paper that Delmar was ready to receive the child. To effect the infant's removal was the hardest part of Heydeck's task. He would admit no one to his confidence in the matter; neither Dr. Putzer nor his wife should know whither the child was taken; thus only could the secret remain such forever.

Late in the evening Heydeck left the castle in his carriage, driven by Melcher; the boy had been drugged, and was in deep slumber. The Bavarian town of Rosenheim was selected by Delmar as the place where the child was to be delivered up to him.

All went well: Delmar was on the spot, and received the boy with the promised sum of money. He immediately departed for Munich, and Herr von Heydeck returned to the Tyrol, firmly convinced that Delmar had no idea who had delivered the child to him.

Six months later he informed Dr. Putzer that he had placed the child in an establishment in Switzerland, where it had died of the measles. As there was no reason to doubt this, Putzer made no further investigations in the matter: indeed, any such would have been useless, so perfect had been Herr von Heydeck's precautions.

Thus everything seemed happily concluded. Herr von Heydeck had no treachery to fear, for Dr. Putzer and his wife had as much to dread from discovery as he had himself, and Melcher and his sister, if they had been capable of understanding matters, were entirely dependent upon their master, to whom they clung with slavish devotion.

And yet Herr von Heydeck was not content. The phantom of possible discovery pursued him awake and in dreams. In vain he repeated to himself that he had nothing to fear, that there was no flaw in the precautions he had taken; he could not banish the dread lest his sin should one day find him out.

Become more misanthropic than ever, he secluded himself from all human companionship, and if he had not been obliged to visit the baths every year for the sake of his health, he never would have left Castle Reifenstein.

But when years passed by and nothing was heard further of the boy, when he married again and enjoyed a happiness of which he had never dreamed, he became reassured. The dreadful dreams in which he saw his secret discovered and himself about to receive the punishment of his crime, tortured him no longer; he had even felt perfectly secure for years, when suddenly he had been startled out of this security by the appearance at the castle of his nephew's companion.

His fears had become reality. It was impossible that the dreaded stranger could have any motive but revenge and the recovery of his property. Leo's information that his friend was a millionaire, and had accompanied him to the Tyrol solely out of friendship for him, had satisfied Herr von Heydeck but for a few moments,—the more he pondered this information the more improbable did it seem to him. He could not believe that this meeting was due solely to accident.

Therefore he had in this moment of supreme peril sent for Dr. Putzer, as the only living being to whom he could look for aid and advice, and therefore, a prey to torturing anxiety, he made his long confession with the greatest minuteness, interrupted but rarely by a question from his listener.

While he gave his utmost attention to these revelations, the idea which he had thrown out just before, simply to intimidate Herr von Heydeck, recurred to Dr. Putzer's mind. He too was now more than ever convinced that Paul Delmar was aware of his parentage and of the right which he possessed to all that Herr von Heydeck possessed, and that he had come to Tausens to assert this right. But if this were the case, what the millionaire coveted was certainly not the possession of an old castle and some hundred thousand guilders which he could not possibly need, but the ancient noble name and title, upon which the plebeian merchant would of course place the greatest value.

Now this was just what Herr von Heydeck had the right to withhold from his opponent. The doctor knew perfectly well that, in view of the proofs which Heydeck could adduce, no court in Germany could force him to give his name to his wife's illegitimate child. Delmar's right to his mother's property was indisputable, but he had none whatever to the name and title of a Herr von Heydeck. If he coveted this, he must be reconciled to Herr von Heydeck, in which case he would no longer be dangerous, but would doubtless be willing richly to reward the man who should help him to the fulfilment of his desires.

And this man the doctor would be. In imagination he saw a shining stream of gold flowing from the millionaire's money-bags into his own open pockets, for such a lavish young Cræsus was a very different customer from miserly old Herr von Heydeck, from whom it had been difficult, latterly, to extort even as much as sufficed to pay the doctor's wine-bill.

He would ally himself with Paul Delmar: his safety as well as his advantage required it; he was not yet quite clear as to how this alliance was to be most advantageously concluded; he would see about all that later, when his head should be a little clearer. Now he must take great care lest Herr von Heydeck should suspect his scheme. Its success was perhaps dependent upon the old man's placing implicit confidence in him.

When the doctor was busy thinking he was fond of refreshing himself with a glass of wine; therefore, while Herr von Heydeck was making his revelations, he had frequent recourse to the bottle, which, when the narrator had come to an end, was nearly emptied, while the listener's good humour had so increased that he found it difficult to restrain the expression of it. "'Tis a confounded queer story, and you are in for it," he said, at last. "This Delmar is a devil of a fellow; he'll make you squeak. I should like to know where the deuce he heard it all. You say you took every precaution."

"I cannot understand it: I thought I was perfectly safe," Heydeck replied despairingly.

"You must have done something stupid; what it was the devil only knows; but you're in for it now; the fellow will pull the house down about your ears!"

This expression seemed to the doctor so eminently fitted to the occasion that he burst into a coarse laugh, which so irritated Herr von Heydeck that he started up, exclaiming, "What are you laughing at? I should think matters looked grave enough! I ask you for counsel, not for idiotic laughter----"

This angry outbreak only increased the doctor's tipsy merriment. "You're a wonderfully fine old fellow!" he said, vainly trying to steady his voice. "But, still, you're an old coward, afraid of your own shadow, and a skinflint into the bargain! But never mind, we're the best of friends, and I'll stand by you in this matter with your wife's son. He shall not hurt you, depend upon me. But we'll have no more of the stupid old story to-day: we'll drink and be merry. Take a glass, you old sinner; come, and don't put such a d---d wry face on the matter."

He held out to Herr von Heydeck a glass of wine as he spoke, but the old man rejected it angrily. He had been so absorbed by interest in his own narrative that he had not until this moment noticed the condition of his listener. What advice or aid could he look for from this sot? "You are drunk again," he said with contempt. "Go home and sleep it off!"

This was just what the doctor desired. He knew that his brain was confused, and that he was not in a condition to talk without betraying his secret intentions; therefore he had feigned to be more drunk than he really was, hoping thus to end the conversation for to-day. "You may be right, old Solomon!" he exclaimed, with a loud laugh. "I am a little cloudy, and a nap can do me no harm. I'll come again tomorrow and have another talk. Sleep in peace; you need not be afraid; you and I are more than a match for the young fellow!"

He arose, and although he knew he had already drunk too much, he could not withstand the temptation of the glass that was standing filled upon the table, but emptied it before he turned towards the door. Then, nodding a familiar farewell to Herr von Heydeck, who took no notice of it, he left the room by the same door by which he had entered. When he reached Melcher's apartment he thought his head felt less confused and that his gait was sufficiently steady to justify his refusing the old man's proffered guidance down the mountain, and accordingly he left the castle alone.

As he reached the court-yard a cool breeze was blowing down the valley from the snow-mountains in the north, and by the time he had crossed the bridge the wine had produced its full effect upon him. So far from being able to reflect upon the best way in which to carry out his schemes, he needed all the mind he could muster to provide for his safety in descending the mountain. His capacity for thought was not quite destroyed, although his brain was thoroughly bewildered.

CHAPTER XII.

"Two weeks to spend in hobbling from the bed to the sofa, and from the sofa to the bed! it is insufferable!" Herwarth exclaimed when he was again alone with Paul, after Dr. Putzer had left his room.

In his vexation he did not meet with much sympathy from his friend. "You are wrong, noble knight," Paul replied, mockingly. "You will not only suffer it, but after a while you will admit that

this enforced rest is highly beneficial for both of us. I at least am always delighted to have a good excuse for luxurious idleness. With what ecstasy shall I now survey from a distance the blue ice-rifts in the glaciers, in the consciousness that I am not called upon to ascend them in the sweat of my brow! I verily believe, my dear Herwarth, that you divined my secret wishes, and in heroic self-sacrifice sprained your knightly ankle to do me pleasure, that I might lounge and dawdle here for two weeks. It was true magnanimity on your part, my noble friend. We shall have some delightful days together. I will send for piles of books from Innsbruck and Bozen, and I have any quantity of good cigars,—that is, as good as can be had in this confounded Austria. Oh, we will idle away the time gloriously!"

"Do you think I shall allow you to sit still here in the inn on my account while such delightful excursions are to be made all round the country?"

"On your account? You know perfectly well that you have nothing to do with it, noble knight. I act to please myself. I follow my inclination for the *dolce far niente*—for a season of repose after all these nonsensical, tiresome mountain-ascents, of which I have had in the last week enough to last me my lifetime. I have a horror of your delightful excursions, where your only gain is an unquenchable thirst. The view of the mountains from below is far finer than that of the valleys from above. I will have none of your mountain-excursions."

"But, Delmar, you are the most indefatigable mountain-climber. You have been the chief instigator of our boldest efforts."

"Have I? Very likely. I sometimes am a prey to whims. I suppose it is because I have done so much of it that I feel such an unconquerable repugnance now to any mountain ascent."

"You cannot convince me. I will never consent to have you tied to the house on my account."

"You will never consent? You do not consider the significance of the words so calmly uttered, noble knight. You have not the slightest idea of all to which you will consent. As I said just now, a patient is not an individual but a case. You will therefore consent to whatever I see fit; for example, to let me put a fresh wet bandage upon your foot at this moment. Let me advise you not to irritate me by opposition. Do not force me to cool your head also with a wet bandage."

"But, Delmar, let us speak seriously."

"You are not to speak at all," Paul replied with a laugh; "but to keep quiet while I bandage your foot." He proceeded to do this with a firm and gentle hand, and then continued: "And now, noble knight, let me beseech you not to fatigue yourself with representations and remarks which will be of no avail against my obstinacy."

"But, Delmar, I myself cannot bear being shut up in this room for two weeks, and how can I allow you----"

"As I said before, you will not be consulted upon the subject. Besides, the doctor spoke of a balcony whither I might take you, with a lovely view of the castle and the distant mountains. I will immediately proceed to discover where this balcony is, and whether I can arrange a comfortable seat there for you. If I can, we will stay in the open air all day long, and all the evening too if you desire it."

He left his friend, and summoned Hansel in stentorian tones to show him the way to the balcony. This balcony was the worthy postmaster's pride. He had himself added it to his inn, and it flattered him not a little that every stranger who visited Tausens declared it to be a charming place to enjoy the prospect.

And in truth there could be no more delightful abiding-place for any one unable to walk than this spacious balcony at the back of the house. It was protected from sun and rain by a stout roof, and from the blasts of wind by the house itself, and it was large enough to accommodate easily more than thirty people. The view from it was glorious, comprehending a distant prospect of the densely-wooded mountainside of the valley of the Schwarzenbach, with Castle Reifenstein proudly crowning the rocky wall at its entrance, and also the glaciers in the background with the three peaks the Maidelspitz, the Weisshorn, and the Schiechjoch.

"Wonderful!" Paul exclaimed. "Here let us build our cots." And he straightway proceeded to make every arrangement for Herwarth's establishment in ease and comfort, being most cordially assisted in his task by the good-humoured innkeeper.

When all was ready he returned to Kuno's room for his friend, whom he supported in triumph to the comfortable easy-chair provided for him. The injured foot was placed upon another cushioned chair, and a plaid thrown over it that the noble knight, as Paul said with a laugh, might present a respectable appearance in case any ladies should visit the balcony.

"And I think they will not be long in coming," he added. "I remarked Fräulein von Schlicht's expression as she looked down at you. A wounded warrior of this description has the same attraction for the fair sex as a candle has for moths."

Kuno would have resented this unseemly comparison, but how could he resent anything from

so kind a nurse? And besides, Delmar's words were almost immediately confirmed, for before Herwarth could reply Eva Schommer and Aline von Schlicht appeared upon the balcony.

"Was I not right?" Paul whispered. "Here come the moths already."

Kuno would have sprung up from his arm-chair to receive the ladies, but Delmar detained him with a firm hand. "Sit still, my noble knight," he said; "a patient has no right to be chivalric. Pray take the will for the deed, ladies," he went on, turning to Eva and Aline. "You see that this wounded warrior, in his joy at this unexpected meeting in a strange land, would fain arise to do you reverence, but my strong grasp detains him. The doctor has forbidden him to stand, and I am an incorruptible nurse. As his present natural guardian, and in his stead, I salute you with my most profound obeisance." And he bowed low, still keeping his hand upon Kuno's shoulder.

The latter still made efforts to rise, until Aline von Schlicht said in a gentle tone of entreaty, "Do not drive us away from this charming balcony, Herr von Herwarth. We must go if you are not perfectly quiet. I hope the injury to your foot is not grave?"

"Nothing of any consequence, Fräulein von Schlicht," Paul answered in Kuno's stead; "nothing that will prevent his waltzing as gracefully as ever next winter, if he will only keep quiet for two weeks and obey orders, which now that I have so charming an ally in my efforts to that end I have good hopes of his doing. One word from your lips, fair lady, will be of more effect than whole sermons from mine."

Paul spoke to Aline, but as he spoke he looked at Eva, and scarcely noticed that Aline approached Kuno's arm-chair and frankly extended to him a hand, which the lieutenant kissed with more warmth than the occasion seemed to require.

Delmar's attention was absorbed by Eva, who did not follow her friend's example, but leaning against the balustrade of the balcony had taken no part in the short conversation.

Hitherto Paul had seen Eva only in full dress at balls or in brilliant assemblages, or driving in her carriage. He had always thought her beautiful, but he regarded her as a purse-proud woman of fashion, and as such he had a prejudice against her,—a prejudice strengthened by the marked friendliness of her manner towards himself, the wealthiest man of her acquaintance, in contrast with the cold reserve she maintained towards all the other men about her, with the exception perhaps of Count Waldheim.

Money was of so little value in his eyes, he so detested pride of purse, that he had intentionally kept aloof from the beautiful heiress; he would not add another to the crowd of her adorers, and the sweet smile with which Eva replied to his bow, instead of acknowledging it by the haughty bend of her head which she accorded to others, increased his dislike of her, for he thought this smile was given to his money and not to himself.

By her betrothal to the man for whom Delmar had so thorough a contempt Eva had lost every claim to his regard. That she had made an apology to Leo the condition of her betrothal caused him to waver for a moment in his judgment of her. Only for a moment, however; he had not thought it worth while to inquire into her reasons for so doing; very likely she acted from fear lest her precious lover should be wounded, or perhaps from mere whim. What did he care about the motives actuating the purse-proud heiress?

His prejudice against her was in full force when she appeared upon the balcony with Aline, and yet he could not help regarding her with a degree of interest. She had never looked as lovely, he thought, as in her simple travelling-dress. The brilliant lady of fashion receiving, in diamonds and lace, the homage of her ball-room adorers as her right, with a haughty, disdainful air, was scarcely to be recognized in the simple lovely girl who stood leaning against the balustrade of the balcony contemplating Herwarth's reception of her friend, with a look full of loving sympathy. The dark eyes, wont to flash with disdain, were full of gentle tenderness, while a charming smile transfigured her face for an instant as Kuno bestowed his eager kiss upon Aline's hand. It vanished immediately however to give place to an expression of profound melancholy, while the dark eyes sought the ground. It would almost seem that the girl whom Delmar had always thought heartless was a prey to some deep-seated grief.

Paul was no sentimental enthusiast. When he found himself, after observing the melancholy in Eva's face, upon the high-road towards sympathy for the sorrow that brought it there, he started off in the opposite direction. He was vexed with himself that a pretty face could have such an influence upon him; his old aversion for Eva stirred within him, and awakened a desire to prove to the purse-proud girl that she could not drag every man at her chariot-wheels; that there was one at least who saw through her and was dazzled neither by her beauty nor her wealth.

With the scornful smile which so often hovered upon his lips and did not at all add to his attractions, Paul bowed low to Eva as he approached, and addressed her in a low tone, "'Tis an unexpected pleasure, Fräulein Schommer, to meet you here in this retired corner of the world. I am the more delighted, as it gives me an opportunity to offer you my congratulations upon your betrothal; congratulations as sincere as is my admiration for Herr von Bertram, who certainly, as far as manliness and nobility of disposition are concerned, is worthy of his lovely betrothed."

As Delmar approached her Eva had raised her eyes to his for a moment, but at sight of his

scornful smile she instantly averted them. A burning blush crimsoned her cheek and tears rushed to her eyes as she listened to his words.

With an effort to control herself, she replied, "What have I done, Herr Delmar,--how have I ever offended you? How given you the right thus to wound me?"

Paul was prepared for a sharp reply, to which he would have made as sharp a rejoinder; but tears, and this gentle reproof! He had never been so nonplussed; he felt ashamed and confused, and hardly knowing what he said, he stammered, "Indeed, Fräulein Schommer--you are mistaken--I did not mean to wound you."

"You did mean to wound me, and you succeeded excellently well," Eva rejoined, still mastering her emotion, and looking directly at Delmar with eyes before which his own sought the ground. "I know how unfavourable is your opinion of Herr von Bertram. Your sarcastic congratulation was an intentional offence which I have not deserved at your hands."

Delmar felt precisely like some school-boy caught in a particularly disgraceful trick and forced to listen without a word of reply to a severe reprimand, the justice of which he could not but acknowledge. The quiet dignity and the feminine gentleness of Eva's reply to his ironical address completely disarmed him. His wonted skill in repartee forsook him, and he could only say simply, in excuse, "Forgive me!" From the altered expression of his face Eva saw clearly that these words were prompted by sincere regret for his late attack. The sneer had entirely vanished, and there was such genuine entreaty for forgiveness in his eyes that she could not but accord it to him.

"I am not angry," she said, not unkindly; "but it pains me that even you, whom I have never offended, can take pleasure in wounding me. I will forget the words in which you couched your congratulations just now if you will frankly tell me in what way I have provoked your hostility."

"You subject me to painful embarrassment. I assure you that I entertain not the slightest hostility towards you."

"You evade me, but I cannot let you escape. I have a right to know of what you accuse me, what you think gives you the right to speak slighting words to a poor, defenceless girl. You are Herr von Heydeck's friend, perhaps you accuse me, as he did publicly, of arrogance, self-conceit, and despicable pride of purse, and therefore feel yourself justified in humiliating me? You need not answer, I see in your face that if you spoke honestly you would be obliged to say 'Yes;' but I solemnly declare that you do me bitter injustice! You, who know the misery of being rich, will believe me when I tell you how I detest and despise this wretched wealth that poisons every enjoyment of life for me. I purse-proud! I who am forced to feel with shame and pain every hour of the day that I myself am nothing, that with the exception of two or three friends every human being who comes near me values me for my money! And never was I so painfully conscious of this as at the present moment. For you, with your millions, my wealth is valueless. In your eyes I am simply an insignificant girl whom you regard with contempt, and whom you feel yourself justified in humiliating by offensive words of reproof. But I promised to forget what you said, and I will keep my word. Let us speak of something else.

"I came out upon this balcony with my friend Aline with a purpose in view. I knew you were here, and I wished to speak with you. Chance has brought me to Tausens. I wished to avoid the stream of tourists, and if possible to spend a few quiet weeks in some retired corner of the Tyrol. I hoped to find this asylum in Tausens, and my kind uncle consented to accompany me hither, although he knew that he should be obliged to forego here many of his daily luxuries and even comforts. Upon arriving at noon to-day we learned that three gentlemen were already lodging at the 'Post.' Your name was mentioned, and also that of Herr von Heydeck, whereupon my uncle and Herr von Bertram would have left Tausens immediately. But I refused to do so. I am quite sure of never having given Herr von Heydeck the slightest reason for the offensive expressions which were the cause of his quarrel with Herr von Bertram. I can therefore meet him frankly and fearlessly. There is no reason why I should run away from him, and I shall certainly not do so. This is why I stayed."

Eva's long explanation had given Paul time to recover from his embarrassment, and the change in her manner helped him to overcome his confusion; but he had lost all desire for a war of words. He no longer regarded Eva with his late dislike. Her frankness and candour inspired him with esteem and interest; her lament over the misery of wealth aroused his sympathy. Had he not often felt thus while he despised those who flattered and cringed to him? He had known that their homage was paid only to his money, and he could easily conceive how a like knowledge should embitter Eva's very soul. Her determination, so boldly expressed, to meet Leo frankly and fearlessly pleased him, and he could not but say, "I admire your courage, Fräulein Schommer, and I expressed this admiration to your betrothed when he told me of your resolve."

Eva blushed as Delmar uttered the word 'betrothed.' It sounded strangely in her ears from his lips. True, there was not a shade of sarcasm now in his tone, and yet it offended her to hear of Bertram as her betrothed. She knew that she had no right to object, that any objection would be extremely unbecoming, and yet when she asked, "You have already spoken with Herr von Bertram?" she laid a sharp emphasis upon the 'Herr von.'

Delmar noticed this; it was not the way in which a true-hearted girl would speak of her lover,

and he called to mind Bertram's uneasy anxiety in the conversation they had had shortly before. Paul was now convinced that love had hardly tied the knot of this engagement, and he wondered what inducement could have led the lovely heiress to bestow her hand upon such a suitor. This wonder so occupied his thoughts that it was not until Eva had repeated her question that he replied.

"Yes, I have had a conversation with him."

"By your own desire?"

"Why do you ask?"

"From certain expressions of Herr von Bertram's I am led to suspect that you are no friend of his, nor does he regard you with friendly sentiments. He feared a meeting with you and with Herr von Heydeck, and so urged me to leave Tausens that I am surprised to hear of a conversation between you. Therefore I asked. I wished to know whether you had sought an opportunity to express the same congratulations to him that you offered to me."

"He accosted me, and begged me to grant him an interview."

"Was it of a peaceful character?"

"Yes."

"You parted friends?"

"You must excuse me from replying to that question, Fräulein Schommer. I do not wish to offend you again, and therefore we will say no more with regard to your betrothed; my opinion of whom must be a matter of entire indifference to you. Since chance has brought us together here, and as we shall probably often meet in the next few weeks upon this balcony, let us avoid all allusion to disagreeable topics. Let us follow the example of my friend Kuno, and of yours Fräulein von Schlicht, who, to judge from their cheerful countenances, are certainly not discussing anything disagreeable, but conversing together most amicably. I think we can do so, too, if we only consent to forget the past, and to consider ourselves merely as a couple of travellers meeting in a retired and beautiful part of the Tyrol, where in the beauty around us, and in our daily experiences, we can surely find matter enough for pleasant talk."

"You are right; I will follow your advice; only answer me one question. I do not see Herr von Heydeck, but only Herr von Herwarth, who I did not know was your travelling companion; has Herr von Heydeck gone away?"

"Not very far; he is staying up there in the fine old Castle of Reifenstein, which belongs to his uncle, a Herr von Heydeck. He will probably visit us down here but rarely, since he is held in magic thrall by the soft spells of a lovely fairy, his beautiful cousin Hilda."

"Hilda von Heydeck?" Eva exclaimed. "An exquisitely beautiful young girl with lustrous blue eyes and magnificent golden hair. A merry, frank, charming creature! Hilda von Heydeck a near relative of your friend's?"

"You know Fräulein von Heydeck?"

"I met her at an evening party two years ago, in Vienna, where I with my uncle Balthasar stayed a few weeks, and I was so delighted with her loveliness and gayety that I talked with her almost the entire evening. How strange that I should find myself so near to her now without having intended it!"

"She is the cause of our presence in the Tyrol. Leo came to Tausens to make acquaintance with his charming cousin, whom his father wishes him to marry, and Herwarth and I accompanied him."

Eva did not reply, she gazed up at the castle on the rocks with eyes full of a dreamy melancholy; the image of the lovely Hilda arose in her mind side by side with that of Leo von Heydeck. How often had she thought of him lately!--not in hatred, but in profound sadness. She could not hate him, although he had insulted her; she could not but feel that by her own cold reserve she had given him some reason for his harsh words. She had thought of him almost as of a departed spirit. Was he not dead to her,--the betrothed of his mortal enemy? And yet now a sharp pain, inexplicable to herself, stirred within her at the thought of the happy hours he was passing in the old castle with his lovely cousin, who was one day to be his wife. But she knew that such vague, unjustifiable emotion was unworthy of her; that it was her duty to endeavour to conquer it; and she did so, forcing herself to say with apparent calm, "I thank you, Herr Delmar, I trust any disagreeable meeting with Herr von Heydeck may be spared myself or Herr von Bertram. Although I do not fear it I would rather avoid it, and I think this may be quite possible, since Herr von Heydeck must find the castle with its fairy most attractive. And now let us join our friends, who have a right to take it amiss that we have held ourselves aloof from them so long."

It was doubtful whether Eva really entertained the fear lest Aline and Herwarth should take her *tête-à-tête* with Delmar amiss. Had she done so, one glance at the pair would have reassured

her; they evidently needed no other companionship.

Aline stood beside Kuno's arm-chair, and had asked about the manner of his accident with such tender sympathy, that the happy lieutenant inwardly declared that such gentle, kindly words from such lovely lips were cheaply bought by a sprained ankle. He told her how devoted and kind was Delmar, whom he had only lately learned really to know; and although Paul had never before particularly interested Aline, she suddenly found him extremely amiable and agreeable.

Kuno also told of Leo, and of his visit to Castle Reifenstein, finding a most attentive listener. So absorbed were they that they never thought of finding Eva's conversation with Delmar too long. Now, when Eva made kindly inquiries of Kuno as to his suffering, he thanked her courteously, and all took part in a conversation inaugurated by Delmar about Tausens and the wonders of scenery in its neighbourhood.

Paul was in the best of humours; he brought chairs for the ladies, placing them where they could have the finest view of the Schwarzenbach valley, and then gave a humorous account of all the friends had gone through on their walk from the Zillerthal. His talent for conversation was undeniable, and Eva felt the charm of it for the first time. Meeting him only at balls and large assemblies in K---, she had always regarded him as a *blasé* man of the world, probably because his dislike of the haughty heiress had never permitted him to think it worth the trouble to let his light shine in her presence. To-day, however, resigning himself entirely to his natural mood, he soon overcame the prejudices of his listeners. His dry humour even provoked the grave Eva's frequent laughter, and she soon almost forgot how unpleasant had been the first few moments of their meeting. Aline too was much interested in Herr Delmar's talk, but what provoked her special admiration was his constant care and consideration for Herr von Herwarth, and the conscientious fulfilment of his duties as nurse.

The appearance of Uncle Balthasar on the balcony was no interruption to the pleasant conversation. He greeted Delmar and Herwarth with his usual kindly good humour, and they returned his salutation in kind. Eva was especially pleased to see that Delmar, who was generally so ready with the sharp arrows of his sarcasm in view of any silliness or weakness, had neither sneering word nor look for Uncle Balthasar.

And yet the young man might well have thought Uncle Balthasar fair game, as he came tripping out upon the balcony in his trim elegance of costume, in one hand his fine straw hat, and in the other a delicate cane, addressing Delmar in the richest Saxon patois: "Aha, my good Herr Delmar, monstrous glad to see you in the Tyrol, I'm *suah*."

But Delmar never seemed to hear Uncle Balthasar's mistakes either of grammar or pronunciation; he treated him with all the respectful courtesy due from a young man to one much older, thereby taking the kindly old man's heart by storm.

A couple of hours flew swiftly by; the sun had long set behind the mountains, the valley of the Schwarzenbach lay in dim shadow, from which only the distant peaks of the Weisshorn emerged, glowing in crimson light; soon it, too, faded, and a dull ashen gray followed upon the last shimmer of departed day. The increasing darkness warned Eva that it was time to leave the balcony, and she arose. "We must not leave Aunt Minni alone any longer," she said. "She will certainly be waiting for us at her tea-table."

Uncle Balthasar was enjoying himself hugely,--he would have liked to spend another hour upon the balcony,--but he followed Eva's lead immediately, and took leave of Delmar and Herwarth, assuring Paul that it was *too* delightful to find such entertaining society in Tausens, and that he only regretted that "the dear Guido"--it was thus he spoke of Herr von Bertram--was prevented by headache from taking part in the delightful conversation.

The name of Guido again provoked on Delmar's face the sarcastic smile which had vanished from it during the last two hours. "Do you share this regret, Fräulein Schommer?" he asked hardily.

"No! Good-night," was the brief reply, as, taking her uncle's arm and followed by Aline, Eva left the balcony.

After the ladies had left, Paul walked to the balustrade and, leaning upon it, gazed thoughtfully abroad upon the landscape now fading quickly into the gloom of night.

Kuno, occupied in reflecting upon the last few hours, and upon many a gentle word of Aline's, did not disturb his reverie, which had been prolonged for nearly half an hour, when suddenly Delmar turned to the lieutenant and said, "Do you know, noble knight, that I have just made a discovery which will not be half as new to you as it is humiliating to me?"

"What have you discovered?" Kuno asked.

"That I have been a confounded ass, a stupid, addled ass! And it is all the more humiliating to find this out just when I thought myself so very wise."

"Confessions of a fair soul!" Kuno laughed. "May I ask what has led you to so unflattering a discovery with regard to yourself?"

"Yes, you may ask, and it is my duty to answer, because it is to you also that I have so often and so conceitedly displayed my superhuman wisdom. I must confess to you, and in especial to Leo, the terrible grief to which I am come with my boasted knowledge of human nature. I deserve to have my ears boxed,--if there were only some one to do it for me.

"You make me curious."

"You have often heard me speak of Fräulein Schommer; do you remember what opinion of her I expressed?"

"Not a very flattering one."

"It was brutal, thick-headed, idiotic! I called her purse-proud, vain, arrogant, cold, heartless, and I have no doubt I used a great many more adjectives equally stupid. It is not sufficient that I inwardly confess and regret the wrong I have done her. I must apologize to you and to Leo, with whom I have often spoken of her. She is a charming and lovely girl, noble in disposition, and of great sensibility,--incapable of an unworthy thought. Faults she may have,--I cannot say,--but pride of purse is not among them, that I'll swear to."

Kuno laughed. "Take care, take care!" he said. "You seem to me to have been gazing too deeply into the lovely Eva's dreamy dark eyes. I have never heard you speak of a girl thus. Keep fast hold of your heart or you will lose it here on the balcony."

"Do you think so?" Paul asked mockingly. "Your wisdom is profound, noble knight, almost as profound as my own. One cannot lose what one does not possess; my admiration for the fair Eva has nothing to do with my heart. I should hardly have spoken of her so frankly to you had I been in love with her; reassure yourself on that score. I am only filled with remorse for having so misjudged her, and perhaps thereby strengthened others--our Leo for example--in their false estimate of her. Do you know what I have been pondering for the last half-hour?"

"How should I?"

"I will tell you; I have been dreaming of a happy future for our friend. It is particularly stupid to indulge in waking dreams, but it is a habit of mine, and I cannot get rid of it. I saw Leo with a charming young wife,--saw him wealthy and happy, valued by every one as a true artist and scholar, and beloved as a friend by all who stand in need of aid or counsel. I saw him thus, and his lovely young wife gave me a bewitching glance from her dreamy dark eyes, and smiled the gentle, kindly smile which I saw to-day for the first time. It was a dream, Herwarth, but a delightful dream, and I wish I could make it a reality. Leo and Eva! What a charming couple they would make!"

"You forget that Fräulein Schommer is betrothed."

"To that scoundrel Bertram! That is what vexes me, and what I cannot understand. This betrothal was a puzzle to me when I thought Fräulein Schommer a cold, heartless, vain, purse-proud creature; even then I did not see how she could throw herself away upon the fellow, and the only explanation I could find was that she had fallen in love with his smooth, handsome face. But she does not love him; I know it now, and I know more than that,--I read in her face to-day that this engagement is a disgrace in her eyes, and that she despises Bertram. And yet she is betrothed to him! She shrinks when he is spoken of as her lover; she never speaks of him except as *Herr von Bertram*; she confesses that his presence wearies her, and yet she is his betrothed! I cannot understand these contradictions; I must discover what they mean; and if I find that this Herr von Bertram has played false with Fräulein Eva, and perhaps with me, let him look to himself. He has not yet reached the goal of his hopes,--an engagement may be broken,--and I do not relinquish the hope that my dream may be fulfilled,--that Leo and Eva may come together at last!"

"But you quite forget Leo's profound aversion for Fräulein Schommer,--an aversion which was the cause of that wretched scene at Büchner's. You have indeed been dreaming, my friend; your fancy has run away with your understanding. Eva and Leo! The strangest combination imaginable! I find it much easier, after your glowing description of the beauty and loveliness of his charming cousin, to believe that Leo will find a balm for all his woes up there at the castle, and that he will return to K---- happily betrothed to the 'Fair one with the golden locks.'"

"That he never will!" Paul cried angrily. "I tell you---- But no, I had better tell you nothing, but change the bandage on your foot; it will be pleasanter both for you and for myself."

He did so, and then walked again to the balustrade to look out once more over the valley, now shrouded in black darkness. Nannerl brought a lamp with a screen, which she placed upon a table beside Kuno. Paul never noticed it; she asked what the gentlemen would have for supper; he did not hear her, and Kuno, contrary to custom, gave orders in his stead. Paul dreamed on, resigning himself to the unrestrained play of his fancy, although he had just denounced all waking dreams as folly.

A coarse, rough voice saying loudly, "Good-evening, Herr Delmar!" recalled him to earth from the realms of imagination, and turning, he saw before him the bloated, purple face of Dr. Putzer, who had just come with an uncertain step from the house out upon the balcony, and who thus

greeted him with repulsive friendliness.

One look into the doctor's eyes sufficed to tell Paul that he was intoxicated, and the good impression he had produced upon his first visit to his patient was entirely obliterated by his present air and manner. With positive disgust Delmar withdrew the hand that Putzer would have grasped.

The doctor was in too exalted a frame of mind with the wine he had taken to notice this repulse; he staggered to the table, dropped into a chair, and drummed with his fingers upon the table-top. "A can of red, Nannerl!" he bawled hoarsely, "and be quick! My throat is as dry as dust with my long walk! Do you know where I have been?" he continued, turning to Delmar, after Nannerl had brought him the wine and he had tossed off a glass. "Guess where!"

"I think, Herwarth, we had better go to our rooms," Paul said, paying no heed to the doctor's question; he did not want to enter into conversation with the man in his present state, and he thought it best to vacate the field.

"What are you talking about?" the doctor interposed. "Nonsense! We are just beginning to enjoy ourselves. Here comes your supper. A measure of wine for the gentlemen, Nannerl! We'll show you how we drink in the Tyrol!"

Nannerl, who had just brought the supper ordered by Herwarth, looked from the doctor to Delmar, and the latter was about to give orders that the supper should be carried to his room, when Kuno whispered, "Stay, Delmar; the fellow is tipsy, and may be off his guard in speaking of the castle and Heydeck. Stay for Leo's sake."

Paul nodded assent and stayed. He could not bring himself to take a seat beside Putzer, so great was his disgust at the man, but he pushed his plate and napkin over to the other side, and took his place just where he could look directly into the doctor's face.

"Now where have I come from?" the doctor repeated after Paul had seated himself. "Guess! You won't guess? Aha, I see you're a sly one! You know well enough where I have been. With the old man up there of course. You've put him in a deuce of a worry. Yes, you're a sly one, but you can't fool me, and I am not afraid of you as that old coward is. He thinks his castle and his property are all gone. Such a fright as he is in! You should have seen him shaking! Ha, ha, ha!"

The doctor leaned back in his chair and laughed, or rather roared, until it took him some moments to recover his breath.

What did these tipsy sentences mean? Delmar would have attached no significance to them, coming from such a source, had he not remembered the strange manner in which Herr von Heydeck had received him, and the disconnected words he had then uttered. The doctor now spoke of the old man's dread of losing his castle and his property. Had Herr von Heydeck in former years had money transactions with Paul's father, the deceased banker? Was there any bond or note of hand hidden away somewhere? The name of Delmar had evidently not been unknown to Herr von Heydeck. He had muttered 'Paul Delmar' without having heard the name of Paul from its owner.

Delmar's curiosity was excited. He was anxious to learn what was the mystery at the foundation of Herr von Heydeck's terror of him, and surely no better opportunity than the present could be found for gaining this knowledge. The doctor's tipsy garrulity was driving him to tell all that he knew. By taking care not to awaken any suspicion in him that he was under examination, Paul might easily learn as much as he wished.

In an instant he had decided what course to pursue. He went on carefully cutting the loaf which Nannerl had brought, and, without looking at Putzer, he casually remarked, "The old man is afraid, eh? Well, perhaps he has reason to be so."

"Found out! found out!" the doctor roared, with another coarse laugh. "I told you you couldn't fool me. That's what you've come for, then! Well, the old miser deserves it. But if you think you can force him to acknowledge you as his son and give you his name, you're mistaken indeed. If you can bring proof you can take from him his castle and all he owns, but not his name and rank. You can never be a Herr von Heydeck unless he chooses, I tell you that; I, Dr. Putzer!"

With all Paul's self-control he could not quite suppress some expression of the measureless astonishment which he felt at these words. The doctor observed this, and laughed more uproariously than ever, ascribing the look of startled amazement upon Delmar's face to the young man's dismay at finding his schemes discovered,—a view in which he was confirmed by Paul's laconic "Do you think so?"

"Do I think so!" he exclaimed, amid peals of stentorian laughter. "Do I think so! I don't think so at all, I know it; I know everything. You're a sly one, and so is the old fellow up there, but Dr. Putzer is slyer than the pair of you together. You can't fool me; I know more than you think. You may look as mild as milk, but I know what I know! The old fellow is rich enough, to be sure, but you won't go to law with him for that. If a man has millions, what does he care for a paltry couple of hundred thousand guilders? You want to be a Herr von Heydeck, a nobleman with an ancient name; that's all you need. Ha, ha, ha!"

And he laughed until he brought on a coughing-fit, from which it took him some time to recover.

Paul's desire to know more was now aroused to the utmost, but he forced himself to appear quite calm. Replying to Kuno's whispered "Is the fellow only drunk, or is he insane?" by a sign to remain quiet, he went on eating his supper with an air of perfect indifference until the doctor had ceased laughing, and then asked, with a contemptuous shrug, "Can you prevent my getting it, doctor?"

"I? On the contrary, I'll help you to it!" exclaimed the doctor, emphasizing his declaration by a blow of his fist upon the table. "The old man will struggle and resist. You will never be able to do anything with him, as I know well enough. But leave him to me; I know how to work upon his fears. If you don't mind a matter of ten thousand guilders or so, I am yours; but if you are such an infernal miser as the old fellow up there, you'll never be a Herr von Heydeck as long as you live. There's nothing to be done with the old man by violence; cunning must be used, and I have more of that than both of you together."

"You ask ten thousand guilders? That is a very large sum."

"Are you not a millionaire? And you can do nothing without me, nothing!"

Paul was prevented from replying by the arrival upon the balcony of several of the village dignitaries.

The circuit judge, who had been stationed for about half a year at Tausens, the forester, and the collector, having just returned from a walk, had come to the inn to enjoy the pleasant breeze upon the balcony after the sultry day. They were regular evening guests at the Post, and were a little later to-night than usual on account of the aforesaid walk.

They saluted the two strangers with great courtesy, nodding to the doctor with a degree of contemptuous familiarity that testified to the estimation in which he was held by them. With kindly sympathy they inquired about the injury to Kuno's foot, adding the soothing assurance that however grave it might be he could rely upon the skill of the doctor, who, the circuit judge remarked without any regard for any one present, although a confirmed drunkard, was an admirable physician. Just at present, to be sure, he was in an entirely irresponsible condition, but on the following day, when sober, he would be all they could desire in a medical man.

The doctor was not in the least offended by this explanation on the part of the judge; he laughed, and declared that the judge was a little tipsy himself or he would not accuse others of being so. To show how thoroughly sober he was he swallowed several more glasses of wine, and shortly became so uproarious in his merriment that the Tausens gentlemen, mortified by such a disgraceful scene in the presence of strangers, called the postmaster and had the drunkard led home to his house.

Delmar and Herwarth spent another hour in most agreeable conversation with the three gentlemen upon the various points of interest in the neighbourhood, after which they bade them good-night, and Paul conducted Kuno to his room.

Delmar passed a restless and sleepless night after a long discussion with Kuno as to the meaning of the doctor's mysterious talk,—a discussion in which neither of the young men arrived at any conclusion. They could not divine what could induce the man to suppose that Delmar intended to deprive Herr von Heydeck of his estate and to lay claim to his name. The account of Paul's reception at the castle threw no light upon the subject; no one but the doctor could do this, and to him Paul determined to appeal the next day. Perhaps Leo had in the mean time received some intelligence from his uncle which would make any such appeal unnecessary. At all events, Delmar felt it his duty to see his friend and talk frankly with him before taking any steps which might be regarded with suspicion by his uncle.

Hitherto Paul's existence had pursued a smooth, commonplace track; he had always seen clearly the duty that lay nearest him, and even in the only troubled time he could remember, the years he had devoted to business before his father's death, he had never doubted what path to follow. The large accession of wealth that had been the consequence of the enlargement of his business had never moved him; it was of value to him only as a source of content to his father, and thus the success that crowned his efforts left him cold.

Nor had his father's odd will made any great impression upon him; he regarded it as the result of the morbid desire of the sick man to atone, by some special acknowledgment of love and esteem, for any neglect of his son in past years. But now, as he tossed restlessly upon his bed, this will recurred to his mind, and he racked his brain to discover any connection that it might have with the doctor's words. In vain; and the more he pondered the more confused became his thoughts; his head throbbed: he could not stay in bed; he arose, dressed, and lighting a candle took a book and began to read. It was long before he could command his thoughts sufficiently to understand as he read; but at last his mind became more composed, and before morning he was able to throw himself upon his bed once more and snatch an hour's refreshing slumber before he was roused by the early noises in the awakening village.

Herwarth did not awake until eight o'clock from his long night's rest, which he declared had

so strengthened him that he was eager after he was dressed to repair again to the balcony. This Paul positively forbade until his patient had received the doctor, who upon his professional visit of the day before had promised to come early in the morning.

Kuno was too grateful a patient to rebel; but the time seemed long until, shortly after the clock of the village church had struck ten, the heavy tread of Dr. Putzer was heard outside the door of their sitting-room.

Upon entering the doctor looked very much as if he too had passed but a sorry night, his red, bloated face had a weary, dragged expression, his watery, lack-lustre eyes were dimmer than ever and his step was unsteady. Still, he was certainly no longer intoxicated, although the flush upon his cheeks betokened that he had possibly indulged in a morning glass.

Putzer saluted the two gentlemen with the same quiet affability that had distinguished him upon his first professional visit, asked intelligently about the injured foot, and was in his whole bearing so entirely the educated man of the world, the benevolent physician, that no one could have recognized in him the brutal drunkard who had been led from the inn by the stable-boy on the previous evening.

He examined Kuno's foot, expressing great satisfaction at the improvement produced in it by the wet applications, and he then proceeded to bandage it more firmly than before, with such gentleness and dexterity that Delmar was really amazed, and almost wondered whether this could be the same man who had left them on the previous evening.

"In two weeks," said Putzer, rubbing his hands after he had finished, "we shall remove all bandages, and I will go surety that you shall walk as well as ever if you will remember not to use the foot in the mean time, except to hobble out upon the balcony, where you must sit with it up in a chair."

Kuno promised obedience.

"You have no further need of my aid," the doctor rejoined upon this promise, "unless you should feel any pain again, when I beg you to send for me. Nevertheless, I hope to see you frequently on the balcony. I come to the Post every evening and drink my glass of wine, either there or in the inn parlour. I have the honour to bid you good-morning."

With a more graceful obeisance than would have been thought possible for his clumsy figure he took his leave, without having made the faintest allusion to the previous evening. He had reached the door when he turned once more. "I shall surely have the pleasure of seeing the gentlemen on the balcony to-night?" he asked.

"Certainly, Herr Doctor," Delmar replied. "Why should you not?"

"Why not, indeed? Still, let me confess frankly that I rather feared I might have offended the gentlemen yesterday evening. For several days past I have had a tightness about my head,--a rush of blood to the brain,--which was of course aggravated by the intense heat and the unwonted exertion of my ascent to the castle. I may also have taken a glass or two more of wine than usual. I was, I am ashamed to confess, but it cannot be denied, stupidly intoxicated, not from excess, but from feeble health. At this very moment I fear a recurrence of the same rush of blood to the head. I must have talked all sorts of nonsense yesterday evening, and perhaps I offended you. Whether this be so or not I cannot say, for I have not the slightest remembrance of what occurred. In any case I pray you to excuse me, and not to avoid the balcony for fear of similar scenes. It shall not occur again."

"You did not offend us, Herr Doctor," Paul declared.

"I did not? That reassures me, and I may then hope to see you again this evening."

He bowed once more; and as he did so his face grew purple, and when he would have grasped the handle of the door he had to feel for it twice, like a blind man. His step too as he went out was strangely unsteady.

"Can he be intoxicated again so early in the morning?" Kuno whispered.

"I think not, he spoke so quietly and sensibly. Remember how differently he behaved last evening. No, I think he really is ill now."

Paul walked to the window whence he could overlook the path the doctor must take to the village. Several minutes passed before he came out of the Post, but then he turned directly into the road to his house, walking very slowly, and staggering at every step.

A peasant meeting him nodded familiarly, and then looked after him with a laugh.

"He must be drunk after all," said Paul, "or he is still feeling the effects of yesterday's debauch. Can he really have forgotten all he talked about last evening?"

"It would certainly seem so."

"At all events, I had better see Leo as soon as possible. Therefore, noble knight, when I have settled you comfortably on the balcony I will leave you to your fate,--not a very hard one in this instance, since I heard Fräulein Schommer not half an hour ago order her breakfast to be served upon the balcony,--and I will take my way to the castle to have a talk with Leo."

CHAPTER XIII.

As soon as Kuno was established upon the balcony and commended to the kind attention of the ladies, Delmar rapidly ascended the narrow, precipitous path by which he had reached the castle on the previous day. He did not heed the heat which had begun to be intense; he accorded not a look to the magnificent landscape, nor had he any care for the dangers of the way. What he desired was to reach the castle as quickly as possible.

His brain was in a chaos of confusion; he was in a labyrinth of puzzles, out of which he could find no clue. Nevertheless he passed on his perilous way in perfect security, and soon reached the garden of the castle.

Here he looked around him, hoping to encounter his friend, but Leo was nowhere to be seen. In the midst of a thick growth of shrubbery, however, he saw the flutter of a light dress, and in a moment Hilda appeared. She must have seen him coming, for she advanced directly towards him, holding out her hand in greeting, and speaking before he had time to address her. "You have done wrong, Herr Delmar," she said reproachfully. "You come from the rocks by the rock-path; I am really angry with you for not keeping your promise."

Was she really angry? Why then should she have received Paul with so enchanting a smile? Her words betokened a care for his safety that delighted him. He thought her far lovelier than upon the previous day, and far more like an angel, with her wealth of hair framing in so girlish and beautiful a face. When he had seen her before her straw hat had concealed its masses; now her head shone in the sunshine like pure gold.

When he took her hand he felt an intense longing to press it to his lips, but he remembered her reproof of the day previous and forbore, contenting himself with a slight pressure, which he rejoiced to fancy was in some measure returned. "You must not come to the castle by that path up the rocks," Hilda continued, when Paul did not reply to her first remonstrance. "You must give me your word not to take it again, or I shall always be anxious if you come at all late when you have promised a visit to Leo."

"Would you really be anxious on my account?" Paul asked, never thinking how low and gentle was the voice in which he put the question, or how Kuno would have laughed at him if he had heard it.

But Hilda did not laugh; she answered gravely and frankly, "Yes, Herr Delmar; I have deeply repented my thoughtlessness in showing you that path, and I should never forgive myself if you were to meet with any accident there. I have already been anxious about you this morning; you were so long in coming, when Leo thought you would be here directly after breakfast. Will you not make me the promise I ask?"

"Any promise that you ask is already made, lovely fairy. Delightful as is that scramble up the rocks, the path will not exist for me in future. You have forbidden me to use it, and I, as your obedient slave, venture no opposition to your command, but obey!"

"Then as a reward I will instantly conduct you to Leo, who is anxiously expecting you. He would have gone to Tausens himself this morning to see after his friend Herr von Herwarth, but he was kept here by the intelligence that a wealthy and well-known family from K---- had arrived at the Post."

"Then Leo already knows who they are?"

"Yes; the maid from the Post came up to the castle last evening to beg for some fowls. She reported that a very grand family from K---- had arrived in two four-horse carriages and were to spend some time in Tausens. She mentioned their names too as my housekeeper told me. The name of Schommer was familiar to me,--I met a charming girl, a Fräulein Schommer, in Vienna,--and so I asked Leo this morning if he knew these people."

"And he said?----"

"He said yes. But he seemed to me not very well pleased that they should have come to stay at

Tausens. When he told me that he should not go to the Post this morning because he wished if possible to avoid any personal encounter with these strangers, I said nothing further, although I should like to know more of them."

"Perhaps I can gratify this desire, Fräulein von Heydeck. I have the honour of knowing Fräulein Schommer."

"Ah, how glad I am! I should so like to know whether she is the lovely Eva Schommer whom I saw nearly two years ago in Vienna, and who so charmed me that I never left her side for an entire evening. Unfortunately I could not pursue the acquaintance, for she left Vienna the next day, and we never met again. Yes, she said her home was in K----. What a pleasure it would be to see her again here in Tausens!"

"That pleasure you can easily enjoy. Fräulein Schommer spoke to me last evening of her pleasant remembrance of you in Vienna."

"Oh, delightful!" Hilda exclaimed. "I have thought of that lovely Eva so often! I will go this very day to Tausens to see her. We must be together constantly!" She spoke impulsively, but suddenly she paused. "I forgot," she said sadly, "that Leo wishes to avoid meeting these people. Does he know this lovely girl? He cannot wish not to see her. But no, do not answer my question, Herr Delmar. I had no right to ask it. If Leo had wished me to know his reasons for not wishing to meet these people he would have told me them himself. I would rather have you say nothing to me about it."

"I thank you, Fräulein von Heydeck. It would have been hard to refuse any request of yours, and yet I have no right to speak of Leo's position with regard to Fräulein Schommer's family without his express permission. Of one thing however I can assure you: Leo can make, and can have, no possible objection to your renewing your acquaintance with Fräulein Schommer."

"Are you sure of this?"

"Perfectly sure; promise me that you will pay Fräulein Schommer a visit this afternoon, and I will answer for it that Leo shall accompany you."

"You will greatly oblige me by doing so, for I could not of course seek out the lady if our guest wished to avoid her."

As they talked, Hilda had conducted Paul into the castle and through the rooms to the corridor, at the end of which were Leo's apartments. "You cannot go astray now," she said. "Leo's room lies just before you. You will find him at his easel. He would not go out for fear of missing you. When I called him to breakfast he had begun a sketch, and was so absorbed in his work that he never left it. I did not see it, but I am hoping to enjoy it when it is finished."

Here Hilda left him, and Delmar went along the corridor to the last door; he knocked twice without receiving any answer, and then opened it and entered the room.

Leo had heard neither the knocking, the opening and shutting of the door, nor his friend's footstep. He was standing lost in thought before his easel, gazing at a sketch of a head, the result of his last few hours' labour.

When he had entered his sitting-room in the early morning, refreshed by his night's rest, and had seen the easel by the window with the canvas upon it ready stretched, he had been irresistibly tempted to take up his crayon and enjoy the delight of which he had been deprived for a week. Yielding to this irrepressible desire, he had made a sketch of the fair face that filled his dreams both sleeping and waking. It was so like that he stood now lost in contemplation of it, quite dead to the outer world, not hearing when Paul entered the room, not noticing the approach of his friend, who stood behind him for some minutes in silent admiration of the sketch upon the easel.

"Bravo, Leo! You have outdone yourself! 'Tis the most artistic sketch you've ever made!"

Leo started like one awakening from a dream that has held him spell-bound. His first impulse was to snatch the picture from the easel, and from the eyes of his friend, but Delmar stayed his hand.

"Come, come, Leo! let the picture stay! No artist is justified in hiding from sight the fruits of his genius. The picture is wonderful,--a masterpiece. Her eyes had just that deep, dreamy look in them yesterday when she so bitterly lamented your injustice in accusing her of pride of purse. You must know that I have concluded a peace with the fair Eva. I solemnly retract everything derogatory that I ever said or thought about her; indeed, I frankly confess to you that I never in my life fell into so pitiable an error as when I pronounced such hasty, crude, and unjustifiable judgment upon this charming girl. If she would but allow me, I would beg her pardon on my knees."

Leo regarded Paul with amazement, looking in vain for the sneer that was wont to play about his lips when he wanted to tease his friend.

Delmar had been steadily contemplating the picture as he spoke in a tone of honest conviction. Now he turned to Leo, and remarking his amazement, he continued, with a smile: "You look at me as if you hardly believed me, and, remembering my folly with regard to Fräulein Schommer, I cannot blame you. The age of miracles however is not yet over; the most hardened of sinners may be converted by the logic of lovely lips, and I am a convert. With a few simple, frank words she has reversed my ridiculous judgment of her. I wish you could have heard her yesterday when she so sadly bewailed her misfortune in being 'too rich.' You, too, would have changed your opinion of her, and no longer have hated her, as you apparently do at present. Only intense hatred or intense--affection could have stamped her features so deeply upon your memory as to enable you to reproduce them in this wondrous way. And as you assuredly do not love Eva, you of course hate her. And yet how admirably you have managed to show no trace of this dislike in your drawing!"

"Paul, do not torture me!"

This simple sentence disarmed Delmar; he grew grave instantly. "I will not tease you," he said, "although you deserve it for never giving the confidence you owe a friend to one so devoted to you as I am. Have I not a right to be angry with you that accident alone--the sight of this picture--has told me your secret? You love Fräulein Schommer, although to me you denied that you did so. It was not true friendship, Leo."

"What else could I do? I hardly knew myself at first whether I loved or hated her; and when I did know, I was ashamed of my hopeless passion."

"Hopeless? It is folly to use such a word. How can a man like yourself, endowed with physical and mental superiority and distinguished both by birth and by position, condescend to utter such a word? You never tried to gain Fräulein Schommer's affection."

"She has repulsed me with proud reserve upon the only occasions when I have been in her society. And even if she had not done so, I should not have paid court to her,--she is too rich!"

"Too rich! There it is! That is the root of the matter!" Paul exclaimed with irritation. "Too rich! It is Fräulein Schommer's misfortune and my own. While the wretches who envy us for our wealth crowd about us to gather up servilely the golden crumbs we may throw them, while they flatter and cringe and worship us as their golden calf, those whom we esteem and love withdraw from our society. We are too rich for those disinterested souls who would love us for our own sakes,--they will not expose themselves to the degrading suspicion of seeking us for the sake of our wealth! How often I have been devoured with rage when you, Leo, my dearest friend, have refused to share with me the enjoyments that wealth can procure! I was 'too rich' for you, and therefore you bestowed but a few meagre hours of your society upon me when I so coveted your companionship; therefore you withdrew from me more and more, and would, I verily believe, have forsaken me utterly if I had not clutched you and refused to let you go. Poor Eva Schommer! She, too, is 'too rich,' and therefore throws herself away upon a heartless vagabond. For the man who would love her disinterestedly for her own sake she is 'too rich'! The devil take wealth! if it robs us of all that is best and noblest in this world,--the love of our friends,--giving us instead only the flattery of fools, ennui, satiety, and disgust of life!"

Leo had never seen his friend thus agitated. His cheeks were flushed and his voice trembled with emotion as he spoke. To Heydeck's friendly remonstrance he made no reply, but, walking to the window, stood gazing for some minutes at the magnificent view. Then, having recovered his self-possession, he turned to Leo, and with a gentleness of manner rare in him, said, "I was cross to you, Leo; forgive me. A sense of the misfortune that dogs my life overcame me for a moment,--it shall not be so again. I know that you, in spite of my millions, are my true, my only friend. Enough of this! we have other matters to discuss. First, let me tell you that Herwarth's sprained ankle will keep him tied to his arm-chair on the balcony at the Post for two weeks; therefore if you wish to see him you must go to him, he cannot come to you."

Leo was annoyed by this intelligence, much as he wished to see his friend. He would have liked to avoid the meeting with Fräulein Schommer and Bertram, that would doubtless take place if he visited Herwarth. He expressed this annoyance to Delmar.

But Delmar would not heed it. "Bertram will hardly dare to put himself in your way; and as for Fräulein Schommer, it is your duty as a man of honour to ask her pardon. It is not enough to see that one has been wrong,--the wrong should be confessed to whomsoever it has injured. But I will not press you. I am sure that you will do what is right, and I hope you will come to Tausens this afternoon with your cousin, who wishes to renew an acquaintance with Fräulein Schommer. And now let us speak of another matter, of the greatest interest and importance to me. You must help me to solve a mystery in which I suddenly find myself involved, and to this end I must tell you in detail all that happened yesterday."

And Paul began his story, first recalling to Leo's remembrance the extraordinary reception accorded him by Herr von Heydeck,--dwelling upon the fact that the old man had mentioned his Christian name, 'Paul,' without hearing it. He then told of his visit to Dr. Putzer and of the doctor's amazement at seeing him; of his first taking him for a Count Menotti,--a name which Paul had certainly heard somewhere lately, he could not remember where; and last he gave an account of the incomprehensible phrases which had escaped the tipsy doctor during his evening

visit.

Leo listened with eager attention. As Paul went on he thought involuntarily of the postmaster's information with regard to his uncle's earlier life, connecting with it the strange interest which Herr von Heydeck took in Paul Delmar, the deserted room in the tower, and the old cradle. All this, combined with the tipsy talk of Dr. Putzer, suddenly aroused in Leo a suspicion, which he at first rejected as too wild and incredible, but to which every word of Paul's, as he continued, gave greater probability.

When Delmar ended his recital with, "Now tell me, Leo, what do you think of this strange tale?" Heydeck had no doubt that he had discovered its meaning,—a meaning that brought disgrace to his uncle.

"I will tell you, Paul," he said, "but first answer me one question. Look back to the days of your boyhood, think of your relations with your father, of his last days, and of his will. Did it never occur to you that he must have had a particular reason for the terms in which it was couched? You were his natural heir; why should he have made the express statement that he left you his property, not because you were his son, but because of your love for him, and because you were the founder and preserver of his wealth? What reason could your father have for such a will?"

"I cannot tell. I have often wondered, but never have arrived at any conclusion."

"Did you never think how your father, during all your early childhood, held himself aloof from you, only according you his parental affection in later years; and that he may have had some reason for this conduct? Would not all these apparent contradictions be explained if you were not his own child, but an adopted son, whose dutiful and filial conduct at last aroused his genuine affection?"

Paul, who had been leaning back in an arm-chair, here started to his feet. "What do you mean?" he exclaimed, in great agitation. "Such an idea never entered my mind; my brain whirls at the thought. But go on; to what does all this lead?"

Leo obeyed, reminding Paul of the postmaster's narrative, of the suspicion awakened years before with regard to Herr von Heydeck,—a suspicion that he had, in connection with Dr. Putzer and his wife, caused the death of his son, to whose estate he had thus become heir. Formerly it had been whispered that Herr von Heydeck was not the child's father, but that the boy was the offspring of Frau von Heydeck and of Count Menotti.

"There is where I heard the name!" Paul exclaimed; "but go on, go on! I am upon the rack of expectation!"

Leo went on to speak of the cries which had been so often heard from the round tower after the child's death, and that no one save Herr von Heydeck himself and his half-idiotic servants had ventured to go near this part of the castle. He then told of his losing his way upon the previous afternoon, of his visit to the deserted room, of the cradle, and of his struggle with Melcher. From all this, taken in connection with his uncle's expressions and the doctor's talk, he drew the conclusion that possibly many years previously his uncle and Dr. Putzer had combined to remove from the world the unfortunate child which his uncle was convinced was not his own, but the son of Count Menotti. This was not effected by murder, of which vulgar gossip had accused them, but by the removal of the child whose little corpse no one but the doctor was allowed to see.

For this purpose the haunted tower had been put to use; there they had kept the boy whose cries, heard in the silent night, had stricken with terror the superstitious villagers. Afterwards, for his perfect security, Herr von Heydeck must himself have removed the child. If this were so, and if the deceased Herr Delmar had been induced to adopt the forsaken boy, the strange provisions of his will were clearly explained, as were also the expressions of Herr von Heydeck and the doctor, who had both instantly recognized the resemblance of Delmar to Count Menotti, and were doubtless convinced that he had come to Tausens to lay claim to his inheritance and to the name and title of a Herr von Heydeck.

"If my suspicion be correct," Leo concluded, "and the more I reflect upon the matter the more convinced I am that it is so, you are the boy, the lawful possessor of this castle, whom my uncle has deprived of his estate and of his name. According to law you are my uncle's son,—Hilda's brother."

"Hilda's brother!" Paul almost shouted. "Would you drive me mad? Is it not enough to take from me everything to which I have hitherto clung,—even the father whom I loved and in whom I had full faith? I, Hilda's brother! Never I never! I cannot believe it! And yet can I help believing it?" he continued, after a short pause. "Have you not succeeded in discovering an explanation for all which I thought inexplicable? Heydeck, who stole from me my estate and thrust me forth into the world because he knew that I was not his son, recognizes me by my likeness to the man who dishonoured him. There is not in my veins one drop of your worthless uncle's blood, and yet the law makes me Hilda's brother,—and the worst of criminals, should I ever dare to entertain for her in my heart one sentiment save that of a brother for a sister!"

As he spoke, Paul was pacing the room to and fro in the greatest agitation; his olive cheek was deeply flushed; and such unmistakable despair was painted in his face, that Leo, who had had no

idea of the depth and strength of the 'love at first sight' that had taken possession of Paul for Hilda, could have no doubt as to the sentiments that filled his soul. He was utterly amazed. Paul, with his critical sneer, his ridicule of all sentimentality, his constant insistence that the intellect should always maintain its dominion over the affections, had suddenly lost his heart,—lost it irretrievably to a young girl whom he had known only for a few hours, and who, in Leo's opinion, was to be sure very charming and amiable, but not at all the one to inspire such a man as Delmar with this sudden overmastering passion.

Yet although this love was a riddle to Leo, none the less did his friend's despair excite his compassion, and he repented having so pitilessly pronounced the sentence 'according to law you are Hilda's brother,' without dreaming of the effect it might produce upon his friend.

"Calm yourself, Paul," he said gently; "do not forget that all I have said is only hypothetical. I have no facts to substantiate my supposition, no way of proving even the possibility of its correctness."

"Who want proof?" Delmar angrily exclaimed. "Did I come here to lay any claim to the wretched inheritance which that woman, whom I will not call mother, left her son? You know well enough that I am too rich now. Or can you suppose that I aspire to the honour of the name of von Heydeck? I love the name for your sake, Leo; you have ennobled it, and it is that borne by your cousin, else I should hate it. Proofs! If I possessed proofs clear as sunlight that this castle belonged to me, and that I had a legal right to the name of Heydeck, I would consign them to the flames, that no one upon earth might know that I had a right to be considered your uncle's son."

"Why then, Paul, should the thought of Hilda bring you such misery? If you never lay claim to the right which the law would perhaps accord you, she is not your sister. As you yourself said, no drop of her father's blood flows in your veins."

"Are you so sure of that,—sure that I am not your uncle's son, whom a freak of nature stamped with a resemblance to his mother's friend. Count Menotti? In that case Hilda would really be my sister. I grow giddy at the horrid thought, and yet I must learn to grasp it. I should despise myself if, in view of such a possibility, I ever dared approach Hilda with other than a brother's love. Shall I poison her young life? If she should love me and become my wife, as I, fool that I was, ventured to dream a few hours ago, and should then, by any chance, learn that the law makes her father, mine, how horrible would be her fate! No, Leo; I will never sacrifice her happiness to my insane passion! She shall never suspect it. I will be all to her—faithful friend, true counsellor—that a brother may; but she never shall hear from my lips one syllable betokening a warmer feeling than the love of a brother."

"I know you will remain steadfast in this resolution, Paul. I shall not gainsay it by a single word. Only let me pray you to act calmly and without passion. You have no right to take my conjecture for reality without further confirmation; the facts upon which it is founded may perhaps bear a different interpretation. You must not allow the happiness of your life to be destroyed by an ill-founded suspicion."

"What would you have me do?"

"Investigate the truth concerning your birth. First spare no pains to discover, here in Tausens, whether my uncle's son did not really die here years ago; your wealth will help you to do this. I will do all that I can to assist you, not only here, but also in Germany, where you must search out the former home of Herr Delmar, and succeed, if possible, in establishing proof that you really are his son, and that a chance resemblance has thus befooled us all. You must not lose courage, Paul; you have a sacred duty to fulfil, both to yourself and to Hilda."

"Be it so!" Paul replied, with a firm grasp of his friend's hand. "I will do what you ask; I will investigate this wretched mystery; I will search for proof that I am the son of this scoundrelly Herr von Heydeck, as if in this certainty lay my every hope of happiness instead of my doom to misery; but I am inwardly convinced that your suspicion is only too well grounded. The task I propose will not be a difficult one. I know the hand wherein lies the clue to the secret. That wretch, Dr. Putzer, is your uncle's accomplice. He will do anything for money, as he clearly made known to me yesterday. *In vino veritas*. If I give him what he asks, and insure him from all risk, he can easily be brought to betray his principal and give me the proof I want. I will not chaffer with him; he may have as much as he asks. I will tell you more, Leo, if you will come to Tausens with your cousin this afternoon. Now I leave you to go to Dr. Putzer. Farewell."

The friends separated with a cordial grasp of hands that told better than in words of their determination to pursue earnestly the task they had undertaken; and then, when Leo had conducted Paul to the head of the grand staircase, he returned sadly to his studio.

As Paul passed through the portal of the castle and saw upon the right the old round tower, a bitter sense of injury possessed him. There was the place where he had been imprisoned as a helpless infant, while the avaricious man who was legally his father annihilated all trace of the existence of the child whom he dared not kill, but would not allow to live.

"If he had only killed me!" Paul sighed; and the thought suddenly occurred to him whether it would not be best to end his misery by a leap from the castle rock. "No! no!" he reflected; "they

must not despise me as a coward."

And yet the thought had a positive fascination for him. Could he not contrive that a misstep upon the perilous path up the rocks should cause his death to be considered by his friends the result of chance? They would--Leo would--mourn him truly, and the will by which he had made his friend his heir would smooth Heydeck's future career for him. He would not hesitate then to approach Eva as a lover. The miserable millions would at last bring happiness to their possessor.

But as he was walking through the garden towards the narrow rock-path, oblivious of his promise to Hilda, a prey to dire temptation, a voice was suddenly heard that caused him to pause, startled.

"Where are you going, Herr Delmar?"

He looked up, and Hilda stood before him, with pain and reproach in her eyes.

Her simple question covered Paul with confusion. He now first remembered the promise so frankly given a short time before; a promise he was on his way to break. He might have given an evasive reply. Indeed, Hilda helped him to do so by adding, "Perhaps you hoped to meet me here in the garden. Did you speak with Leo about my visit to Fräulein Schommer?"

But such an evasion seemed unmanly and unworthy of him. "Forgive me, Fräulein Hilda," was his only reply.

Hilda understood him. "Were you really about to return to Tausens by the rock-path in spite of your promise?"

"I had forgotten it. Indeed, you have a right to be angry, but if you knew----"

He hesitated; he could not make Hilda the confidante of his misery.

"What has happened, Herr Delmar? Why do you pause? You are evidently agitated. What can you have learned in the short time since I saw you? Tell me, I pray."

As she spoke she kindly offered him her hand, but he did not take it. He shuddered as he thought of how happy he had been but a few short moments before when he took that little hand, and of the hopes that had then dawned in his soul, hopes that must be crushed forever. Should he press his lips upon it in one farewell kiss? No! not even that. She must not dream how hard it was to part from her; she must think of him as of a stranger, and he looked away, that Hilda might suppose he did not see the hand she held out to him.

But Hilda was not deceived. The interest which she felt in Delmar was too deep and vivid to allow her to remain ignorant of the change he had suddenly undergone. She saw that he intentionally avoided taking her hand, and she was afraid that she had in some manner offended him. Was he vexed at her suspicion that he had meant to break his word? She had not meant to call him to so strict an account. "Are you vexed with me, Herr Delmar?" she said gently; "I did not mean to offend you."

"I know that, Fräulein Hilda," Delmar replied, recovering his composure. "How could you offend me? I confess that I am agitated by the conversation that I have just had with Leo about family matters, of which I am not at liberty to speak. I had forgotten my promise with regard to the Reifenstein rocks, but be assured I will keep faith with you now. Farewell, Fräulein Hilda!"

He bowed formally and walked away through the garden towards the court-yard. In the dim gateway leading into it he turned to look at Hilda once more. She was standing on the spot where he had left her, with amazement and sorrow expressed in her whole air and bearing. His strange manner, his formal farewell, had filled her with vague misgivings.

He waved his hand in token of adieu, and hurried from the castle across the bridge to the well-worn foot-path down the mountain. Again, as he walked on, did that grim temptation to self-destruction assault his soul. He turned aside among the shrubbery that bordered the pathway, and penetrating it, reached the brink of the abyss and gazed down into its misty depths. As he looked his foot slipped upon a loose stone; in an instant the instinct of self-preservation was on the alert. Involuntarily he seized the stout branch of a tree growing beside him and swung himself up to the level ground. As he did so a scornful smile curled his lip at the thought of the exertion he was making to save a life now so worthless in his eyes. But dreary as the future seemed to him, he shrank from the cowardice that would flee from trials and agonies that might be bravely met. He remembered how often he had heard Leo denounce the pusillanimity of those who lacked courage to meet the inevitable shocks of life. And Hilda,--could she ever have even a kindly thought for the memory of a suicide?

One more look he gave to the abyss at his feet, and then turned back into the secure foot-path and walked on slowly, lost in thought, to the village. He was no longer occupied solely with self; his mind reacted healthily and he thought of his friend. What change might not the next few weeks bring about in the life of the man who had been to him more than a brother? Eva and Leo must have opportunities for knowing and understanding each other. With closer knowledge of his friend, Fräulein Schommer could not but return his affection. To this end Paul would exert

himself: he would give his life a new purpose; and this resolution exalted and refreshed him. He had almost forgotten the dark shadow brooding over his own existence when he was reminded of it by a sudden glimpse among the trees of the village in the midst of which Dr. Putzer's house was conspicuous.

He remembered that he had promised Leo to attempt to learn from Dr. Putzer more concerning Herr von Heydeck. The result of such an attempt had lost all interest for him, it is true, so convinced was he of the truth of Leo's surmises, but nevertheless he would, as he had promised, do all that he could to drag every fact connected with this mystery to the full light of day.

CHAPTER XIV.

When Paul at last reached the village street, he did not turn in the direction of the Post, but went directly towards Dr. Putzer's house. On approaching it he noticed several peasants talking in the road in front of the garden. Among them was the postmaster, gesticulating eagerly.

Paul would have passed them and entered the garden, but the postmaster detained him. "If you want to speak to the doctor," said honest Hansel, taking off his cap, "you come upon a vain errand."

"Is he not at home?"

"He is at home, but you cannot speak with him."

Hansel's answer was made in quite a solemn tone; he was evidently burning with desire to tell Delmar what he had repeated already three or four times to the peasants, who listened with eager attention to his every word; but he waited to be questioned by Paul. As soon as this occurred the floodgates of his eloquence were opened.

He told minutely all that he had heard from the doctor's servant. Yesterday evening, when the stable-boy from the Post had taken the doctor home, he had been received very unkindly by his wife, who had called him an irreclaimable drunkard, and more hard names besides than the poorest peasant's wife in the village would have bestowed upon her husband. The doctor only laughed childishly, and, although his wife forbade his speaking before the maid, went maundering on unintelligibly about Herr von Heydeck at the castle, and Herr Delmar, and Count Menotti.

The doctor's wife had grown quite furious when she could not make him hold his tongue, and had dashed a bucketful of cold water over his head to bring him to his senses. She had often done this before, and the doctor also often held his head under the cold stream of water at the brook to make himself sober; but on this evening the cold water did him no good: he grew quite purple in the face, and it was a long time before he came to himself and got to bed.

To-day they had a great quarrel early in the morning; the maid did not know what it was about,--they often quarrelled,--but she heard the name of von Heydeck very often; and towards ten o'clock the doctor took his hat and stick and went to the Post, to pay his visit to the sick gentleman there, and as he walked through the garden the maid had noticed that his face was much redder than usual when he had been intoxicated the day before. He spoke very quietly and was entirely himself; but when he came home again, walking very unsteadily and looking very ill, the doctor's wife flew into a rage, and insisted upon his letting the water at the brook flow over his head. He refused to do it at first, but his wife stormed and insisted, and he yielded at last, as he always did. Scarcely however had he held his head under the stream for a minute when he suddenly fell on the ground and lay like one dead.

His wife's screams brought the neighbours to the spot, and they got the sick man into the house and put him in bed, where he was now lying perfectly unconscious. He was still living, but he could not possibly recover. His wife was no true wife to him, but a worthless, miserable creature. Instead of taking care of her husband, she had left him. As soon as he was got to bed she had ordered a conveyance from the Post; and the postmaster had provided it immediately, for he thought she wanted to send for a doctor. But the wretched woman had never thought of doing so; she had packed up her clothing and various other articles in a hurry, and had driven off no one knew whither. She had told the servant-girl to take care of the doctor and to send for another physician, but that he would certainly not last long. And so the poor man was lying in bed, unconscious, with no one but the servant to attend to him. The postmaster, however, for old acquaintance' sake, had sent another conveyance for Dr. Atzinger. Dr. Atzinger had just left the

sick man, and had said that he might get over the stroke this time, but that he never would have the use of his limbs, and that no one must be allowed to see him. All this the postmaster related to Delmar, who thus found himself deprived of any hope of immediate aid from Dr. Putzer in his investigations. This did not trouble him, however, since he had only been interested to fulfil his promise to Leo, and he was rather relieved to feel entirely free to devote himself to his friend's affairs.

Upon his return to the inn, Delmar found the entire Schommer family at dinner with Herwarth upon the balcony. Bertram alone was missing; he had not returned from an expedition to some cascades which he had undertaken that morning; indeed, a messenger had arrived from him saying that he had gone on to Rothwald, whence he should make a mountain-ascent, which would probably detain him there until the following day. Uncle Balthasar told Delmar of this, lamenting that 'dear Guido' could not join their little circle, but he was the only one who regretted his absence; the others all felt relieved in the consciousness that they should not see Bertram for some hours at least.

Kuno had enjoyed himself greatly during Paul's absence. Eva declared with a smile that all the ladies had bestowed upon the invalid their tenderest solicitude, and had succeeded in compelling him to comply with the orders of his physician, although he was at times a most unruly patient, in his determination to prevent them from exerting themselves in his behalf.

These few hours of unconventional intercourse on the balcony had established a degree of friendly intimacy between Kuno and the young ladies which pleased Delmar much. Eva treated him with frank familiarity, jesting with him as with an old acquaintance. Aline was not quite so unconstrained; although not less kind, there was a certain reserve in her manner towards Herwarth. Paul noticed this, and that her eyes, which evidently rested with pleasure upon the lieutenant when he was talking with Eva, were quickly averted if he looked towards herself. It was not difficult for so keen an observer as Delmar to read the secret of these two hearts. The discovery gave him a melancholy pleasure. "Another couple who will and shall be happy!" he thought to himself "It was best that Fräulein Hilda should keep me away from the path down the Reifenstein rock; a ghastly accident would have scattered these happy people, and I may be of use here yet." Filled with this thought, Paul forgot himself and his sorrows. He sat down at the table, and was the life of the little party. He contrived that Aline and Herwarth should have frequent opportunity of conversation, while he entertained Eva, Uncle Balthasar, and even silent Aunt Minni with his gay talk, seeming to all to be even more merry than on the previous day. Eva forgot her usual gravity, and Uncle Balthasar was enchanted; his only sorrow was that 'dear Guido' could not be present to enjoy 'this delightful conversation.' Paul said but little of his visit to the castle; he simply told Eva that in a short conversation with Fräulein von Heydeck he had told her of the guests at the Post. The young girl remembered, with great pleasure, her evening with Fräulein Schommer in Vienna, and would certainly come to the inn with her cousin Leo to renew her acquaintance with her. As he spoke, Delmar watched Eva narrowly, although he was apparently toying indifferently with his wine-glass. When he mentioned Leo's name, and his intention of coming to the inn, he saw the girl's cheek flush; she suddenly raised her eyes, and as quickly dropped them again upon meeting Paul's keen glance. She turned away to hide her confusion, and addressed a few words in an undertone to her aunt, who sat beside her.

"Will it be disagreeable to you, Fräulein Schommer, to have Leo come down to Tausens?"

Eva hastily turned towards him, her cheek still flushed, but all confusion overcome. "Did you arrange this visit of which you now tell me, Herr Delmar?" she asked, not without asperity.

"I may have done so. You expressed a wish yesterday to see again Fräulein Hilda von Heydeck. I could not suppose that you contemplated going up to the castle, and I therefore proposed that Fräulein Hilda should come to you. She only half promised, however, and I am not sure she will be able to fulfil her intent."

"I was not speaking of Fräulein Hilda, but of Herr von Heydeck. I asked whether you had arranged this visit, because I had hoped you would remember what I said yesterday."

"You said yesterday that you were not afraid of meeting my friend."

"And I also said that I thought it desirable that any such meeting should be avoided. It is not fair in you, Herr Delmar, intentionally to expose me to embarrassment of this kind."

While she was speaking Paul regarded her with gentle gravity; her reckless frankness enlisted his sympathy profoundly. As she finished he bent his head, and in a low and gentle tone said, "Your frank, honest reproof shall receive as frank and honest a reply. I might easily deceive you by telling you that Leo must see his friend Herwarth, and that therefore I had arranged this visit; but I will not deceive you. Frankly and honestly, then, I wish Leo to see you again for his own sake and--for yours!"

"Herr Delmar, I must beg----"

"Stay, Fräulein Schommer! I know what you would say. You would accuse me of unjustifiable interference in your affairs which are no concern of mine; but there you are wrong. I take a deeper interest in them than you would probably think permissible, but nothing is so near to me

in this world as Leo's happiness. You see I am honest and do not flatter you."

"No, you have shown me that you do not, both yesterday and to-day; yet I really cannot see what interest your affection for Herr von Heydeck can have for me."

"That is not said with your usual ingenuousness, Fräulein Schommer," Delmar said earnestly. "You know well that you take a degree of interest in my friend Leo's destiny, and you ought not to deny it. Leo bitterly regrets having been misled in an unfortunate moment to say words which wounded you."

"That is not so, Herr Delmar."

"Excuse me, it is so; and Leo is all the more sensible of his injustice since he was not true to himself in what he said. Irritated by a certain haughty demeanour, which Fräulein Schommer is apt to display towards those whom she knows but slightly, Leo was induced that day, in answer to his friend Herwarth's badinage, to say what was no sooner uttered than it was deeply repented. He will never be satisfied until he has had an opportunity of entreating your forgiveness,—an opportunity which I am sure you are too magnanimous to deny him."

Eva was much moved by Paul's words. Was he telling the truth, or was what he said the result of the ironical mood that so often possessed him? Had he read her heart? Did he know that she could not bear a grudge to Leo,—that his insulting words had long since been forgiven by her,—that she only mourned he should have been prompted to utter them?

"You do not reply, Fräulein Schommer," Paul continued, so gravely that Eva could no longer suspect him of a sneer. "You hardly seem to trust my words, and therefore you force me to say more than I had intended. Do you remember what you said yesterday,—your bitter lament over the misfortune of being too rich?"

"Yes; why do you ask?"

"You never uttered truer words than those then spoken. Yes, it is your greatest trial, as it is my own, to be 'too rich.' Your wealth has poisoned your soul. Conscious of these wretched riches, you receive all who approach you with haughty disdain, believing them attracted solely by the glitter of your gold. Such was your treatment of Leo, the noblest and most disinterested of men, and the cold contempt of your manner cut him to the quick. And this is not the worst,—an unkind word can be atoned for by kindness,—Leo would not be implacable any more than you will be so, but— you are too rich. He loves you, Fräulein Schommer. Your image is so deeply engraven upon his soul that it stands upon his easel at this moment wrought by his hand, so like you that it almost seems your living, breathing self. He loves you, but you are 'too rich.' Not your cold reserve, but your miserable money, repels his pride. That fortune, which is a bait for the avarice of a—Bertram, is a barrier between yourself and the man in whose affection you might find the deepest bliss attainable in this world. But enough of this. I have presumed incredibly, I know, but I hope not past forgiveness when you consider how profound is that regard for my friend, in which I refuse to believe that you take no 'interest.' Fräulein Aline is looking at us in surprise at our withdrawal from all part in the general conversation, and we must really devote more of our attention to these excellent trout."

Delmar had seized a happy opportunity, when the rest of the circle were variously absorbed, to prepare Eva's mind thus for Leo's visit. He had succeeded; the girl's glowing cheeks, and the dreamy expression of her dark eyes, told him how profound was the impression he had produced. She did not reply, her heart was too full for words.

Beloved by Leo! No, this was no ironical jest of Delmar's; he had spoken in the tone of intense conviction. She could not doubt his words; the consciousness, vague although it was, of being loved by the man whose image she had so cherished in secret, filled her with a sense of blessed content which not even the knowledge that she was separated from him forever could at first disturb.

Separated forever! Yes, she was the betrothed of Bertram. When Delmar had uttered his name she had shrunk involuntarily, as if conscious for the first time of her detestation and contempt for him. But she was his; she must keep the vow that bound her to him. It was a duty which she had voluntarily imposed upon herself, as she now knew, for Leo's sake. She had sacrificed herself that he might escape a threatened danger; the knowledge of this gave her strength to bear the misery that must be her future lot. Her fate was decided, but in the consciousness that she was beloved, she no longer found it so hard to bear.

Paul divined what was passing in her soul; he saw that his words had produced upon her an ineradicable impression, but she must not be left to reflect upon them. He turned away and began a conversation with Uncle Balthasar, in which the rest speedily joined. Never had Paul seemed half so merry and entertaining, how could Eva refuse to bear her part in the general cheerfulness that prevailed? Even Aunt Minni was startled from her usual indolent serenity, and once or twice actually laughed. As Delmar had succeeded in banishing his own brooding fancies, he now prevented Eva from indulging in any such.

Several hours passed thus gayly upon the balcony. Coffee had been served, and still no one arose to leave it. Uncle Balthasar had foregone his usual afternoon nap in view of the agreeable

society in which he found himself.

Thus the moments flew by, and no one noticed that Delmar grew slightly restless, casting frequent glances towards that part of the landscape where a small stretch of the road from the village could be seen. In fact he began to be afraid lest his well-devised plan for a reconciliation between Eva and Leo should fail, in view of the latter's great unwillingness to approach one whom he felt he had so deeply offended. He was not however doomed to such a disappointment. The visit he had so desired was at hand.

In the distance he first noticed the flutter of a light dress, and soon recognized Hilda, beside whom walked Leo, engaged in earnest conversation. Paul breathed freely now,--in a few minutes they would reach the inn. Leo's visit could not have occurred at a happier time. Eva had been prepared to see him again; she had forgiven him; she had been told that he loved her, and to this declaration from Delmar's lips she had replied by no word of reproof. Delmar was convinced that a few friendly words from either would suffice to banish the shadow that now lay between them, and then he could make up his mind what to do next. They must have frequent opportunities of meeting, that was certain,--frequent occasion for familiar intercourse. Delmar must see that Bertram did not interfere here.

Although Paul was aware of his friend's love for Fräulein Schommer, he knew nothing of the state of the girl's heart, except for the gentle sympathy for Leo which he had read in her eyes. Her readiness to bestow her hand upon Bertram was inconsistent Paul thought with the existence of an affection for any one else. And yet this uncertainty did not deter Delmar from the pursuance of his schemes. He was convinced that Leo could succeed in winning Eva's heart if only time and opportunity were given him. She must admire his brilliant talents and respect his lofty enthusiasm; love would surely follow, and then would come the time to dissolve her engagement with Bertram, and the end for which Delmar was now living would be attained.

"There come our friends Fräulein Hilda and Leo von Heydeck!" he turned to say to Eva, who was talking with Aline, and as he spoke he pointed towards the road. For a moment Eva lost her self-possession: her cheek paled and her lips trembled.

"Courage, Eva dear!" Aline whispered. "You must summon all your self-control."

Aline's efforts to calm her friend were seconded by the extraordinary surprise which Uncle Balthasar displayed at Paul's information, a surprise which greatly amused every one.

"Oh, Holy Apostles! Herr von Heydeck!" the old man exclaimed in the broadest Saxon, with such positive horror imprinted upon his broad, good-humoured face as only some fearful intelligence should have provoked. He had not much time to recover from his fright, for a few moments later Hilda appeared upon the balcony followed by Leo.

Herwarth's and Delmar's laughter at Uncle Balthasar's exclamation of dismay had restored Eva's composure, and when Hilda hastened up to her, expressing in her fresh girlish way the delight that it was to her to meet Fräulein Schommer once more, every trace of embarrassment on Eva's part disappeared. She returned Hilda's kiss with equal cordiality, and then presented her to her uncle and aunt as the "charming Fräulein von Heydeck whom she had met in Vienna, and of whom she had so often spoken to them." She acknowledged Leo's profound bow most courteously; she could not be perfectly easy and unconstrained while doing so; the blood rushed to her cheek as she felt that Delmar was watching her the while.

In spite however of the cordial meeting between Hilda and Eva, all the members of the little circle, with the exception of Hilda and Paul, suffered under a certain constraint. They could not but remember the past, and it was not easy to enter into general conversation. Uncle Balthasar cast timid side-glances at Leo, who, to conceal his embarrassment, was making minute inquiries after Herwarth's health. Aline was anxiously watching Eva, who was exerting all her self-control to appear at ease, and even Aunt Minni, usually so perfectly unimpressionable, seemed aware of the general disturbance, and sat in her arm-chair with her fat red face studiously turned away from the terrible Herr von Heydeck.

Paul was quite unembarrassed and much amused by the evident efforts of every one to appear at ease, the sarcastic smile which his friends knew so well hovered upon his lips; he was master of the situation which he himself had contrived, and which was to aid his schemes. He managed with a jest directed towards Uncle Balthasar to relieve the good old man from constraint, and then skilfully drew him into conversation with Leo and Herwarth, so that Eva, Aline, and Hilda were left to talk together. Aunt Minni always preferring to be left to herself.

It was Paul's fashion in pursuit of any aim to act with great recklessness, and now, determined to reconcile Leo with Uncle Balthasar, instead of avoiding all allusion to the scene at Büchner's and the affront offered to Eva by Leo, he led the conversation directly to the subject, and thus gave his friend an opportunity to express his regret to Uncle Balthasar for what had occurred. Leo did this in so frank and manly a way that the placable old man was entirely satisfied, and no longer remembered the dismay with which he had received the announcement of Herr von Heydeck's visit.

For a while Paul left the young girls to themselves; then by appealing to Eva upon some

opinion just expressed by Leo, he drew them also into the conversation, which thus became general. To his great satisfaction he noticed that Eva replied willingly and pleasantly to the few remarks which Leo addressed to her.

But a first visit should not be too prolonged. At the end of an hour Hilda rose to take leave, after having arranged that Aline, Eva, and herself should meet frequently, Hilda promising to act as their cicerone to all the points of interest in the country round.

"If you will allow me, Fräulein Hilda, I will walk some distance with you and Leo on your way back." Paul said to Hilda; and then turning to Eva he added, "Will not you, Fräulein Schommer and Fräulein von Schlicht, improve the occasion for a walk? you have not left the house to-day,-- and I will promise to escort you safely back to the Post."

Hilda of course seconded this proposition, and Eva agreed to it, to the surprise of Aline, who could not but consent to accompany her friend after commending Herwarth to the kind offices of Uncle Balthasar.

Eva and Aline started with Hilda, while Delmar walked by the side of Leo; and how it happened no one except perhaps Paul could have told, but after a little while Leo walked by Eva's side, while Paul followed with the two other ladies. Gradually the distance between the two parties increased, for Delmar walked very slowly, and often stopped to ask Hilda the names of the various mountain-peaks, or to point out to Aline some special beauty in the landscape, while he talked so fast and so eagerly that he absorbed the entire attention of his companions. They never noticed that Leo and Eva were now a considerable distance in front of them.

Leo's entertainment of his companion was by no means so glib and ready as was Delmar's of Aline and Hilda. He was glad that Paul had so soon procured him this opportunity of speaking to Eva alone and undisturbed; and yet, now that it was thus his, he could hardly find courage to improve it. He walked along by Eva's side in silence for some minutes, and did but grow more and more confused. Never had he felt so utterly and insanely stupid. Of course Eva could not begin a conversation, and how she must despise his inability to find the right words in which to address her! The right words! he thought he could not find them, and yet they came, when, yielding to the feeling that had mastered him, he simply asked, "Can you forgive me?"

These were the right words! They came from the heart, as Eva felt, and she looked up to Leo with a charming smile. "I have nothing to forgive!" She said nothing more, and yet she seemed to Leo to have spoken volumes. He could have shouted for joy, so exquisite was the pleasure that the low whispered words gave him, dispelling the dark shadow that had rested upon his life. Eva had forgiven him! The words that she spoke, and still more the eyes that had gazed for a moment into his, had assured him of this.

He took her hand and pressed it to his lips; he could not help it, and Eva did not resent his doing so, nor did she withdraw it when he placed it within his arm. She had forgiven him, there was no cause for offence between them. He never thought of her wealth, of her betrothal, nor of the future. He walked silently beside her in a blissful dream of the present, conscious only of the pressure of that little hand upon his arm.

They said nothing more; now and then their glances met, and they seemed to have uttered all that it was in their hearts to say.

"Halloo, Leo!"

It was Paul's shout. Leo looked back in amazement, and noticed for the first time that he and Eva had left the road and were walking along the foot-path, very much in advance of the others.

"It must be time for me to turn back; we have really come quite a distance," said Eva, withdrawing her hand from Leo's arm.

"May I come to Tausens again to-morrow?"

"Yes."

Again he kissed her hand rapturously, and she allowed it, although at the sound of Delmar's voice near by she withdrew it more quickly than before. Paul had shouted at the request of Hilda, who, now that they were approaching the steepest part of the way, thought it too difficult climbing for Eva, unaccustomed as she was to mountain-walks.

Twilight was settling down upon the landscape as Eva, Aline, and Delmar took their leave and returned to the Post, while Leo and Hilda pursued their way up the mountain.

"Eva is a charming girl," said Hilda.

"She is an angel!" Leo replied. He said nothing further; Hilda glanced up at him in surprise, but he did not notice it as he looked down, lost in dreams. An arch smile flitted across the girl's face; she nodded archly at her cousin, who did not see her, and said no further word to disturb his reverie,--she thought she could divine its subject.

CHAPTER XV.

Eva had anticipated a first meeting with Leo with absolute dread, and yet one brief hour and two or three words had sufficed to dispel the dark cloud between them. They were reconciled.

A delicious sense of repose and peace filled Eva's soul as she silently accompanied Aline and Delmar back to the inn. Paul guessed that she was in no mood for conversation, and so left her free to pursue her thoughts.

And when they were again all seated upon the balcony, and the three gentlemen from Tausens made their appearance as usual, Paul contrived that no one should notice that Eva scarcely took any part in the conversation. Aline alone saw how quiet the girl was, and divined the cause of her silence.

Only when the two young girls had retired to their room did Aline put her arms about her friend, and, looking into her dark eyes, ask, "Are you reconciled?"

"Yes, Aline. Oh, I am so happy!" was the reply. And then Eva poured into her friend's ready and sympathizing ear an account of all that filled her heart, all she had heard from Delmar, telling last of the few words she had exchanged with Leo, and of the kiss he had imprinted upon her hand at parting.

Aline listened with the deepest interest, never interrupting her, but when she had finished she asked, in a low tone, "You love him, Eva?"

"Yes, with my whole soul! Now I dare tell you. Aline, of the warm interest I felt in him long before I ever saw him. You and Lieutenant Herwarth had told me so much of him, of his heroism in the field, of his humanity to the conquered; he was my ideal of a hero, and when I first saw him I was confused and strangely moved, for all my expectations were so much more than answered. I was so happy when Uncle Balthasar presented him."

"And yet you received him so coldly that he could not but feel hurt!"

"It was my misfortune, Aline! I have shed many a secret tear at the thought of it. Delmar is right: wealth has poisoned my soul and filled me with unjust suspicion. I take shame to myself for ever thinking that my money could have any attraction for him. And so I threw away the happiness of my life. He loves me, but he will not approach me,--we are separated forever! I am betrothed to Bertram!"

Eva wept bitterly, while Aline clasped her closer in her arms. "You must not be unhappy, Eva," she said earnestly; "you must not sacrifice your life to an illusion! This miserable engagement should never have been entered into. There is still time to break it; you must not give your hand to a man whom you detest and despise while your heart belongs to another. Courage, Eva! Your fate is in your own hands. Break the disgraceful chains that fetter you!"

"I cannot, Aline! Bertram has my promise; he knows that I do not love him, but he will hold me to my promise. Would not Leo von Heydeck despise me if he thought me capable of wantonly breaking a promise for which Bertram has sacrificed his entire future? And if I did so, I never could be really happy. Leo is himself betrothed."

"Herr von Heydeck betrothed?" Aline asked in surprise.

"Yes; he has complied with his father's desire that he should be betrothed to his cousin Hilda. Herr Delmar told me this."

"My poor Eva----"

"No, not so, Aline! I was indeed wretched when I thought that Leo von Heydeck hated and despised me. Now that I know that he cherishes for me a pure, disinterested affection,--that he loves me, although he knows that we are separated forever,--I am no longer unhappy. The thought that I am sacrificing myself for his sake consoles me. I gave my promise to Bertram that Leo von Heydeck might escape a great peril,--I cannot be unhappy."

"You deceive yourself, Eva; you must not sacrifice yourself to a phantom of the imagination. Bertram loves not yourself, but your money; with money you can atone to him for his lost future."

"Say no more, Aline, I cannot bear it; you must not think so meanly of the man who, although I

cannot esteem or love him, has never given me reason to believe him so sordid a wretch as you describe. I will keep the promise I have given. Do not try to shake my resolution, it is firmly fixed."

"I have no right to urge you further," Aline said sadly, "but answer me one question, what are you going to do now? Will you return Fräulein Hilda's visit? Will you thus provoke frequent opportunities of meeting Herr von Heydeck? I should think such interviews would be alike painful for yourself and for him."

"You are wrong; we are reconciled. If our future destinies separate us forever, we may at least avail ourselves of these few chance weeks of friendly intercourse. I am resolved to enjoy this time, troubled by no sad thought of the future. When I leave Tausens I will go to meet my fate serenely, for I know that Leo von Heydeck will have none but kindly thoughts of me."

"A most extraordinary purpose!" Aline rejoined, as she looked at her friend with a dubious smile; "but so be it,—it may result in good. Then we are to enjoy the society of our friends at Castle Reifenstein as if there had never been any unpleasantness between Herr von Heydeck and yourself I confess I am curious to know what Herr von Bertram will say to this."

"Do not mention his name to me now!" Eva exclaimed impatiently, instantly however kissing her friend, and saying, in a gentle tone of entreaty, "My dear true Aline, do not be angry with me for my cross words,—you know how tenderly I love you, and how I depend upon your counsel and sympathy. Let me enjoy this short season of happiness,—even Herr von Bertram shall not alloy it for me,—he has no right to do so; I am still my own mistress. And now goodnight, my dearest friend."

Thus with a tender caress they separated for the night, but it was long before either fell asleep. Eva resigned herself to waking dreams, and Aline's thoughts were occupied with her friend's fate. She had long since surmised that Eva was far from indifferent to Leo von Heydeck; her surmise had just been made a conviction, and she now knew that Leo reciprocated her friend's sentiments. Aline had the most sincere affection for Eva; she took the deepest interest in her future; she knew how firm and loyal she would be to a given promise, and that no entreaties would avail to make her false to her idea of right. She had often declared that nothing should cause her to recall the words spoken to Bertram, and this declaration she had just repeated, although she now knew that Leo loved her.

Nevertheless she must not be allowed to carry her resolve into execution. Bertram was utterly unworthy of such a sacrifice. Aline had become entirely convinced during the last week of his mercenary disposition; she saw plainly that it was Eva's wealth and not herself that he coveted. The constant coldness and reserve that characterized her manner towards him had created in him almost a feeling of hatred for his betrothed, the existence of which, in spite of the servile smoothness of his manner, could not always be concealed from Aline's eyes, made keen as they were by affection for her friend.

In Fräulein von Schlicht's opinion there was only one person who could be of use here, and that was Paul Delmar. Aline would speak with him, or—no, it would be far better to confide the whole matter to Herr von Herwarth, who was intimate with both Herr von Heydeck and Herr Delmar. He would know what to advise. This thought soothed her, and she fell asleep with a happy smile upon her lips.

The next morning the whole party again met upon the balcony. Bertram alone was missing; he had not yet returned from his expedition. Delmar was in his gayest humour,—only Fräulein von Schlicht noticed that he was rather pale, and that his eyes lacked something of their wonted brilliancy; the others were content to yield to his influence and laugh at his jests.

Leo and Hilda came down from the castle in the early morning to arrange a walk to some waterfalls, and all went as smoothly as possible. Eva received Leo with a smile that transported him to the seventh heaven, and Hilda greeted Delmar as amiably. For a moment Paul forgot his rôle; he grew very grave as he took Fräulein von Heydeck's proffered hand, but the next instant he was gayer than ever, rallying the cousins upon their condescension in descending from their rocky throne to mix with the humble inhabitants of the valley. Hilda was ready in her replies, and merriment was the order of the day.

When the party were about to start upon their expedition. Aline declared that she was still fatigued with her walk of the previous day, and preferred to remain quietly upon the balcony. She therefore begged Delmar to join his friend Herr von Heydeck, and leave to her the charge of the lieutenant. She made the request in so gentle a tone of entreaty, and Kuno seconded her so eloquently, that Delmar could not but comply. Thus Aline remained alone with Kuno on the balcony, for Uncle Balthasar made one of the walking-party, and Aunt Minni, as soon as breakfast was over, retired to her room and her beloved sofa.

Aline's wish was fulfilled; she now had an opportunity of speaking to Herwarth of Eva, and her relations with Bertram. She found it difficult at first to allude to so delicate a topic, but Fräulein von Schlicht was too natural and frank a person to yield for long to girlish shamefacedness; she was convinced of Herwarth's truth and honour and of his friendship for Leo, and so she gave him her entire confidence with regard to Eva and Bertram. She told him that her friend was bound

only by her promise,—that she had not the smallest esteem or affection for her betrothed,—and that if her engagement were not broken the happiness of her future life would be entirely destroyed. Of course Aline never alluded to Eva's sentiments for Leo von Heydeck, she had no right to do so; it was of her relations with Bertram alone that she spoke; and she concluded with an earnest request that Herwarth would induce Delmar to exert the influence which Herwarth had told her he possessed over Bertram to force the lieutenant to free Eva from her promise.

As Aline spoke, Kuno watched her with enthusiastic admiration; she had never seemed to him so bewitchingly lovely. Her cheeks flushed, her blue eyes sparkled in the glow of her devotion to her friend as she eagerly explained and entreated. He was only too happy to be the recipient of her confidence, and he promised with ardour to do everything that she desired. It was only natural that when she offered him her hand in token that the compact between them was sealed he should refuse immediately to resign it, but should retain the 'white wonder' in his clasp and imprint upon it a fervent kiss.

It is not quite safe for a young girl to pour confidences into a man's ears, especially when their subject is love, and Aline had proof of this. Kuno's ardour embarrassed her; she tried to withdraw her hand, but he clasped it only the more firmly, and even drew its owner nearer to him, as he reiterated his promise to do all, everything, always that she could desire if only she would not repulse him, but would listen while he told her that life was worthless to him unless he might keep as his very own the little hand he then held. How could Aline withdraw it?

When at noon the pedestrians returned from their waterfalls, they found Aline and Kuno still together, and the lieutenant rapturously presented to them Fräulein von Schlicht as his betrothed.

Here was a delightful surprise, and yet afterwards every one, with the exception of Uncle Balthasar who was unaffected amazement itself, professed to have foreseen it all along.

Delmar regarded Kuno with eyes that sparkled strangely. "Number One!" he said. "You're a lucky dog, my noble knight! Have you not made fools of us after all? Confess: was that sprained ankle accident, or did you so contrive it that pity might bring her nearest of kin to minister to you? And if it were so, my congratulations are none the less sincere, I swear to you, Herwarth, that for only one hour of such happiness as yours I would give not only a miserable foot but my head into the bargain!"

Involuntarily his glance sought Hilda. Their eyes met, but were instantaneously averted, and Delmar turned hastily away to conquer the emotion that threatened to overcome him. In Hilda's look of tender sympathy he read, "You too might be as happy!" Poor child! She did not dream of the woe that awaited him, making it impossible that he should be happy. The thought shot a pang through Paul's heart; there was no bliss in the conviction of Hilda's tender sympathy for him, it only made his fate harder to bear. With all his self-control, the struggle was wellnigh too much for him. He hurried away,—anywhere to avoid again meeting Hilda's eyes.

Eva, too, was much moved as she embraced her friend, and wished for her every blessing that life could bring. "You happy girl!" she whispered.

"You will soon be just as happy," Aline replied, in as soft a whisper, glancing at Leo, who was warmly congratulating the lieutenant. But Eva brushed away a tear and made no answer.

Never had Hansel, our worthy postmaster, enjoyed such delightful days as those which ensued upon the betrothal of Fräulein Aline with the Herr Lieutenant von Herwarth. He went about the house with a constant grin upon his broad face which beamed with special satisfaction whenever he saw Herr Delmar, for Hansel was proud to acknowledge that it was owing to Herr Delmar that his wildest dreams were now transcended by reality.

The honest fellow listened daily to exclamations of admiration from Herr Schommer and the ladies over the wonderful degree of comfort to be found in this excellent inn, although Tausens was so retired a spot. Every day he listened to thanks and praise of his wonderful energy and skill in ministering to the wishes of his guests. Sometimes when Uncle Balthasar was exhausting himself in surprise, and the young ladies uttered cordial thanks in addition, Hansel, to be sure, would become confused, and quite unable to suppress a maidenly blush, but he liked, notwithstanding, to be so lauded.

Indeed, his guests had good cause to be amazed and grateful, for each day brought some fresh surprise, prepared as Herr Delmar assured them by the worthy Hansel, for whom Herr Delmar had a positively enthusiastic regard.

A large box full of books, the best works upon the Tyrol, and the latest novels, arrived from Innsbruck. Hansel had ordered them from a bookseller there, sparing no expense to provide amusement for his guests if the weather should chance to be rainy.

Several furniture-wagons arrived from Bozen laden with comfortable lounges and arm-chairs. Hansel had sent for these by express, because he heard that Aunt Minni was fond of such luxuries. He showed a most refined aptitude in supplying every desire of his wealthy guests.

Money was no object to him; no expense was spared in any direction.

And the table,--Herr Delmar had indeed maligned Tausens when he had declared that there was nothing to be had there but veal. Hansel sent to Bozen, Triest, Riva, and even to Venice, to procure delicacies wherewith to tickle the palates of his guests. He sent his own messengers, empowering them to make the required purchases. Uncle Balthasar declared that nowhere in the world could a better table be found than at the Post at Tausens. He really could not understand it, for the charges were extremely moderate, not a kretzer higher than at other Tyrolean inns where not a delicacy was to be had.

And not only in luxurious lodgings and delicate fare did he testify his desire to please. Every wish expressed in other respects by the strangers, and especially by the ladies, was fulfilled almost before it was uttered.

Fräulein Eva, upon a short walk where the postmaster was guide, expressed her special admiration for a certain point of view and a desire to visit it frequently. The next morning a couple of convenient wooden benches and a table were erected upon the spot, and the path leading to it was found to have been cleared of stones during the night. Labourers were also employed to open and clear various mountain-paths in the neighbourhood of the inn, making many charming places accessible for the ladies. But Hansel's tenderest care for his guests was shown in an arrangement which excited the unbounded surprise of the entire village. Fräulein Aline von Schlicht was not very strong, walking fatigued her, and she therefore often remained at home with the invalid lieutenant when some pleasant expedition on foot was to be made. One evening Fräulein Eva expressed her regret that in consequence of the entire want of mules and riding-horses in Tausens her friend was obliged to lose so much of the beauty around them, and that Herr von Herwarth also would know nothing of the finest points of view, since he would have to spare his sprained ankle for some time to come. An hour afterwards the village schoolmaster departed for the railway-station in Hansel's own conveyance, the driver being ordered to drive furiously so as not to miss the train, and two days later an Italian appeared from Bozen bringing four strong mules, which he quartered in the stable at the Post, and placed at the disposition of the guests there, two of the animals being provided with side-saddles.

Hansel, admirably careful host that he was, must have overheard Eva's remark, and instantly ordered the mules and their owner from Bozen.

Their host's care and attention did not alone conduce to make the stay of the Schommer party in Tausens agreeable. After Herwarth's betrothal to Aline there was constant and delightful intercourse between the inhabitants of the castle and the guests at the inn.

Every day Leo and Hilda came from the castle to carry off Eva and Delmar to some point of beauty in the neighbourhood, while Aline remained upon the balcony with her betrothed, and kindly Uncle Balthasar felt it his duty to bestow his society upon 'our dear Guido,' who never took part in the daily walks. Besides the mountain-paths were too steep for the old man, and thus Hilda, Eva, Delmar, and Leo were left to themselves to enjoy the exquisite weather and to explore, with Hilda for a guide, all the beauty and grandeur that abound in the neighbourhood of Tausens.

The steep mountain-paths were for the most part so narrow as to allow only two persons to walk abreast; and upon first leaving the village Hilda and Eva usually went before, followed by the two young men; but this arrangement did not last long,--it was but natural that in any climbing Eva should lag behind her fleet-footed guide and that Leo should hasten to assist her unaccustomed steps, while Delmar walked with Hilda, who never needed assistance, and that in this order they should continue to pursue their way even when there were no difficulties to surmount.

And when, after his two weeks of rest, Herwarth was able to mount a mule and take part in these expeditions this arrangement was in no wise altered, for naturally he rode beside his betrothed, who no longer desired to be left at home upon the balcony. Another mule was sometimes provided for Eva in very steep ascents; but Hilda, the mountain maid, could never be induced to admit that walking upon her beloved mountains could fatigue her, and her boldness and agility were quite equal to those displayed by Leo and Delmar.

These expeditions had a rare charm for all who took part in them. Conventional constraint vanished in the familiar intercourse thus induced. A greater degree of intimacy was established among the party than would ever have been possible in the life of a city.

When Leo led Eva along the narrow pathway upon the brink of some steep abyss and she grew giddy with a glance into its misty depths, she would cling to her guide in full confidence in his strength and sureness of foot; he would bear her in his arms across a foaming mountain-brook, lift her on and off of her mule, all small services which she could not but permit him to render her, and which filled him with a sense of ecstasy.

When at some distance from the others he walked with her beneath the fragrant firs, as she leaned upon his arm he would gaze into the large dark eyes lifted to his own and forget past and future in a dream of the present, a dream which Eva shared, and it banished all memory of the hateful tie that bound her to Bertram. She would listen with a happy smile to Leo's words, and

now and then her cheek would flush, although he never breathed a word of the love which she knew possessed his soul. Yes, she knew;--there was no need of a confession from his lips.

Delmar did not, as did Leo and Eva, yield to the enjoyment of the moment without resistance; but even he could not withstand the charm of these daily walks by Hilda's side, of constant intercourse with one so frank and fair.

In her gay unconsciousness Hilda never concealed from Paul how happy she was; she talked so merrily and freely that he could not but adopt the same familiar tone. He tried at first to treat her with reserve; she must not know how wildly his heart beat in her presence; he must be to her but an every-day acquaintance, no more to her than any other stranger.

He would have avoided being alone with her, but that was impossible. If Leo and Eva were to come together they must be left to themselves; their love must so increase in familiar intercourse as to conquer any prejudice that might separate them even after Eva's engagement to Bertram should be annulled. If he would promote his friend's happiness, Paul must be Hilda's sole companion upon these mountain-walks.

Thus he was forced to take with her the lead in all their expeditions, although he offered her none of those small services which Leo rendered to Eva with such delight. Hilda would have laughingly rejected them, for she needed no assistance even on the steepest paths and dizziest heights. Her head never for an instant swam even when she stood upon the extreme brink of some frightful abyss and gazed down into its depths; she sprang with graceful agility from stone to stone in crossing the mountain-torrents, and was always at hand to give aid, although she never needed it.

Once only Paul was forced to proffer Hilda the aid of his strong arm; they had reached the banks of a rushing brook, across which there had formerly been a bridge, which a late freshet had carried away. There were no large stones in the midst of the water by which Hilda could cross. Had she been alone she would, it is to be feared, have dashed across without minding a thorough drenching, but that would never do with any one by to see her, and she looked eagerly for some way to gain the opposite bank.

"You will have to let me carry you across, Fräulein von Heydeck," Paul said, after searching in vain for a place where Hilda could cross without his aid.

"Shall I not be too heavy for you, Herr Delmar?" the girl asked, with an arch smile.

For answer he lifted her lightly in his arms and strode through the foaming water. How easily he seemed to do it, and yet the light burden was almost too much for him. His heart throbbed so that he thought she must hear it; his cheeks flushed crimson, and he almost staggered beneath her light weight, when Hilda shrank from the dashing water and leaned more closely upon his shoulder.

And yet he could have wished to bear her thus in his arms for hours. With a sigh he released her upon the opposite bank of the stream, and she thanked him, and laughing at his thoroughly drenched condition, passed on through the forest, while he stilled the wild throbbing of his heart and the rushing of the blood in his veins as best he might.

How variable and whimsical he must seem to Hilda! he thought. Now he would adopt a cold tone towards her, and now indulge in outbursts of the wildest merriment, striving with a jest to deaden the agitation of his soul. He saw that these jests were not pleasing to Hilda; she grew very grave when he was recklessly gay; he would not distress her, and so restrained himself and compelled himself to talk earnestly and quietly. For this she rewarded him with eager interest and ready sympathy.

He would have held himself aloof from her, but that was impossible; she regarded him not as a stranger, but as her cousin Leo's dearest friend, of whom he had talked so much and so often that she felt thoroughly at home and at her ease in his society, and she treated him with a frank familiarity that was irresistibly attractive to him, and the influence of which he could not resist.

Often, as they walked fearlessly along the brink of frightful abysses, he remembered his despairing desire to end a life that could offer him no future save pain and anguish. As he talked gayly with Hilda such thoughts would assail him; he would pause for an instant and gaze with longing into the blue depths. Why should he live on? Eva and Leo were reconciled. All that remained for him to do was to break the tie between Eva and Bertram and his work in the world would be at an end. But as he wandered on at Hilda's side the spell that her presence threw around him would inevitably exert its power; gloomy thoughts would be banished, and the love of life and all that makes life fair would stir strongly again within him, although he deceived himself into the belief that his only desire was to live until Leo's happiness should be secured and Dr. Putzer be sufficiently recovered to tell him all that he feared to learn.

Convinced that after at most a few more days he should be separated from Hilda forever, he at last resigned himself utterly to the enchantment of her presence, unaware of how her constant society fed and increased the love which he felt for her. Consequently he grew calmer; the feverish excitement which drove him to indulge in extravagant merriment subsided: he took cheerful part in the general conversation; and when they rested after some long ascent at the

wished-for point of view, he could thoroughly enjoy both the enthusiasm of the others and the glories of the landscape. Still, when at the end of the day the entire party would sit discussing their expedition, upon the balcony, Paul was apt to fall into a gloomy revery from which it needed a word from Hilda to rouse him. Thus the days and weeks passed at Tausens with very little change, and no one divined what was going on in the mind of him to whom all turned for enjoyment and sympathy.

One person however suspected that Delmar was by no means so careless as he seemed. Guido von Bertram watched him keenly whenever he had an opportunity, with many a misgiving that a storm was gathering above his head. When it would break he could not tell, and he racked his brains for some means whereby he might escape it.

The ex-lieutenant played but a sorry part in Tausens. When he returned from his mountain-expedition, on the day of Herwarth's betrothal, he found the entire party assembled upon the balcony, for Leo and Hilda had despatched a messenger to the castle to inform Herr von Heydeck that they should not return until late in the evening.

Uncle Balthasar had brewed a bowl of punch in honour of the occasion, and the three gentlemen from Tausens had taken part in the festivity. Uncle Balthasar was in an ecstasy; he repeatedly proposed the health of the betrothed couple, and made them a short congratulatory speech in his comical patois. His only disappointment was that 'dear Guido' was not yet returned; and when 'dear Guido' did actually make his appearance upon the balcony, the old man's happiness reached its climax; he immediately filled him a glass of punch and required that he should drink the health of the betrothed couple.

The surprising intelligence deprived Bertram for an instant of his self-possession, and his face showed the dismay that he felt. In fact, there was reason for it. Herwarth, Leo's most intimate friend, betrothed to Aline, Eva's friend and confidante! What results might not ensue! Probably a reconciliation between Eva and Leo. True enough, there was his dreaded enemy beside his betrothed, and the two were conversing as easily and pleasantly as if there had never been the slightest misunderstanding between them. At the moment Leo was standing with his hand on the back of Eva's chair; he bent above her and said something in a low tone of voice. And she? She looked up at him with a gentle smile, so lost in what he was saying that she never heard Uncle Balthasar's joyous exclamation, "Here is our dear Guido!" and did not know that her betrothed was looking on while she conversed familiarly with his mortal enemy.

They were reconciled! The phantom which had scared Bertram since the day of his betrothal had become a terrible reality. Eva loved Leo von Heydeck,--her sweet smile, the tender light in her eyes as she looked at him, revealed the fact even more plainly to Bertram's jealousy. He grew giddy; he saw his whole future in peril, his fairest hopes destroyed, and himself upon the brink of an abyss. But he must suppress all manifestation of the dismay that he felt. Mechanically and with a hand that trembled he took the glass which Uncle Balthasar offered him.

Fortunately, the individual members of the little party were too much occupied with themselves to pay much attention to Bertram. Leo and Kuno had indeed been aware of his entrance upon the balcony, but they did not deign him a glance. Delmar however bestowed some notice upon him, saying with the sarcastic smile which Bertram so detested, "When you have congratulated our friends as in duty bound, Herr von Bertram, let me pray you to bestow upon me the short time which the fatigue of your expedition allows you to accord us this evening. Here is a place by my side."

This was a command which Bertram did not dare to transgress. With rage in his heart he obeyed.

He offered his congratulations to the betrothed couple. Aline received them with the merest bow required by courtesy, and Kuno noticed them not at all,--for him Herr von Bertram did not exist.

Guido controlled his anger; he did not dare to resent the contempt shown for him by Herwarth. He had to pay his respects to his betrothed after two days of absence,--a duty he would gladly have omitted. He offered her his hand; she placed her own within it, but withdrew it instantly. She asked one or two cold questions as to whether he had enjoyed his excursion, and then turned and continued her conversation with Leo, who did not accord him even a glance.

"Come, Herr von Bertram, I am waiting for you impatiently," said Paul.

Bertram obeyed, and took the vacant place beside his tormentor.

"Tell me of your excursion,--you know the interest I take in all that concerns you. Egotist as I am however, I am not so selfish as to detain you long when you must be so very much fatigued with your walk. Give me only five minutes, and then when you have taken a couple of glasses of Herr Schommer's excellent punch, I will not keep you an instant longer."

This was another disguised command. This man was a tyrant, who refused to allow his slave the slightest freedom of action, but Bertram obeyed. With morbid loquacity he began to tell of his excursion, of the glorious views from the Spitzhorn, and of the difficulties of the ascent. He broke off however in the midst of his discourse, having taken two glasses of punch, when Delmar took

his watch from his pocket with a meaning glance; he declared he was really too tired to continue his description, and neither the request of the judge, who wanted to hear more of the ascent of the Spitzhorn, nor Uncle Balthasar's entreaty could detain him. He arose and took leave. Eva again gave him her hand, scarcely interrupting as she did so her conversation with Heydeck,-- which, indeed, she had continued steadily, never paying any attention to Bertram's loud description of his mountain-ascent or of the natural beauty of the Rothwald valley.

Thus passed Bertram's first meeting with Leo since the scene beneath Büchner's awning; he had suffered a fresh defeat and had left his enemy at Eva's side; the worst he had to fear had nearly occurred.

Bertram had in fact had a most fatiguing walk; he was very weary, but nevertheless he tossed restlessly upon his bed. There was no sleep there for him,--he started up whenever the sound of gay laughter from the balcony reached his ears, only to bury his head again among the pillows to shut out if possible the hateful noise.

And even late in the night when all was still, when nothing stirred in the rooms on either side of him, and he knew that Eva, as well as Aline and Uncle Balthasar, had retired for the night, sleep fled his eyelids.

He thought with horror of his future. What would become of him if that demon Paul Delmar should reveal to Eva her entire right to recall her promise? He could not return to K---, where his debts were immense and his honour and credit both gone. How should he even live from day to day?

His property, which had been considerable, he had squandered in the wildest dissipations; his creditors had abstained from resorting to extreme measures only in the hope which he had held out to them of his marriage with the wealthy heiress. If his engagement with Eva were broken, nothing could keep him from their clutches should he attempt to return to K---. The moisture stood in cold drops upon his forehead as a vision of his probable future rose distinctly before him. A jail and the disgraceful habit of a convict were all he had to look for. The check with Count Waldheim's forged signature was in Delmar's possession, and unfortunately it was not the only witness to be brought against him. A well-known usurer in K--- possessed similar papers, having been easily induced over Count Waldheim's name to furnish Bertram with a large sum of money for the liquidation of a pressing gaming debt.

With the recklessness of a thorough gamester, Bertram had lived along from day to day in the hopes of winning Eva's hand. To escape dishonour he had become a forger; to cover one counterfeit check he had drawn up another for a larger sum. Delmar had helped him upon one occasion,--he had not dared to apply to him again; and so he had gone on plunging deeper into debt and disgrace, until he saw no means of escape save by a marriage with Eva.

A jail! Horrible thought! There was no sacrifice he would not make to escape such a fate. Once in a feverish vision of so frightful a future there had risen in his excited fancy the thought of a certain casket, in which Eva kept her most valuable jewels, diamonds, and ready money; but he had rejected this thought with horror. Now it recurred to him again. He knew the casket well; it was of ebony, with Eva's monogram inlaid in gilt on the lid. He had helped to pack it into the travelling-carriage when they had left K---, for Eva took it with her wherever she went; it was dear to her as her dead father's gift.

Just before leaving her home Eva had opened it in his presence to put in a large sum of money designed for travelling expenses, and he had admired the brilliancy and size of the diamonds it contained. He had asked his betrothed why she took such valuable jewels with her upon a tour among the mountains, and had received for a reply that she never left them behind her when she went from K---, since the casket with the diamonds was her father's last gift to her, and she was nervous lest it might be stolen if she did not have it with her.

As he now tossed restlessly in bed, the ebony casket, with the glittering diamonds and the large roll of notes, recurred to Bertram's mind. What might be the possible value of the diamonds? Uncle Balthasar had mentioned that his brother had paid more than ten thousand thalers for them in Berlin. Besides the diamonds the casket contained other jewels, worth at least several thousand more, and then the money. Bertram did not know how much there was, but the bundle of large notes was thick, and there were two or three packets of gold besides. There must have been several thousand thalers,--a trifle for Eva, the wealthy heiress, but a treasure for one who looked forward to a jail as his only future.

Physical exhaustion at last overcame him; his eyes closed and he sank into an uneasy slumber, in which his dreams were still of the ebony casket and its contents. He dreamed that Eva gave it to him. He counted the money: it amounted to a huge sum. He took up the diamonds, and was just feeding his gaze upon their lustre, when Leo von Heydeck snatched them from his hand. He turned and grappled with him; but just as he would have overthrown his foe he felt himself in Delmar's iron grasp, and heard his sneering voice cry, "To jail with the scoundrel, he stole both money and diamonds!" In his struggle to free himself he awoke.

Trembling in every limb, he sat up in bed and looked about the room, which was lit up by the pale moonlight. It was some minutes before he could recover from the effects of his feverish

dream, and he could not rid himself of the thought of the ebony casket. Eva had it in her room upon a table beside her bed; at least it had been there on the previous morning, for he had noticed and recognized it as he passed by the open door of her room.

He was now wide awake, and his glance fell upon the door that connected his room with Eva's. In the moonlight he saw the glitter of the key in the lock. Were Eva and Aline sound asleep? They had taken a long walk in the morning and had retired late. Bertram had heard the postmaster say that the young ladies had returned quite fatigued from their expedition. Honest Hansel had forgotten to mention that Aline had not joined them.

If he could succeed in unlocking the door and opening it without noise, it would be easy enough to enter the room unheard by the sleeping girls. To possess himself of the casket would be but the work of a moment, and no one would dream that he could have taken it.

Bertram got out of bed, slipped on his dressing-gown, and noiselessly crept to the door leading to Aline's and Eva's apartment. He listened with his ear at the key-hole. The profound silence told of the deep slumber of the occupants of the room. With the greatest caution he succeeded in turning the key noiselessly in the lock; all that was to be done was to open the door as silently. His heart throbbed and his hand trembled as he took hold of the latch. "Courage! Boldly ventured is half won," he said to himself, as he pressed down the latch and pushed against the door, which however did not yield to his efforts,—it was bolted on the inside. "Fool that I am!" he exclaimed to himself as with a whispered curse he stole back again to his bed.

The sun stood high in the heavens when Bertram next awoke. He remembered the events of the night as those of a terrible dream, and yet strangely enough, its fantastic images pursued him in his waking hours. His thoughts dwelt perpetually upon the ebony casket, and upon how he could gain possession of it without being suspected of the theft.

Theft! It was an ugly word, and had not occurred to him during the night, but in the light of day the deed he contemplated showed for what it was, and he acknowledged to himself, with an angry flush that proved him not quite dead to a sense of shame, that the appropriation to himself of the casket, even although it belonged to his betrothed, was nothing more or less than a common theft.

Such thoughts however were uppermost but for a moment. He reflected again that a theft was no worse than a forgery, nor more severely punished by the law. The possession of the casket would enable him to escape punishment for forgery, by providing him the means wherewith, if the worst came to the worst, he might seek refuge in foreign lands. It was folly to shrink from a word, and he found some excuse for himself in the consideration that all that was Eva's might soon be legally his. Was she not his betrothed? If she kept her promise to him it would be easy to contrive some way of restoring the casket to her at a future day; and if she broke her engagement with him she deserved no mercy at his hands, and he must look out for his own safety.

While he dressed, his mind was filled with thoughts of this description with which he silenced the last whispers of conscience. He left his room and betook himself to the balcony. He feared that he should find Delmar at breakfast there, but that could not be helped. As long as the balcony served the guests of the inn for a dining-room it was impossible to avoid seeing them there.

But to Bertram's satisfaction, Delmar was not on the balcony, nor, indeed, was Eva to be found there. Uncle Balthasar and Aunt Minni were sitting at the breakfast-table with Fräulein von Schlicht and Herwarth, and they had finished drinking their coffee.

Uncle Balthasar received him with some good-natured badinage about his late rising, telling him that Leo von Heydeck and Fräulein Hilda had carried off Eva and Herr Delmar upon a mountain-excursion early in the morning. They had started at six o'clock, and would not return until evening, for Eva had ordered her servant Wilhelm and a boy from the inn to follow them with lunch packed in baskets.

Guido was relieved, it is true, to know that there was no chance of his meeting his enemies for some hours to come, but vexation at Eva's treatment of him far overbalanced this relief. Had she forgotten that she was betrothed to him? Did she not outrage decency by thus wandering about the country with Delmar without even giving her future bridegroom a choice whether or not to join them? This conduct on her part gave him a right to treat her with the same want of consideration, and again he thought of the ebony casket.

Uncle Balthasar also probably felt uncomfortable at the slight put upon his 'dear Guido' by his niece, and tried to excuse it by remarking that Eva would not have him disturbed after his fatigue of the previous day, and that he, Uncle Balthasar, was quite ready to accompany him if he felt like a morning walk, an offer which Bertram declined almost roughly, explaining that he was far too tired to take another walk, and that he would go to his room and write letters. He finished his breakfast in silence, replying in monosyllables to Uncle Balthasar's good-humoured inquiries with regard to his expedition of the previous day, and immediately rose and left the balcony. With Aline and Aunt Minni he had not exchanged a word, and his morning salutation to Herwarth had been barely acknowledged.

As he passed along the passage to his room he noticed that the door of Eva's apartment was open. The thought suddenly occurred to him, "What if this were the right moment?" He looked cautiously about him,--no one was to be seen. He hastily entered the half-open door, and found himself face to face with Nanette, who was putting the room in order.

"Nanette!"

There was so distinct an expression of surprise unmingled with pleasure on Bertram's face as he uttered her name, that Nanette could not but perceive it, and her temper was not at all improved by doing so. She gave the intruder an angry glance, and said in a sharp tone, with an emphasis upon every word, "Much obliged, I'm sure. Herr von Bertram does really remember my name. I shall certainly find some way to show my gratitude for such condescension. No need to shout until one is out of the woods. If you want to catch gold-fish, see that no one throws stones in the water."

The girl was really angry; her eyes fairly flashed with malice. Bertram saw that she was offended by his neglect of her, and just now she might prove a most valuable ally; she must be appeased. He looked round once more to see that there was no one near, and then entering the room, closed the door carefully behind him. Yes, there beside the bed stood the table upon which was placed the ebony casket,--the goal of his desires. He needed but to stretch out his hand and it was his. But Nanette must be won over to his schemes.

With the sweetest smile at his command he regarded her. "What's the matter, my little darling?" he asked, in the tenderest of tones. "Are you angry with me? What have I done? Here am I so happy to have a chance of seeing you alone at last, hoping you would run into my arms, and you receive me with hard words. How can you do so, you naughty little thing?"

He approached her and would have put his arm around her waist, but she pushed him away. "Don't touch me!" she said crossly. "You think it needs only a couple of smooth words to wind a silly girl around your finger; but you shall find to your cost that you are wrong! I'll show you what it is to turn a poor girl's head and then break her heart for the sake of a purse-proud Zantuppy. You shall learn who I am, my fine Herr Lieutenant!"

"But, my darling----"

"Hands off, or I'll scream!" the girl exclaimed, when Guido made another attempt to put his arm around her; and she struck at him with the coarse dust-cloth she had in her hand. "I'll not be fooled again with your flattering, deceitful speeches. It's all very well to call me 'darling' now, and make eyes at me, but for a whole week you've never even looked at me. I hate Fräulein Eva's stupid black eyes, but the haughty thing shall know who used to steal to my chamber at night when I lived with the Privy Councillor's lady. She'll be furious enough, and the Herr Lieutenant will see what will become of his gold-fish. Ugh! I can't stand these vulgar commoners! While she drives her four horses, a girl worth ten of her must perch like a scarecrow on the box; and while she's off in the woods with Herr Delmar and Herr von Heydeck, Nanette has to stick at home in a wretched inn and sleep in the garret with a stupid maid! I've lived with the best, and I'll not stand it. I'll give them all something to think of, and the Herr Lieutenant into the bargain. I'll have my revenge, and I hope you'll enjoy it."

Nanette paused for breath, and would then have continued with her angry outburst, but Bertram interrupted her: "Has jealousy made you mad, girl? Do you not know that I hate your mistress as much as you do? Can't your bright eyes see that? You are the only one whom I love, you foolish little darling----"

"I have not seen much of it this last week."

"How can my foolish little pet be so blinded by jealousy? Can we live on air, my dear? We have nothing,--for your sake I must be the victim."

"A pretty victim!"

"And hard enough it is; I am sometimes almost wild with fury when I see how the odious creature treats you; but let her once be my wife, and I will repay with usury every hard word she ever gave to my sweet angel; she shall suffer for her arrogance, and you shall have everything that heart can desire,--a charming villa, a superb carriage, silk dresses, and as many jewels as you want. We will live together in Paradise,--that shall be your revenge!"

Nanette's eyes sparkled: the malicious look passed from her face. She smiled, and did not shrink from the lieutenant's encircling arm; but she shook her head nevertheless, and said, "Those are only castles in the air. You don't know the Zantuppy,--she guards her money like a dragon, or like the foul fiend himself!"

"I do not see that----"

"But I do! There in that black box she has more money than she can ever use; but she keeps it locked up, like a perfect miser. Only a little while ago, in Munich, when I asked her for a paltry advance of fifty thalers of my wages to buy a new bonnet and a silk mantilla for the journey, what did she do? Glared at me out of her stupid black eyes, and said, 'I do not desire to see my maid

tricked out in finery; you shall have your wages as you earn them, but not a penny in advance to gratify your vanity.' Those were her very words. I should have liked to box her ears!"

"Odious creature!"

"Yes; and is it not hard to see you making eyes at her and never even looking at me?"

"Can I help it, you foolish child? If she guessed how dear you are to me she would dismiss you instantly, and I should never have a chance of seeing you. I have suffered enough this last week, but I hope we can arrange matters better in future. I have a plan by which we can often be together undisturbed. With your help it can easily be carried out."

"What is it?"

"It is simple enough. You are often busy here while Eva and the rest are on the balcony. I might come to you here, but that would be too dangerous; we might be surprised here at any moment, and all would be lost. And you cannot come to my room either, for fear of being seen; but if you will always take care that the bolt on this side of the door between the rooms is slipped back, we can be together as often as we choose and not a human being suspect it."

Nanette gave an ugly laugh as Bertram made this proposal. "Not so stupid as you think," she said. "Thank heaven I can see through a millstone, and have long known your silly admiration for Fräulein Aline's doll-face. You would like to pay her a quiet visit now and then. No, I thank you, Herr Lieutenant!"

"You are perfectly insane with jealousy!" Bertram exclaimed, forgetting his wonted caution in his surprise at an accusation so unfounded. Warned however by the angry flush on Nanette's cheek, he restrained his vexation, and continued in a tone of mild reproach: "How can you entertain so odious a suspicion, my pet? I detest that waxen-faced Aline almost as much as her friend. I cannot understand how you can speak so."

"Are you to be trusted, I wonder?"

"You will really provoke me, Nanette. This is all I have in return for my affection. At great risk I come to look for you, to speak with you for a moment, and you receive me thus unkindly. Come, lock the door into the passage and unbolt the one leading to my room, where we can then talk further without any danger. We can hear the moment Frau Schommer leaves the balcony, and you can slip back here again without the slightest fear of detection."

The invitation was too tempting to be refused. Nanette locked the door into the passage, and unbolted the one between Fräulein Schommer's and Bertram's rooms.

Guido's end was attained to his great satisfaction, and he now had so much to say to Nanette, of the future that awaited her when he should have married the heiress and her wealth should be his, that the girl quite forgot her former jealous ill humour, and imparted to him the import of the various conversations she had lately contrived to overhear between her mistress and Fräulein Aline. Fräulein von Schlicht had done all that she could, Nanette said, to induce Eva to break her engagement, but Eva had declared firmly that she would keep her promise.

This intelligence was very soothing to Bertram, and he began to think that it would perhaps be better to resign his designs upon the casket; but he reflected that Eva's purpose would never be maintained should she ever learn from Delmar that her promise was the result of falsehood upon the part of her betrothed. Half an hour passed thus in confidential discourse, when the door leading from the passage to Aunt Minni's room was heard to open. Nanette, at this note of warning, slipped back into Eva's apartment, and the next instant Bertram heard her push the bolt home. He uttered a low curse. "D--n her stupid jealousy!" was the flattering phrase bestowed upon Nanette, as he walked to the window and sat down to ponder upon some other means of obtaining the casket. He could devise none, save by taking it at night. Although Eva's room was often open in the daytime, there would be no possibility of concealing it elsewhere in the house, where it would be immediately missed; and to carry it off to the forest by daylight, when the inn was full of people, would be equally impossible.

Nevertheless he did not resign his project, and he determined to accustom Nanette to a frequent unbolting of the door, in hopes that, grown careless, she might some time forget to bolt it again.

This determination he carried out during the ensuing weeks. He could do so all the more easily by reason of the part which he was compelled to play with regard to the rest of the party. Herwarth, and Leo who came daily with Hilda from the castle to join in excursions among the mountains, took no notice whatever of Eva's betrothed. They never even looked at him, and Aline only spoke to him when common courtesy required that she should do so.

Eva did not hold herself so entirely aloof; she preserved towards Bertram the same cold politeness that she had always shown him, allowing him to call her by her first name, although she never addressed him otherwise than as Herr von Bertram. All familiar approach on his part she repelled by a frigid reserve. Bertram was made to feel that the slightest attempt to assert his rights as her betrothed would be fruitless, and he could not but see how much more familiar was

her manner towards Delmar, Herwarth, and even Leo than towards himself.

Warned by his enemy, Guido never ventured to take part in the daily excursions. He made one of the party only at breakfast, dinner, and supper, and here Delmar endured his society no longer than he thought absolutely necessary.

If, at the end of an hour at most, Bertram made any attempt to join in the general conversation, Delmar was sure to make some remark which contained a command to leave in disguise,—a command which the former dragoon hastened to obey. His observation, quickened by terror, told him that at the first sign of rebellion against his enemy's authority the storm which he so dreaded would burst above his devoted head.

In these last few weeks Paul had greatly changed. Often when the others were conversing eagerly he would sit gazing dreamily out upon the distant mountains, in a way very unlike himself. When he roused himself from such brooding reveries, Bertram almost always caught an angry glance from his dark eyes, which convinced him more and more that he meditated striking a blow at his prospects, and that, for some hidden reason, his hand was stayed for the moment. He guessed that this blow was the breaking of his engagement with Eva, for any one could see the pleasure Delmar took in the growing intimacy between Leo and Fräulein Schommer, and that he would gladly remove any obstacle to their happiness.

The firmer this conviction became in Guido's mind the more was he strengthened in his resolve to insure his own future by the possession of the ebony casket, and he availed himself of every opportunity for the private interviews he had contrived with Nanette. Almost every evening they met in his room, and to his great satisfaction he saw that he was gradually destroying in her frivolous mind all mistrust of him, although every evening when she left him he still heard the low creaking of the bolt as it was pushed into its staples, and Eva's door remained not only closed to him but fast bolted.

CHAPTER XVI.

Four weeks had passed since the arrival of the strangers at the inn at Tausens; every day, favoured by the clear summer skies, they had made delightful excursions among the mountains, and still no one talked of leaving; Uncle Balthasar indeed, instigated thereto by Aunt Minni, who, in spite of her comfortable quarters, missed the luxuries of the villa in K---, had once or twice asked his niece how long she intended to stay at Tausens, but he had received no decided answer. The kindly old man, seeing how his pet was enjoying herself, would have been the last to wish to cut short her enjoyment, even had he not been so thoroughly at his ease as he was. For his own part he declared he never had been so much entertained as in the agreeable society in which he now found himself. Every evening the party at the inn was joined by the cousins from the castle, and by the judge, the forester, and the collector from the village, and Uncle Balthasar was in his glory. Also he spent as much time as he could with 'dear Guido,' only regretting that his favourite was not duly appreciated by the rest of the party. He gladly accompanied him upon his walks from time to time, never dreaming that the former dragoon's only reason for desiring his society was the hope that he entertained of gaining some certainty as to his future prospects from the old man's artless talk of Eva and her relations with Delmar and Leo.

In fact, poor Uncle Balthasar was deeply grieved that Delmar, Herwarth, and Leo should treat Bertram with such haughty reserve, and that Eva did not comport herself towards her lover as a girl should, but showed a decided preference for the strangers. The kindly soul therefore took care that Bertram should always have a place at the breakfast-table which made it possible for him to avoid all necessity of speaking with Delmar or Herwarth.

Such a seat Uncle Balthasar had provided, between himself and Aunt Minni, for his 'dear Guido' on a certain clear, rather cool morning in August, when the party had assembled upon the balcony at the Post. It was rather late, nearly nine o'clock; there was to be no long walk to-day, because the young people had made so distant an excursion the day before. Leo and Hilda had not come down from the castle, but had invited Eva and Delmar, with Herwarth and his betrothed, to spend the day with them in the castle garden and in seeing all that there was of interest within the old walls.

Conversation did not flow as easily as usual this morning. Herwarth and Aline talked, it is true, but Delmar sat gazing dreamily abroad over the valley, and Eva rarely spoke.

Paul had lately lost much of his former vivacity; he sometimes had no power to rouse himself and conquer his depression, and would sink into a reverie, from which he awakened only when he

observed Hilda regarding him with a look of trouble on her lovely face. Then perhaps for a while he would be as merry as ever, although this would not last long. He would leave the rest, lagging behind upon some side-path if they were walking, or absenting himself upon some slight pretext from the party on the balcony.

After a month of hard struggle Paul at last confronted a crisis in his fate. The goal which he lived to attain was reached. Between Leo and Eva there was now only the promise given by the latter to Bertram. The heart of each was laid bare to the other. It was in Paul's power to remove the obstacle that separated the lovers. Why did he hesitate to pronounce the word that would avail to do so? He excused this to himself by urging that he must first keep the promise given to Leo, whereby he was pledged to learn all that could be known of his past from Dr. Putzer. He did not confess even to himself that he dreaded keeping this promise; that he shuddered when he received from Dr. Atzinger, who was in constant attendance upon the sick man, daily intelligence of the slow improvement in his patient's condition; that his heart had throbbed fast when he heard that Putzer would soon be in complete possession of his faculties and able to receive Delmar's visit; and that on this very morning, as he sat silent at the breakfast-table, he was lost in gloomy reflection because Dr. Atzinger had reported on the previous day that he hoped on the ensuing morning to allow Delmar the long-talked-of interview with the sick man.

This visit Delmar was now anticipating with harrowing anxiety. In the sleepless night he had passed he had reviewed in detail every circumstance of the last few weeks. Four weeks since death would have been welcome to him, in view of the horrible certainty that Hilda was legally his sister, although bound to him by no natural tie; all that had given life an interest to him then had been the hope of insuring his friend's happiness; he thought this hope now upon the point of fulfilment, and yet a possible death seemed to him far from welcome now.

What had produced this change in the last month? Was his conviction that Hilda was legally his half-sister shaken? No, on the contrary it had been confirmed; after his conversation with Leo he had written to a prominent lawyer in K---, instructing him to make every possible inquiry as to Herr Delmar's place of abode and family circumstances before he had come to reside in K---; placing at his disposal the means for making these investigations thorough at any cost. The result had been such as to remove all doubt in Paul's mind, had any such existed, as to his relationship with Hilda.

The lawyer had established the fact that Paul Delmar, the son of Herr Delmar, had died a few days after his mother,--there were official records of this,--and also that Herr Delmar had established himself in K--- shortly after leaving his native place. He had brought to K--- with him a child, whose certificate of birth and baptism as his son Paul had been shown to the proper authorities. Of course, as the lawyer wrote, the fact that Herr Delmar had produced an adopted son as his own could be proved beyond a doubt; but this would never be done unless by Herr Paul Delmar's desire.

After this intelligence from his lawyer, Paul needed no confirmation from Dr. Putzer of his relation to Herr von Heydeck, but nevertheless he was determined to obtain it. Towards ten o'clock Dr. Atzinger made his appearance, and announced that his patient had exceeded his expectations by himself earnestly entreating that Herr Delmar would visit him.

When Paul heard this he sprang up from the breakfast-table and would have hurried away, when suddenly his glance fell upon Bertram, who was observing him narrowly. The thought instantly occurred to him that after this interview with Dr. Putzer he might not be able to endure another twenty-four hours in the society of his friends. Therefore before seeing the sick man Eva must be released from her bondage.

He stood reflecting for a moment, and then turning to Herwarth, Aline, and Eva, he begged them not to delay their visit to the castle upon his account; he should in all probability shortly follow them, although he might be detained longer than he anticipated by Dr. Putzer. Eva's offer to wait for him he decidedly refused to accept; and only when they had all promised to set off without him did he turn to Bertram, saying, "Before I see Dr. Putzer, Herr von Bertram, you will perhaps grant me the pleasure of fifteen minutes' conversation with you. Shall we walk?"

Certainly no invitation could have been more suavely and courteously expressed, and yet Bertram's face grew ashy pale, and his heart sank within him as he bowed and stammered a few words of assent to Delmar's proposal.

As soon as Paul had requested Dr. Atzinger to await him at Dr. Putzer's, he left the balcony and led the way, Bertram following, to the village street, where first he moderated his pace, that the ex-lieutenant might walk beside him.

"Do you know, Herr von Bertram, why I have thus requested your company?" he began.

"Indeed--Herr Delmar--I cannot conceive----"

A look of contempt from Delmar greeted these stammered words of denial. "Your embarrassment assures me that you are perfectly aware of what I wish to discuss," Paul continued. "I will therefore come to the point at once. Your unnatural relations with Fräulein Eva Schommer must cease this very day,--this very hour!"

"Herr Delmar----"

"Do not interrupt me. Experience must have taught you that when I speak I mean what I say. For the last four weeks I have watched Fräulein Schommer narrowly; there is no need to tell you that your betrothed abhors you, that she loves my friend, Leo von Heydeck, with all her soul, and that nothing but her inexorable sense of right withholds her from retracting the promise by which she bound herself to you. You know all this as well as I do. If you were a man of honour, such knowledge would suffice to induce you voluntarily to renounce----"

"Herr Delmar, you insult me! Remember your promise!"

"I promised you nothing, and I cannot conceive how the mention of a fact of which you are perfectly cognizant can insult you; but we will not quarrel about words. The fact is that you do not voluntarily dissolve an engagement which you never should have contracted, and that you thus force me to make use of the power over you which I possess. Listen then to a brief declaration of my intentions. Either you will, in order to preserve at least the semblance of honour, make known to Fräulein Schommer in a letter that you release her from her promise, that you voluntarily dissolve the engagement between you, after which you will instantly leave Tausens, so that all further explanation may be impossible, or Fräulein Schommer shall learn from me what reasons moved you to make your public apology to Leo von Heydeck, and I will present in K---, to be cashed, a certain forged check.

"If you do as I require I am ready to hand over to you a sum of five thousand thalers as soon as your letter is sent to Fräulein Schommer. If you refuse, you will be expelled this very day from our circle, where there is really no room for a detected forger. Make your choice!"

Guido trembled with futile rage while Delmar went on speaking with calm decision. Had he only been alone with his foe, he would have throttled him. But they were walking along the village street, the observed of many eyes. Bertram knew that he was in his enemy's power, and he knew Delmar, and that his was no vain threat. He dared not make any resistance; he only hoped to gain time. He thought of the ebony casket, and of Nanette. If Delmar would only grant him a little time, a few days, he might bring the maid over to assist in his plans, now that she was daily yielding more and more to his influence. Therefore he suppressed all expression of anger; nothing could be wrung from this man by opposition; submission and entreaty must be tried.

"You are fearfully hard upon me, Herr Delmar," he said, with feigned humility. "Was it magnanimous to leave me so long in torment between fear and hope? I implore you to give me a few days in which to prepare myself for the step you demand of me. I will speak with my betrothed, and will entreat her to tell me frankly whether indeed she cannot look for happiness in a life spent by my side. And if, as I fear she will, she tells me that she cannot, that she can only give me her hand without her heart, and that her promise alone binds her to me, then I can fulfil your desire honourably, Herr Delmar. Why, after keeping me waiting for weeks without pronouncing judgment against me, do you suddenly insist upon handing me over to disgrace? Only give me a few days' respite, and I promise to do your bidding."

Paul's eyes gloomily sought the ground. A word of entreaty always had great weight with him; it was only where he met with resistance that he was hard. True humility and docility were sure to disarm him. Earnestly as he wished that Leo's fate should be decided, much as he desired to be at liberty to do as he pleased, it is more than probable that he would have yielded to Bertram's entreaty if a suspicion had not suddenly dawned upon him that the man meant to play him false. Why should he desire an interview with Eva? Did he hope to induce the wealthy heiress to buy her freedom from him? Such a scheme might well be attributed to the scoundrel, and Paul was convinced that Eva would be ready to sacrifice her entire fortune if by so doing the detested tie might be severed. The sudden suspicion steeled him against Bertram's entreaty, and he replied, "Not a day, not an hour, will I give you; you must decide upon the spot!"

One look into Delmar's calm, resolute face convinced Bertram that he had no respite, however short, to expect; he still might perhaps succeed in moving him in another respect, and with a profound sigh he continued: "You are terribly severe and cruel with me, Herr Delmar. How have I deserved such scant mercy at your hands? In a miserable moment of my life, a prey to despair, I was led to invoke destruction upon my head by that stroke of the pen. I was half frantic. I had to choose between disgrace and death by my own hand. Love of life conquered, and I forged that signature, an act which I have repented bitterly ever since. You then saved me from merited disgrace, for which I was inexpressibly grateful to you. I felt the wrong I had done you in handing you the forged check, and I was never without a sense of devotion to you as my saviour from dishonour. And yet you are now the one to invoke disgrace upon my head. Remember how you have punished me already. You forced me to public dishonour among my comrades, to resign from the army, to destroy all my hopes in life, and now you thrust me into the abyss from which a marriage with Eva would save me.

"You are enormously wealthy, and you know nothing of the misery of poverty; therefore you thrust me forth into the world with a paltry pittance of five thousand thalers. You offer me five thousand thalers as indemnification for what you take from me! Can five thousand thalers begin life afresh for me and worthily support the name I bear? Can I even live for a few short years upon such a sum? Be magnanimous, Herr Delmar, and let me have, not as a gift but as a loan, a sum sufficient to buy an estate upon the income of which I can live as a landed proprietor, and in

time repay you. You will not miss it, and I shall be forever grateful to you."

With inexpressible contempt Paul regarded the speaker who thus in his servile entreaty for money laid bare all the meanness of his sordid soul. He would gladly have paid any sum to secure Leo's happiness, but to supply this aristocratic beggar with the means for a life of dissipation would in his estimation be a sin against humanity. Utterly disgusted, he turned away; he would have nothing more to do with the fellow. "Not a word more, Herr von Bertram!" he exclaimed, harshly; "you have heard my offer, which I now almost regret having made; you must now decide whether to accept or to reject it. You would squander fifty thousand thalers as quickly as five thousand at the gaming-table. I know that I was wrong in offering you money. But I did so, and will stand by my word, if you declare yourself ready this minute to do as I command you. The time which I was free to devote to you is past. I must have a simple 'yes' or 'no'! Answer me!"

"I implore you, Herr Delmar----"

"'Yes' or 'no'! Not another word! If you do not reply, I shall understand it as 'no,' and you must abide by the consequences."

Not yet could Bertram bring himself to utter the decisive 'yes.' He still hesitated, but Paul left him no time for further reflection. When Bertram paused he turned from him with contempt, and would have returned to the inn. His firmness conquered.

Bertram saw that all would be lost, and the promised five thousand thalers besides, if he did not instantly submit. He hastened after Delmar. "Yes, Herr Delmar!" he exclaimed, "I submit to your wishes; I confide in your magnanimity!"

"You have made prudent use of the last moment," Paul rejoined coldly; "follow me to my room."

Again he led the way, Bertram following him. At the door of the inn they met Aline, Eva, and Herwarth about to start for the castle. "I will soon join you," Paul said, as he passed them. Bertram never lifted his eyes from the ground, and they did not appear to notice him.

Arrived in his room, Delmar directed Bertram to his writing-table. "Sit there," he said; "take a sheet of paper, and write. I will dictate to you a letter that shall serve as the last chapter of the miserable romance of your betrothal. You shall extricate yourself from this wretched business as a man of honour; at least you shall appear such in Fräulein Schommer's eyes. It is of course more than you deserve, and is probably great folly on my part; it is not done for your sake, but because I owe some reparation to Fräulein Schommer for a former unjust estimate of her, and I should like to save her from the humiliating conviction that she has been betrothed to so utter a scoundrel as yourself. Therefore I will surround your brow with the halo of high-souled renunciation. Write!"

Bertram bit his lips, not daring to vent the rage that was consuming him. Without a word of reply he took up a pen, and wrote down the words which Delmar, standing behind him, dictated over his shoulder.

"Four terrible, agonizing weeks have I passed, weeks in which each day was torture to me. With every miserable hour I have become more and more clearly convinced that you, dearest Eva, have accorded me a right to remain near you as your betrothed only in consequence of a promise too hastily given. I have seen that your heart belongs to another, and that it never can be mine.

"I do not blame you; I only bewail the ill fortune that shatters all my life's fairest hopes. I should be indeed lost to all sense of honour if I attempted to hold you, my beloved Eva, to a promise given me when you were ignorant of your own heart. You, at least, shall not be unhappy. I give back to you the faith which your inexorable sense of rectitude forbids you to recall. I voluntarily release you from your engagement.

"I shall not, I cannot, see you again. It is with the deepest pain that I leave you, but there is some consolation for me in the thought that you will not think of me with hatred, but will accord me some measure of friendly remembrance in the knowledge that I have sacrificed my happiness to yours.

"GUIDO VON BERTRAM."

The letter was written. Paul took it, and read it aloud, laughing bitterly as he finished it. "Excellent!" he said; "an epistle which might worthily find a place in any romance, and which is certainly not dear at five thousand thalers. Uncle Balthasar may still speak with genuine emotion of his 'dear Guido;' the fair Eva may think kindly of the noble self-renunciation that inspired the letter, and perhaps privately repent that she did the writer such injustice. Even Leo will shake his head, unable to conceive how such words could have been written by him who penned them. Seal it with your signet-ring, and I myself will deliver it to Fräulein Schommer."

Bertram obeyed in silence. He sealed the letter and gave it to Delmar, who in return took from his pocket-book five thousand thalers in large notes, which he handed to the ex-lieutenant, saying, "Our business is now concluded, Herr von Bertram. I leave you, never to see you again. I myself will order a carriage for you from the postmaster. It will be at the door in five minutes; just in time for you to catch the midday train from the railway-station. In a quarter of an hour you will have left Tausens. Only upon this understanding; do I give you this money. I shall reclaim it if I find you still here when I return from a visit I am about to make in the village. And if you should dare to attempt to obtain an interview with Fräulein Schommer, I shall ruthlessly use against you the forged check in my possession. Make haste with the packing of your portmanteau; you have but a quarter of an hour's time at the most."

Delmar expected no answer, and received none. Bertram swept up the pile of notes, and with a last look of hatred as his only farewell to Paul, hurried away to his room, where he locked himself in, while Delmar quietly went down-stairs and ordered Hansel to have a conveyance brought to the door for Herr von Bertram, who wished to catch the midday train. After which he proceeded to pay his visit to Dr. Putzer.

When Bertram found himself alone in his room, he no longer restrained the expression of the rage that possessed him. Muttering curses upon the failure of his schemes, he paced the floor like some caged wild beast. All was over! He was powerless in the grasp of his deadly foe; thrust forth thus into the world with a paltry pittance of five thousand thalers to atone for the millions he had lost.

How gladly he would have murdered his pitiless, inexorable enemy! But even in the midst of his paroxysm of anger he shuddered at the thought of Delmar's cold, quiet manner, which always had power to overawe his coward will.

His fate was decided; he must submit. The ebony casket again recurred to him. Just then there was a rustle in the next room. Eva and Aline had gone to the castle. Nanette must be there alone. Hitherto he had not thought of making her his accomplice in the theft; this now occurred to him. Only with her aid could he hope to make the coveted prize his own.

But if he did thus gain possession of it, would not suspicion instantly fall upon him? Eva would miss her treasure as soon as she returned from the castle, and Delmar would not leave her long in doubt as to who had stolen it. He pondered the matter. Eva could not possibly return from the castle before two o'clock; she was to dine at three at the inn. But by two he might be far away. If he took the train to Toblach, and then drove to Schleuderbach, he could reach the Italian frontier before even a telegraphic message could be despatched in search of him, although Delmar should immediately institute a pursuit of the fugitive. Once across the frontier he would surely be able to elude all discovery.

What would Eva say when she found her precious casket missing and divined who had taken it? As he thought of the letter he had just written, and the contrast it formed to the act he contemplated, he laughed bitterly. But his time was short, every minute was precious, he dared delay no longer. He knocked cautiously at the door leading to the next room. The bolt was withdrawn, and Nanette opened it. She was received by him with a tender embrace. "My little darling," he said, "how fortunate I am in seeing you once more before I leave!"

The girl looked at him with terrified surprise. "What do you mean, Herr von Bertram? You are going away? How? Where?"

"I will tell you, my pet, and you only. I have just received intelligence that a suit has been instituted against me in K--- for leaving there without leave of absence from my superior officer. I am to be arrested here to-day and taken back a prisoner to K----. I must fly or I am lost; in a quarter of an hour I must leave Tausens."

"What will become of Fräulein Schommer?"

"Do not mention her. I am glad to be rid of her even in this way. I hate her, but it breaks my heart to leave you. Oh, Nanette, if you really cared for me you would leave all and come with me! You should be my darling little wife, with nothing to do but enjoy yourself all day long!"

Nanette listened, speechless with rapture. Here was a proposal she had never ventured to hope for! A great gentleman, and the betrothed besides of her hated mistress, asked her to fly with him and be his wife,--his real wife,--a lady of rank! Her head grew giddy at the thought. She could hardly believe her ears.

But Bertram went on pouring forth his insidious protestations and entreaties until she could doubt no longer. And when he pointed to the ebony casket and said that it contained what would give them a careless, happy life in Italy, she made no resistance to his taking it from the table where it stood, and bewildered and submissive only asked whether they should not be found out. He soothed her with the assurance that they should both be far beyond the Italian frontier before the absence of the casket was detected or any pursuit thought of.

Before many minutes were past Bertram had won the girl over to his purpose; she consented to accompany him in his flight, she became his accomplice. By his directions she locked on the inside the door leading from Eva's room to the passage, and then followed her grand gentleman,

who carried the casket, into his room where he locked the door of communication and put the key in his pocket.

Time was precious, and Bertram made haste to thrust the casket, which must be hidden from sight while he was leaving the inn, into his portmanteau. Here however he encountered an unexpected difficulty. On each side of the box was a large ornamented gilt handle, by which it had usually been lifted. These handles made the box too large for the interior of his portmanteau. As Bertram tried in vain to pack away the casket so that the small trunk would close, he muttered an oath. He could not possibly allow the box, which the postmaster and the inn servants knew to be Eva's property, to be seen in his possession, and there was no way of concealing it except by packing it into the portmanteau, which was too small for it. He tried to bend one of the metal handles, and as he did so it broke off in his hand. "So best!" he said, throwing it aside, and then wrenching off the other, which he also threw on the floor. The casket now fitted perfectly inside the portmanteau, filling it however so completely that Bertram was forced to leave most of his clothes behind him.

In a few minutes the portmanteau was locked, and Bertram himself carried it down to the conveyance which was awaiting him at the inn-door. The postmaster stood by it, cap in hand, expressing sorrow that the gentleman was about to leave him. His surprise was great when Nanette suddenly made her appearance in her bonnet and shawl and took her seat beside Herr von Bertram in the carriage.

"I will take this opportunity of driving to town," she said, observing honest Hansel's amazement. "I have several commissions to execute for my mistress, and I will come back towards evening in the carriage. Adieu, Herr Postmaster!"

"Drive on!" cried Bertram. "I must catch the midday train!" The driver cracked his whip, and the horses started at a rapid pace.

Hansel looked after the carriage as long as it was in sight, and then turned into the inn with a wise shake of his head. This sudden departure of the young nobleman, and so strangely accompanied too, did not seem to him just what it should be. But these great people from the city certainly did have many queer ways, and as long as Herr Delmar had ordered the carriage everything must be right, and thus Hansel forced himself to think.

He went up-stairs to see that Herr von Bertram had forgotten nothing in his room, and to his surprise found the door locked. This was vexatious. The Herr must have locked it absently and put the key into his pocket. Ten to one he would forget to give it to the driver when they reached the railway-station.

Hansel went grumbling and fetched his master-key, which opened all the bedrooms in the house; but when he entered Bertram's apartment he found it in a condition which greatly increased his misgivings with regard to the sudden departure. One or two suits of clothes and a quantity of linen lay about the floor in disorder. They could not have been forgotten; they must have been left behind intentionally. All these clothes had been brought to the inn in Herr von Bertram's portmanteau, and yet Hansel had noticed that it had looked much fuller without all these articles in it when the gentleman had put it into the carriage just now. Again Hansel shook his head; he did not know what to make of all this, and he resolved to ask Herr Delmar about it as soon as he returned to the inn.

CHAPTER XVII.

After Delmar had ordered the carriage for Bertram, he walked slowly along the village street towards Dr. Putzer's. The nearer he came to the house the more he lingered; never had he experienced such a dread as possessed him at thought of the coming interview which would decide his fate.

But he was ashamed of what seemed to him cowardice, and as he paused for an instant at the small grated gate opening into the doctor's garden he braced himself to meet his fate, reflecting that no delay would postpone the inevitable, and then walked quickly through the garden to the house-door.

Dr. Atzinger received him. "You have been long in coming, Herr Delmar," he said. "Our patient has been impatiently awaiting you. If I had yielded to his wishes you would have seen him some days ago; but even now, I confess frankly, I should have liked to postpone this interview. I think him far too weak for any agitation of mind, and I have yielded to him in this instance only

because I feared more from the effect of his restless impatience than from the conversation with you, which he evidently considers as of the first importance. Unfortunately I cannot be present at this interview. He has asked to see you alone, and I must therefore entreat you to use extreme caution, remembering that any over-excitement on his part is certain death. Pray do all you can to soothe him."

Paul willingly promised all that was asked of him. He felt no irritation towards Putzer, who had been but the tool of Herr von Heydeck.

Atzinger conducted him to the door of the doctor's bedroom, saying as he opened it, "Here is the man you so wish to see; now remember, my dear friend, to send him away as you promised, as soon as you feel exhausted."

"Yes, yes; tell him to come in," was the reply, in feeble tones.

Delmar entered, and Dr. Atzinger left him alone with the patient.

The room was large and sunny, and supplied with every comfort that could be procured in a retired Tyrolean village. The sick man's bed was so placed that as he lay with his face turned to the window he had a full view of the steep rock crowned by Castle Reifenstein.

Upon Paul's entrance the invalid raised himself into a half-sitting posture and turned his face full towards his visitor. "I have been longing for you for many days, Herr Delmar," he said, in a faint, scarce audible voice. "You are come at last, and I thank you. I was afraid I should never see you again."

Was this Dr. Putzer? Delmar never could have believed it from the evidence of his senses. There was absolutely no resemblance between the wine-flushed bloated countenance which Paul remembered and this ashy-pale flabby face, save for the light disordered hair that fell on either side of it. And just as little did the invalid's weak gentle voice resemble Dr. Putzer's hoarse brutal tones.

Delmar was so shocked and startled by the alteration he observed in the man that he could at first find no words in which to reply to his salutation.

The doctor continued: "Sit here, Herr Delmar, close by my bed; I have much to say, and not much strength wherewith to say it. I must pray you to lend me your patient attention."

Paul obeyed; he drew a chair to the bedside and sat down, filled with pity for the sick man, whose every word evidently cost him a painful effort. His compassion got the better of his desire to hear what the man had to say. "Talking is too much for you, Herr Doctor," he said kindly. "You must not exert yourself I beg you reserve what you have to tell me for another day, when you are stronger and better, and let us discuss only commonplace topics at present. I will pay you a daily visit, and your friend Dr. Atzinger tells me that you will be much stronger and more equal to the task you have imposed upon yourself in a few days."

A grim smile, which reminded Paul of the Dr. Putzer of his remembrance, flitted across the pale face. "My dear friend Dr. Atzinger is an ignoramus!" the sick man replied. "I shall never be stronger; I shall shortly be found dead in my bed,--perhaps to-day, perhaps to-morrow,--any time within the next fortnight. I know this with absolute certainty, and therefore I was so impatient to see you, for I must and will speak with you. I will not die without being revenged upon the worthless woman whose fault it is that I lie here a dying man, and who has had no thought except for her own safety. She expected me to die without ever being able to utter another word, and she robbed me of every cent I possess that she might escape danger; but she was mistaken,--I still live, and will use my last breath in revenging myself upon her."

The doctor's voice grew stronger and his eyes flashed as he said these words. But the momentary excitement over, he sank back exhausted among his pillows. Paul feared he was dying, and rose hastily to call Dr. Atzinger, but Putzer divined his intention. "Stay," he gasped; "it will pass off,--in a moment I shall be strong enough."

Again Paul obeyed, and after resting for a few minutes, the doctor continued: "Indignation at that wretched woman exhausted me; it shall not occur again. I will husband my strength for what I have to do. There may be no to-morrow for me, and you shall not leave me until I have armed you for my revenge upon that fiend. I might tell you much, but I think you already know most of what I have to say. You would not have come to Tausens if you had not known that Herr von Heydeck has defrauded you of your inheritance, and if you did not wish to recover it from him. You know this, but you do not know what it is most important that you should, and you perhaps imagine that with the help of certain proof of which I am ignorant you can force Herr von Heydeck to acknowledge you as his son and to leave you his property and his name. Is not this so?"

Paul made no reply except by a faint motion of the head, which the doctor took for assent, and continued: "I thought so. You will scarcely undertake a wearisome lawsuit for the sake of the property. I have heard that you are very rich, that you are the possessor of millions. Is this true?"

"Yes, it is true!" Paul replied, firmly.

His answer satisfied the doctor. "Then I am right. Herr von Heydeck's wealth does not allure you; you did not come to Tausens to demand your rightful inheritance? Answer me, am I right?"

"Yes!" Paul said, distinctly.

"Then it is the name and title of von Heydeck that you covet. I thought so. Well, Herr Delmar. I shall have to depress your hopes slightly. I think I remember, before my illness, when I was not exactly myself, having told you that you could lay no claim to the name of Heydeck. What I then said is true; you are the son of Count Menotti, not of Herr von Heydeck!"

"But Herr von Heydeck acknowledged me as his son, and such I therefore am in the eye of the law," Paul rejoined, hoping to incite the doctor to further revelations by this insistence. His hope was fulfilled.

"You think so, but you are mistaken," the doctor continued. "You think you know all about it because you probably possess proof that Herr von Heydeck delivered you over to Herr Delmar as a child, and that you are the boy whom Herr von Heydeck gave out for dead in order that he might appropriate to himself the child's maternal inheritance. All this you know, but you do not know that there was no child by Herr von Heydeck's marriage with his first wife; that you were the illegitimate child of your mother and Count Menotti; that you were born before Herr von Heydeck was married to your mother, and that therefore you can lay no claim whatever to the name of Heydeck."

The words were spoken. Paul saw the yawning abyss which was to have swallowed up his hopes suddenly disappear, and a sunny future expand before him. The burden which had wellnigh crushed him for weeks beneath its weight fell from him. Hilda was not even legally his sister, nor was Heydeck his father, but a stranger, to whom he was bound neither by the law of the land nor by that of nature. His brain reeled at the thought that if the sick man's words were true there was no longer any obstacle to separate him from his love.

The doctor perceived how deep was the impression produced upon Delmar by his words, but he ascribed his agitation to a false cause. "I see," he said more kindly than was his wont, "that my information pains you because it annihilates your hopes, but I could not spare you. You must know the entire truth that you may not proceed to false measures in dealing with Herr von Heydeck,—measures which might defeat your object. This object there is a chance of your attaining if you will follow my advice. I will put into your hands proof that you are not the son of Herr von Heydeck, and it may be the very means of enabling you to induce the cowardly old miser to leave you his name and title."

"Give me this proof, Herr Doctor," Delmar cried, in the greatest agitation, "and I assure you that at no price will I consider it dearly bought! Ask what you will for this proof, and I will give it you!"

Paul's eager words called forth a melancholy smile upon the doctor's shrunken features. "That is a fine promise, but valueless to me," he rejoined. "Four weeks ago I would have thanked you for it; to-day it moves me not at all. In a few days this miserable body of mine will be six feet deep in the ground. I have all I want till then, and all that you have could not induce me to do your bidding against my will. But I will be revenged upon my wicked wife, who made my home a hell, who poisoned my life! I will atone for the wrong I did you. You have been my benefactor in this illness, my friend Atzinger tells me that you have sent a carriage for him daily, and given him a generous fee for attending me. I will show my gratitude to you. Listen to me, and I will tell you what you ought to know, and give you the proof which you need." The doctor then told his tale; he spoke in low, measured words, husbanding his forces, for he felt that he needed all the strength that he could muster. The import of his communication was as follows:

When Herr von Heydeck bought Reifenstein and passed some weeks there with his handsome wife, Dr. Putzer was a gay young fellow; he had studied well, understood his profession, and hoped to lead a pleasant life in Tausens. He soon found however that the position of a village doctor was by no means so pleasant or so lucrative as he had supposed, and that its income would never afford him the social enjoyments which he desired. He was fond of a glass of good wine, and he needed periodicals and scientific books to aid him in his studies. He had no mind for a hermit's life. The paltry fees which he received from his peasant patients but poorly sufficed for half his needs; he became deeply involved in debt, out of which he racked his brains in vain to find any means of extricating himself. Under these circumstances he thought it most fortunate that the wealthy Herr von Heydeck should buy Reifenstein, and that he should be sent for to visit the castle in his medical capacity. He took pains to recommend himself to the lord of the castle, whose love of scientific pursuits he humoured; and he succeeded. He became the confidant of Herr von Heydeck, who often bewailed to him the sorrow caused him by his unworthy wife, but never alluded to the past. It struck Putzer as very strange, this mystery enshrouding the past of Herr von Heydeck and his handsome wife. The husband lived in disgraceful dependence upon Madame von Heydeck's whims, never even venturing to remonstrate when Count Menotti publicly conducted himself as her declared lover.

The mystery was explained for the doctor when Herr von Heydeck, after his wife's death, came to Castle Reifenstein with his child. When Putzer was sent for to see the boy, a single glance at the child told the physician of the criminal deception that had here been practised upon

the world. The newspapers three months before had announced the birth of a boy; but the child who had inherited his mother's property was at least a year and a half old, and must have been born before Herr von Heydeck's marriage, which had taken place not quite a year previously.

Herr von Heydeck, reading the doctor's thoughts in his face, could not refrain from giving him his entire confidence, especially since he needed his aid. He confessed to him that the infant was the child of the Count Menotti, and had been born some months before his own marriage. It was solely for the sake of bestowing an aristocratic name upon the child that its mother had consented to marry Heydeck, after he had promised in writing to acknowledge the child as his own within a year after their marriage. Within that time the intelligence of Frau von Heydeck's confinement was spread abroad in society, but the fruit of it, a boy, was pronounced so sickly and weak that no one except the nurse was allowed to see it.

This nurse, Rosy, was the foster-sister and confidante of Frau von Heydeck, and had contrived the entire scheme. It was by her advice that the marriage with Herr von Heydeck had been contracted, and to her keeping was entrusted the document whereby Heydeck bound himself to acknowledge the child as his own. With this in her possession she ruled her master with a rod of iron after his wife's death.

Dr. Putzer, on his first visit at the castle, easily comprehended the relations between the castle's lord and the pretty waiting-maid. The young physician was taken with her handsome face and pert coquettish ways, while her by no means spotless past was of no consequence in his eyes. Loaded down with debts he had but one wish, and that was to secure for himself a comfortable and assured existence; the safest way to attain this end was by a marriage with Rosy; together they could gain such an ascendancy over Herr von Heydeck as to induce him to share his wealth with them.

They were soon agreed, and Heydeck weakly yielded to their mischievous influence. Rosy suggested to him that the boy's death would be the best luck that could befall him; but Heydeck, although scarcely too conscientious, was too cowardly to commit so grave a crime as murder. He consented to rid himself of the boy, but not by death; he would cause the intelligence of his death to be spread abroad, and he would bring him up in secret, until death did actually come, as he hoped it soon would, to the weakly, sickly child.

The doctor and his betrothed lent Heydeck their ready aid; the doctor wrote the official certificate of the child's death,—he had spread the report of its fatal contagious disease that no one might desire to see the corpse,—and he fitted up the basement of the tower, whither the unfortunate child was taken and committed to the care of the two half-idiotic Melchers.

The scheme which had been hatched in Rosy's brain was successful: the mock funeral took place, the boy vanished, and Herr von Heydeck was his heir. He paid the doctor and Rosy well for their services, and upon their immediate marriage hoped he was rid of them. Here however he was mistaken; his crime did not go unpunished, for he never was able to shake off the mastery maintained over him by the intriguing Rosy, not even when he secretly conveyed the boy away from the castle and falsely told the doctor that the child had died in Switzerland. Whenever Rosy wanted to extort money from Heydeck she threatened him with betrayal, not of the mock death of the child, in which crime she herself was an accomplice, but of that first deception of Heydeck's, whereby he had made official announcement of the birth of a child, who was in reality already more than a year old.

Rosy could produce the proof of this deception; she had carefully preserved the document entrusted to her by Frau von Heydeck, with a series of letters which made the fact of the deception incontestable. She could prove that the boy was Frau von Heydeck's illegitimate child, and if she did so to the relatives of her deceased mistress they would certainly come forward to assert their claims to an inheritance of which Heydeck had illegally possessed himself.

Rosy thus held the lord of the castle in perpetual thralldom, reducing him almost to despair in forcing him to satisfy her avaricious greed. She was the wretched man's evil genius.

The doctor's life too was scarcely less wretched than Heydeck's; his wife made, as he had said, his house a hell. She never ceased tormenting and aggravating him, and he had recourse to drinking to drown his misery. Only in forgetfulness could he find relief. The wicked woman made a perfect slave of him; he hated her, but rarely ventured to disobey her.

The worm will turn however, and sometimes when his courage was screwed up with wine the doctor rebelled against the tyranny that oppressed him. At some such moment he formed the plan of appropriating to himself the power which his wife possessed over Herr von Heydeck, thinking thus to make the evil woman subject to his will. He stole from her the papers by which she ruled Herr von Heydeck, and in spite of her rage when she missed them, bade her defiance, and never revealed the hiding-place where the important documents were concealed.

By this bold stroke he was at least enabled now and then to intimidate his wife by threats that he would deliver over the papers to Herr von Heydeck; but he was never able to shake off the yoke of her stronger nature, and his life was almost as miserable as before.

The absolute hatred with which he regarded her was fiercer than ever as he lay ill and

helpless in bed; he could not forgive her for causing his attack by insisting upon his plunging his head beneath the cold water, and for then leaving him neglected and alone, that she might escape the punishment of the crime which Delmar had probably come to Tausens to investigate.

To revenge himself upon her the doctor now handed Paul the papers, which he had instructed Dr. Atzinger a few days previously to fetch from their hiding-place, and which he had since kept beneath his pillow. The worthless woman, the doctor declared, should perish in want and misery,-she had spent everything that she had extorted from Herr von Heydeck in dress and finery, and had only taken a small sum with her upon her flight. With these papers her power over Herr von Heydeck was gone,-he would certainly do nothing more for her when he knew that she could do him no further harm.

In possession of these documents Delmar could, the doctor explained, force Herr von Heydeck to bequeath to him his name. Through fear lest he should lose his money and be dragged through a disgraceful lawsuit the old coward, so said the doctor, could be made to do just as Delmar pleased.

With a sensation of absolute rapture Delmar received the precious papers which secured to him a happy future, from the hands of the sick man, who never dreamed how worthless in Paul's estimation was a high-sounding, aristocratic name.

Delmar thanked the doctor warmly, but the sick man shook his head. "I have done this not for your sake, but my own," he said. "I know that my detestable wife will perish in want; I am content. I pray you leave me now, Herr Delmar, my strength is exhausted. We shall never meet again. Farewell!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

Never had the heavens been so blue or the sunshine so bright,-never had the hemlocks filled the air with such exquisite fragrance as upon this blissful day, when Paul lightly trod the forest-path towards Castle Reifenstein. A shepherd-boy upon a distant mountain jodelled down to him, and Paul could not refrain from jodelling back a full clear note, that echoed far over the sunny valleys.

He could have embraced the world. He had suddenly been transported from the black depths of despair to the heights of hope. A future, with Hilda by his side, beckoned him. Where were all the gloomy reveries of the last few weeks? As he walked briskly up the steep ascent, he thought with horror of the dark temptation to self-destruction that had once assailed him. Yes, Leo was right when he declared that only a coward would ever seek such a solution of the problem of life,-that a true man should possess a 'heart for any fate.' When he had nearly reached the castle he heard well-known voices near him, and could not forbear giving another genuine Tyrolean jodel.

"That is Delmar's voice!" Leo exclaimed.

"Oh, no; it is long since Herr Delmar has shouted so gayly," Hilda replied.

A second louder and gayer jodel was Paul's reply, as he turned in the direction whence the voices came, and passing through a short stretch of woodland, reached a small rocky plateau, whither Hilda had brought her guests because it afforded them the best view down into the fearful chasm in the rocks.

"You were wrong, lovely fairy," said Paul, as he joined the small party, taking Hilda's offered hand as he spoke; "no man upon earth can shout as gayly as I can when inspired by the hope of seeing you."

'Lovely fairy!' Paul had never bestowed this title upon Hilda since the first day of their meeting; since then he had always addressed her ceremoniously as 'Fräulein von Heydeck,' and only rarely, in eager conversation, as 'Fräulein Hilda.' Hilda heard therefore in surprise, and, blushing at the remembrance of that first day, looked up at him. How changed he seemed since yesterday! His dark eyes sparkled with gayety, a happy smile played about his lips,-he was the same frank, light-hearted man whom she had so liked at their first interview, and yet-no, not the same; he had become far handsomer and more attractive; she had never liked him half so well as now.

Leo also noticed the change which the few hours since he had last seen his friend had effected in him. "What good news do you bring us?" he asked. "I have hardly ever seen you look so gay."

"Have you found that out already?" Paul asked in his turn, with a laugh. "I revere your powers of observation, and will reward them with a share of the treasures to be found in my pockets. But good children should restrain their curiosity and wait patiently until it is satisfied. If you love me, do me the kindness to act as guide to Fräulein Eva and our betrothed couple on their way to the castle garden, and resign your former guide, the lovely fairy of the castle, to me for a few minutes. I trust she will grant me a hearing for that short space of time."

This request had so strange a sound that Hilda grew confused, and looked uncertain whether to grant it, but when Delmar added, in a low, eager tone, "It is my first request; can you refuse me?" she shyly placed her hand within his offered arm and lingered with him behind the others, whom Leo, as Delmar had asked him to do, conducted to the castle garden.

Paul walked along slowly at Hilda's side, preserving an entire silence until their friends were out of hearing. Then he turned to his companion and said, "I owe you an explanation of much that must have struck you strangely in my manner and behaviour during these last few weeks. Will you hear me, Hilda? Will you let me be frank with you?"

It was the first time that Delmar had called the girl by her first name,--that he had spoken to her in so earnest and yet so confidential a tone. She divined what he wished to say, but she did not refuse to listen. Her low-whispered 'yes' enchanted him; it told him that he did not hope in vain.

Paul continued: "That little 'yes,' dearest Hilda, makes me inexpressibly happy; it tells me that you trust me, and I would have you trust me, now and forever, freely and unconditionally. You must have seen that from the first moment when I met you, my lovely fairy, in the labyrinth of rocks, my heart has been yours. I revelled in the hope of one day winning your heart and your hand also. I was happy, exquisitely happy! But my dream of bliss lasted but two short days. I was suddenly and rudely awakened from it by the startling and as I thought absolute certainty that your father never would bestow upon me your hand, and that therefore I must not even try to win your heart. I can never, my dear Hilda, tell you what created in me this belief. Here you must trust me implicitly. You must never know the dark mystery that interposed between us, nor the cause I thought there was for the utter despair to which I was a prey. Life lost all value in my eyes; the reckless gayety which sometimes distressed you, as well as the morbid melancholy that assailed me when I was alone, was the result of the terrible conviction that possessed me that you never could be my own,--that I could never be more to you than a faithful friend and brother.

"But to-day I have learned, to my unspeakable joy, that all my fears were but idle baseless visions,--that I was deceived, and that I deceived myself,--that I may in all honour tell you how passionately I love you, and may hope, if you will but let me try to win your love in return, that your father will consent to give you to me. Will you, can you love me, Hilda? Will you come with me to your father and hear me pray him to give me this dear hand for my very own?"

Hilda looked up into his face with a happy smile, and he needed no reply in words; indeed she could have given him none, for in an instant his arms were about her, and his kisses sealed her lips.

She extricated herself from his embrace, and her pleading eyes restrained his passionate outburst. He still however clasped in his the little hand, which he kissed repeatedly, saying, "Come, come to your father, lovely fairy! This moment must confirm the happiness of my future life."

Hilda conducted him across the castle court-yard to her father's study, whither Herr von Heydeck had withdrawn from the presence of his daughter's guests.

He was so absorbed in his work that he did not hear the door open; only when Paul and Hilda stood close beside him did he look up from his books, and as his gaze rested upon Delmar the same look of horror with which he had greeted his first appearance passed into his face. Again he put up his hand, as if to ward off some attack, while he seemed incapable of speech.

Paul was no whit daunted however. "Do not repulse me, Herr von Heydeck," he said, in a gentle voice. "I come not as your enemy, not to demand, but to entreat. I pray you to receive me as your son in granting me your daughter's hand."

The simple words fairly overwhelmed the old man. He had started forward in his arm-chair; he now sank back into it helplessly. "You--you ask to be my son? You sue for Hilda's hand,--and you know?----"

It was only with great difficulty that he gasped forth these broken sentences.

"I know everything," Paul replied calmly. "I come from Dr. Putzer's death-bed; he gave me these papers, which I now hand over to you. I pray you to destroy them; forget the past as I have forgotten it. Receive me as a son, who never will forget the respect he owes to the father of his dearest Hilda."

Herr von Heydeck clutched with a trembling hand the papers which Paul held out to him. He glanced at their contents, and his face was illumined by an expression of intense joy. The next instant he had torn the dreaded documents into countless shreds, after which he buried his head

in his hands and burst into a convulsive fit of sobbing.

Paul did not disturb him, but whispering low reassuring words of tenderness to the astonished and frightened Hilda, he waited calmly until Herr von Heydeck had regained his composure. Only when the old man lifted his head and looked from his daughter to her lover with tear-dimmed eyes did Paul repeat his entreaty, adding, "Hilda has given me her heart,--you will not refuse my suit, Herr von Heydeck?"

"No, no; you shall be my son!" Herr von Heydeck exclaimed. "God grants me thus an opportunity of repairing the grievous wrong I did you. My Hilda will atone for my sin. She will be to you the angel of light which her sainted mother was to me!"

Again he was overcome by mingled emotions of joy and sorrow. His conscience had been burdened with the consciousness of his guilt; he had trembled at the thoughts of discovery for years, and he could not bear the sudden joy of this moment. Again he sobbed convulsively, only stammering, in broken accents, "Leave me now, my children. I must be alone. God bless you!"

Paul drew Hilda away from the room, knowing how greatly the old man must stand in need of repose, and the girl, not venturing to oppose her father's request, went with him willingly.

When however the study-door was closed behind them she paused. "What is the matter with my father? What wrong can he have done? Why should he be so overcome?" she asked, with an appealing look into her lover's eyes.

Paul clasped her tenderly in his arms. "Do you not believe, dearest, that I love you infinitely more than life?" he asked.

"Yes; I trust you implicitly."

"Then promise me, in this supreme moment, that you will never again ask me what your father's words meant. It is not my secret but his, and I could not in honour betray it even to you. But I swear solemnly that it is the only secret that shall ever be between us,--no thought of my heart shall be concealed from you. Will you not trust me? Believe me, I but obey the dictates of honour when I beg you to forget what you have heard. Will you promise me never to question either myself or your father upon the subject?"

"This kiss shall seal the promise that you ask!"

Leo had conducted the guests to the garden, there to await Paul and Hilda; he tried to engage them in pleasant talk, but he could not fairly succeed, for his thoughts would wander. They were with his friend, the change in whom he could easily interpret, for he knew that Paul had just had an interview with Dr. Putzer; and that the result had been a happy one for Hilda's lover, was plainly to be seen in his sparkling eyes and gay mood. And Paul had also had an interview with Bertram, which must have been satisfactory, or he would hardly have uttered the laughing remark about the treasures in his pockets. What did he mean? He had glanced so meaningfully as he spoke, first at Eva and then at Leo. Heydeck was restless and impatient,--he guessed that one short hour might decide his fate, and yet he could not understand how the decision could be fortunate for him. He could conceive but of one happy future, and that seemed unattainable. He loved Eva with a passionate devotion which the familiar intercourse of the past few weeks had deepened tenfold. He knew that his love was returned, although no word that could betray his devotion to her had ever passed his lips. He had never transgressed the bounds of friendship, nor had she ever given him the slightest right to do so.

The consciousness that she was not indifferent towards him enchanted him, but at the same time it filled him with a despair that would often wellnigh overcome him when he was alone in his room standing in rapt contemplation of the picture,--the work not of his hand but of his heart. Eva's dark eyes gazed at him from the canvas with a look that seemed to promise the fulfilment of his boldest hopes, and in gazing he was sometimes beguiled into delicious dreams, from which he was startled by the consciousness of reality, and a stern voice within him crying, "Lost, lost forever!"

He knew that Paul could force Bertram to resign all pretensions to Eva's hand, but even if Eva should be free she was still lost to him. Could he, a poor artist, whose future life must be one of hard labour, aspire to the hand of the millionaire heiress? He had sacrificed to his principles a brilliant military career, his entire future, and even his father's affections. Could he be untrue to himself now? Honour forbade his ever addressing a word of love to Eva Schommer,--she was too rich!

When he wandered beside her through the lovely scenes among which their daily excursions were made, and she talked frankly and unrestrainedly with him, he could not but resign himself to the spell of her presence, but when he was once more alone those two words, 'too rich,' annihilated every hope within him. And now, while he awaited Paul's return, they destroyed all his anticipations of pleasure,--there could be no happiness for him whatever might be the result of Delmar's interview with Bertram; this was the verdict of his reason, but nevertheless his heart rebelled against so cold a sentence, and throbbed impatiently at the thought of his friend's

return.

It was not long before Paul and Hilda made their appearance beneath the archway of the garden gate, arm in arm, their happiness so plainly to be seen in the countenance of each, that Leo knew, and Eva, Herwarth, and Aline suspected, what had happened, and hastened to meet them.

Paul received them with a laugh. "I see," he said, giving his hand to Leo, "you guess what I have to tell you, but nevertheless I am not going to be defrauded of the pleasure of presenting to you my lovely betrothed, Hilda von Heydeck. The betrothal has duly taken place, and I beseech your congratulations."

They were given in fullest measure. As Leo grasped his hand, Kuno reminded him of how, four weeks before, he had exclaimed, "Number One!" and had declared that he would purchase such bliss, not only with a miserable foot, but with his head.

"Exactly, I said so, and I repeat it," Paul replied, with a gayety which had its root however in deep earnestness. "Only fortunately, noble knight, the sacrifice of my head, which was nearer to being consummated than you dream of, was not required. I said 'Number One' then, never thinking that this lovely fairy would make me the happy 'Number Two.' Now we must find a 'Number Three,' that the trefoil may be perfect."

Then turning to Eva, he whispered, so as to be heard by her alone, "Is there do hope, Fräulein Schommer, of your aid in making a happy 'Number Three'?"

Eva did not reply, save by a blush and a reproving glance, which assured Delmar he was understood, as she turned to Hilda and warmly wished her every happiness. Her reproving look, however, glanced harmlessly aside from Paul's armour of gayety, he only nodded and laughed, as he continued aloud, "Number Two is proud and happy to return thanks to his friends for their kind congratulations, which he receives as the result of his share of the treasures which he brought with him to Castle Reifenstein. It was due to my position as confirmed egotist to provide for my own welfare first; now I am at liberty to fulfil other duties which I have undertaken. I have certain interesting communications to make to Fräulein Schommer. Will she kindly grant me an audience of a few minutes?"

Eva looked up at him, confused and in doubt, but he suddenly dropped his jesting tone and continued very gravely, "You owe the interview I request both to me and to yourself. Pray add your entreaty, Hilda, to mine."

Hilda smiled; she knew what Paul wished to say to Eva; he had briefly informed her on their way to the garden, and she eagerly seconded his request, and proposed that she herself should conduct Leo, Aline, and Herwarth through one wing of the castle, while Delmar showed Eva through the other, and that they should then all meet in the large hall. As she made this proposal she exchanged a glance of secret understanding with Paul.

Eva still hesitated, but Paul would take no refusal. He offered her his arm and led her through the garden across the courtyard and up the grand staircase to the wing in which were Leo's apartments. On the way he pointed out to her everything of interest in the interior decoration and architecture of the ancient pile, calling especial attention to the massive antique furniture of some of the rooms. At any other time all this would have been especially interesting to Eva, but to-day she scarcely looked at all the rare antiquities, and even at last ventured to interrupt the flow of Delmar's antiquarian enthusiasm, saying, "You certainly had something else to say to me, Herr Delmar, when you asked me for this *tête-à-tête*."

"You are right, Fräulein Eva," Paul replied, hastening along the dim corridor, at the end of which was Leo's studio. "I will no longer excite your curiosity, since we have reached the room which I think the most appropriate place in which to tell you what I have to say."

He opened the door of a room which Eva entered. "Have you any idea of where we are?" Paul asked. The girl looked about her at the comfortable arrangements of the room, and her glance suddenly fell upon the easel, from which a face which she could not but recognize, regarded her with a gentle smile. The tears rushed to her eyes,—she knew well where she was, and with a burning blush she turned instantly to leave the room.

"You are unkind. I have not deserved this," she said, in a tone of soft reproach, as she laid her hand upon the door-latch.

Delmar, however, prevented her from opening the door; he took her hand and gently led her to the easel. "You must not, Fräulein Eva," he said earnestly, "at such a moment as this give any consideration to mere conventionalities. This is a turning-point in your existence. Look at this picture. You know who has painted it, and you know that Leo's hand never could have executed so true a presentment of yourself if your image did not fill his heart and soul,—if you were not present at all moments to his mental vision. Far more convincingly than in words must this picture tell you of his entire devotion to you, and it is for this that I have brought you here."

"You are cruel!" was Eva's only reply. She had withdrawn her hand from Paul's, but she no longer thought of fleeing from the room. With sensations both of rapture and of pain she

contemplated the picture. Yes, Delmar was right. The hand that had executed so true, so lifelike a resemblance must have been guided by the heart.

"I do not deserve your reproach," Delmar continued. "My only desire in bringing you here is to make you happy; you must see for yourself the truth of what I once told you of Leo. And now since there can be no doubt in your mind of the intensity of his affection for you, I may give you the letter which Herr von Bertram sends you through me."

He handed Eva Bertram's letter and watched her narrowly as she took it, half in surprise and half in terror, and read its contents.

He hoped to see her lovely features illumined by joy at her release, and gratitude to the messenger of freedom, but he was bitterly disappointed. Eva's face, so far from beaming with joy, expressed only profound sorrow, and a tear fell upon the paper as she read. When she had finished, her hands dropped at her sides and she gazed at Delmar with eyes filled with grief and regret.

"I thank you, Herr Delmar," she said gently. "I will preserve this letter as my most precious treasure. Although every line is a reproach to me for the weakness which at present prevents me from appreciating the happiness it should bring me, in time I shall conquer this weakness. I will read the noble words again and again, and they shall strengthen me if I should ever falter in the path which duty clearly points out for me to pursue. I will leave Tausens this evening. I dare not see Herr von Heydeck again. I pray you conduct me immediately to the inn; tell your friends how it grieves me to part from them, but that I now know my duty and cannot act differently."

Paul's astonishment and dismay at Eva's words are hard to describe; he had imagined all this so differently; he had anticipated with such certainty her thanks to him for her release, and now-- "I cannot understand you," he cried, in great agitation. "You wish to go to Tausens,--to leave without seeing Leo again? What reasons under the sun can you have for such a course? That letter releases you!"

"You are mistaken, Herr Delmar," Eva replied with dignity. "I am less free now than ever before. I have to atone for grievous wrong done to my betrothed." It was the first time that she had ever thus designated Bertram. "He was a victim of the wretched mistrust of every one from which my soul has so long suffered as from some disease. I believed that he loved, not myself, but my wealth, and therefore I treated him with cold severity,--yes, even with insulting harshness. I did not know the nobility of his character. I have learned it from the lofty self-renunciation of this letter. My eyes are at last opened. He has already sacrificed his future to me, and now for my sake renounces his last hope. To make me happy he gives me back my promise; but I will not accept this sacrifice at his hands. I know my duty and will fulfil it!"

"Good God, what nonsense! This is sheer madness!" Delmar cried, almost beside himself. "Is not that letter my----" He stopped short. He could not possibly tell Eva how he had occupied himself with her affairs of late, and that he had dictated Bertram's epistle in the hope of sparing her feelings. What was to be done in view of Eva's inconceivable resolve he could not see; he paced the room to and fro, racking his brains for some way out of the dilemma which was of his own fabrication.

"Herr Delmar, let me pray you to conduct me back to Tausens," Eva said, at last.

"No, Fräulein Eva; you must not leave the castle without seeing Leo. You are mistaken about Bertram; you do not know your own heart. I will not let you act so hastily."

"I know my duty, and nothing that you can say will hinder me from its performance."

"Madness, sheer madness! my brain fairly reels at such insanity! What is to be done with these conscientious people who, from a pure sense of duty, sacrifice themselves and their dearest friends to confer happiness upon blockheads and scoundrels? You know your duty! Do you owe no duty then to yourself and to Leo, who loves you passionately and will be unutterably wretched if you run after that scoundrel?"

"Herr Delmar! I will permit no such expressions with regard to my betrothed, whose noble heart I have learned to know, alas, too late. If you will not conduct me to Tausens I must find the way thither myself, for I must not and will not see Herr von Heydeck again!"

Eva could not however fulfil this intention in spite of her firm resolve to do so, for scarcely had she spoken when hasty steps were heard in the corridor, the door opened, and Hilda entered with Leo, Aline, and Herwarth, and followed also by Eva's servant, honest Wilhelm, his sheepish face quite crimson with hurry and agitation.

"Forgive us, Eva dear, for coming for you so soon," said Hilda, "we could not help it, for your servant was anxious to see you instantly; he brings very extraordinary tidings from Tausens."

"Do not be frightened, my darling," Aline whispered, putting her arm around her friend. "Be sure that whatever has happened, although it may cause you momentary pain, will conduce to your happiness."

"But what has happened? Do not keep me in suspense, Aline!" Eva exclaimed.

Aline beckoned to Wilhelm, who came forward and told, as well as he could, all that Uncle Balthasar had commissioned him to say. The story was confused enough; the fellow was so agitated and embarrassed that he hardly knew what he was saying, but from his rambling tale his hearers gathered that Herr von Bertram had run off with pretty Nanette, who had stolen Aunt Minni's purse full of money out of her bureau, and that Uncle Balthasar was afraid they had taken the ebony casket besides.

"Impossible!" Eva exclaimed indignantly; "the man who could write this letter is incapable of such baseness. I appeal to you, Herr Delmar, to vindicate Herr von Bertram."

"I could not if I would," said Delmar, whose good humour had been entirely restored by Wilhelm's tale, and who had even laughed when Wilhelm mentioned Uncle Balthasar's fears lest Bertram and Nanette together had stolen the ebony casket.

"You must, Herr Delmar! You yourself brought me Bertram's letter, and you know its contents."

"Only too well, and that is just why I cannot undertake the writer's defence. But even I agree that we should not condemn the fugitives without proof positive of their guilt. We must instantly return to the village and learn the truth. You, Leo, will of course accompany us. My darling," he whispered to Hilda, "you must come too,--we must all be together to celebrate Number Three's betrothal."

"Did you succeed?" Hilda whispered.

"Not yet," Delmar replied, in as low a tone. "I have been a terrible blockhead, but, fortunately, this Bertram is a worse rogue, and his roguery will stand us in as good stead as my wisdom could have done."

Paul's proposal to go instantly to Tausens was of course put into immediate execution. Naturally, on the way thither the lovers walked together, and there was nothing for Eva to do but to accept Leo's escort. She walked at his side in extreme confusion, not daring to lift her eyes to his.

"Are you offended, Fräulein Schommer?" Leo asked, after they had gone on for some time in silence.

"What right have I to be offended?"

"You certainly have a right if you think that I permitted Paul to take you to my room to show you the picture which you never should have seen. I swear to you that I had not the faintest idea of my friend's intention, or I should not have allowed him to fulfil it. He has offended you, and me through you, in permitting you to see what was utterly unworthy to be shown to any one, and I shall certainly take him to task for so doing."

"I am not offended," Eva replied in a faltering voice.

"You must be, Fräulein Eva! It must vex you that I should have dared, without your permission, to paint your picture from memory, but I give you my honour that Delmar saw it only by accident, that I never would voluntarily have shown it to him, and that you never ought to have known of its existence."

Eva did not reply, and the rest of the way to Tausens was passed in perfect silence.

When the party arrived at the inn, they found the wildest confusion and excitement prevailing there. The postmistress and Dr. Atzinger, with the men and maids of the house and several peasants, were standing in a group before the door talking eagerly. They parted and made way for the newcomers to enter the inn.

"This is a most unfortunate day!" Dr. Atzinger whispered to Delmar, detaining him as he would have passed him. "Dr. Putzer, who seemed so wonderfully well this morning, is dead. He wished to rest after his conversation with you, and when I went to his room half an hour afterwards, I found him dead in his bed. I hastened hither to let you know of it, and have just heard what has happened here. These are strange occurrences!"

The intelligence of the doctor's death did not surprise Delmar,--he could not pause now to reflect upon its suddenness. As briefly as possible he instructed Dr. Atzinger to make arrangements for a suitable funeral, and then hurried after his friends up the stairs to the hall into which the various apartments for the guests opened.

Here they found Uncle Balthasar and Hansel pacing to and fro in eager conversation, discussing the various discoveries that had been made in Bertram's and Aunt Minni's apartments. From time to time Uncle Balthasar stepped into his room, the door of which stood open, that he might administer a few words of consolation to his wife, who lay moaning on her sofa, returning shortly to continue his consultation with the postmaster as to what had best be done,--a

consultation in which neither had arrived at any conclusion.

The good old man was awaiting his niece's arrival with the greatest impatience, and from Herr Delmar, in whom he had implicit confidence, he looked for instant advice. He had constantly assured his Minni that Delmar would know exactly how to compel the waiting-maid to relinquish her booty. His heart was lightened of its load when the party from the castle made their appearance. "Thank God, my dear, that you are come!" he exclaimed, cordially embracing his niece. "What to think of this confounded affair I'm sure I can't tell!"

And Uncle Balthasar went on to tell as well as he could what there was to be told; his good heart rebelled at the thought of the possibility that his dear Guido had run off with a thief, but proof seemed too strong for him; he had with difficulty prevented the postmaster from sending a couple of men on horseback in pursuit of the fugitives; he would not resort to so extreme a measure without consulting his niece and Herr Delmar.

Neither, until this moment, had Eva believed in Bertram's guilt, but now, when the postmaster showed her into Bertram's room where the floor was strewn with linen and articles of clothing, and held up to her the two gilt handles which she recognized as those belonging to her casket; when he related to her and to all that he had found Bertram's door locked, and had opened it with a master-key; that Nanette had driven off in the carriage with Bertram; that he had helped him lift his portmanteau into the vehicle, and had wondered at its weight; that the box, if it were stolen, must have been packed into the portmanteau, or it would have been seen--all these revelations wellnigh destroyed Eva's confidence.

And there was other ground for suspicion of the fugitives. Nanette had been in Aunt Minni's room just before her departure, and Aunt Minni had left the key in the drawer where she kept her purse. The purse was now gone.

Uncle Balthasar had first suspected from the finding of the metal handles in Bertram's room that the waiting-maid had stolen Eva's casket; he could not believe in Bertram's guilt. What lover would steal his betrothed's money and jewels! Still it was strange that the handles should be found in Bertram's room where his clothes were scattered about. Hansel besides maintained that the box could have left the inn only in Bertram's portmanteau.

There was still however a doubt as to whether the ebony casket were really gone. The door leading from the hall into Eva's room was locked, and Hansel had found, upon trying to open it with his master-key, that it was also bolted inside. He had tried to enter the room from Bertram's apartment, but his key was constructed only for the doors opening upon the hall, and they had not yet been able to inspect the interior of Eva's room.

Neither Hansel nor Uncle Balthasar had thought of sending for the locksmith to force the lock; this simple expedient was now suggested by Delmar, and the village locksmith opened the door without difficulty. The casket was missing, and there was no longer any room for doubt as to who had stolen it; even Uncle Balthasar declared indignantly that his dear Guido was neither more nor less than a common thief.

"Did the casket contain articles of value?" Delmar asked.

"All my jewels and my dear father's last gift to me, with a sum of money, the amount of which I do not precisely know."

"But I can tell you, my pet, that it must have been four thousand thalers, at least," said Uncle Balthasar.

"The scoundrel shall not escape with his booty!" Paul exclaimed. "Herr Postmaster, have your two fleetest horses saddled. Leo, you and I will pursue the rascal, and if we cannot catch him we'll send a telegram after him."

The postmaster would have obeyed, but Eva prevented him. "You must not think of any pursuit, Herr Delmar," she said pleadingly. "Even although Herr von Bertram should be guilty, I would not for the world have him apprehended as a thief. And I cannot believe in his guilt; his letter----"

Paul laughed. "That magnificent letter again! There is nothing left for me but to make a clean breast of my sins; only to you however, and to my dear Hilda, from whom I have promised never to have a secret. Will you come out on the balcony with Hilda and me and listen to me for a few moments?"

With a blush Eva acquiesced. She put her hand within Hilda's arm and went out upon the balcony. Delmar followed them, whispering to Kuno as he passed him, "Pray be ready, my noble knight. As soon as I call bring every one out upon the balcony. I make you responsible for Leo; bring him, by fair means or foul, living or dead; only bring him."

"What are you about now?"

"Number Three! Some people must have happiness thrust upon them. Bring me Leo!"

"You shall have him," Kuno smilingly assured him, in a low tone; and to make sure, after a few whispered words to Aline, he took Leo's arm and walked to and fro in the hall with him, consulting as to the best means for the recovery of Fräulein Eva's casket.

Meanwhile, Paul had joined Eva and Hilda upon the balcony. He had promised to make a full confession of his sins, and he did so, telling Eva with entire frankness how he had known for a long time of Bertram's utter worthlessness. He did not conceal the fact that he had not intended at first to open her eyes to the true character of her betrothed, and that his determination to do so had been the result of the more intimate acquaintance with her which had reversed his former harsh judgment of her, and of the knowledge that Leo loved her and was perhaps loved in return.

As frankly he explained to her that he had delayed unmasking Bertram until Leo and herself should have had time to learn to know each other, and until Leo's affection should have grown so intense as to break down the stubborn pride that forbade his passion for the heiress. Paul concluded by confessing that he had that very morning forced Bertram to write the 'lofty-minded' letter, every word of which he had dictated himself, and that he had thus driven the desperate man to shameless robbery.

One fact however Delmar suppressed: he said no word of the sum he had paid Bertram as the price of the letter. "My tale is ended," Paul concluded, "and is, after all, only a continuation of our conversation in Leo's room at the castle. You then said, in conclusion, 'I must not and will not see Herr von Heydeck again.' Tell me frankly, Fräulein Eva, will you not reverse that decree?"

While Delmar spoke, Eva had listened with her mind and heart in an uproar of conflicting emotions. She felt indignation and disgust at Bertram's baseness, and she was covered with shame that she should ever have had the slightest confidence in him or given him a right to claim her hand. At the same time she was conscious of an ecstatic sense that she was saved from infinite peril; that she was free from the disgraceful fetters that had bound her, and that she might aspire to the fulfilment of her wildest dreams of happiness. She looked gratefully into Paul's eyes as he put this last question to her, and said frankly and honestly, "Yes!"

For which Hilda threw her arms around her and embraced her tenderly, while Paul called out, "All's well that ends well! Come all of you,--Kuno, Leo, Uncle Balthasar!"----

And they came: Herwarth laughing as he conducted Leo, Uncle Balthasar wondering where there was any cause for merriment, and Aline hastening to embrace her friend.

"Come here, Fortune's favourite that you are!" Paul called out to the astonished Leo. "By the right which I possess, as your elder and wiser friend, and which I have won over the lovely Eva by former service, I herewith place her dear hand in yours, and proclaim you the happy Number Three!" Then turning to the rest he said, "Dear friends, I ask your congratulations for the newly-betrothed pair, Eva Schommer and Leo von Heydeck. May all the good the gods provide for happy lovers be theirs!"

"Amen!" said Kuno; and Uncle Balthasar added his voice, although he did not yet understand what it was all about.

Leo heard the words spoken, uncertain whether he were awake or dreaming; he held Eva's hand in his,--she did not withdraw it, and when he looked into her blushing face her eyes met his own. A happy smile was upon her lips. She certainly did not resent Delmar's words, however surprised she might be. He pressed her hand, and felt a gentle pressure in return.

Was Paul jesting? Leo asked himself. In Eva's beaming eyes he read what destroyed in an instant the foolish prejudice that had separated him from his love. He forgot the pride that would have held him aloof from her; he forgot the miserable words 'too rich!' Love conquered; he bent above Eva, and said in low intense tones, "You do not repulse me? You are then my own forever?"

And as he heard her whispered 'yes' he forgot everything but his great happiness, and imprinted his first kiss upon her lips.

CHAPTER XIX.

There was a larger assemblage of officers than usual beneath Büchner's awning,--almost every seat was occupied. After early parade the young men had resorted thither to discuss the entertainments to which the evening was to be devoted, and various civilians also belonging to the aristocracy had lounged into Büchner's to enjoy the ices for which the restaurant was famous,

and which were particularly tempting on so warm a July day as the present.

One of these latter, a young man of distinguished appearance, had taken a foremost seat near the iron railing, against which he had negligently propped his feet in the same attitude as that assumed by his neighbour, a cavalry officer, while both rocked gently to and fro in their tilted chairs. The young civilian held in his hand a newspaper, which however he did not read, his attention being entirely devoted to the promenade and the many handsome equipages with their fair occupants that were perpetually rolling past.

In one of these the brilliant beauty of a young lady especially excited his admiration. She was sitting beside an aged officer with whom she was conversing gayly as she gracefully acknowledged the respectful salutations of many of the officers, and greeted with a special smile the young dragoon before mentioned, who relinquished his negligent attitude while her carriage was passing, and stood up to salute her.

"An exquisitely lovely girl!" the civilian said to his neighbour. "I envy you the smile she gave you, Count Waldheim. One might almost barter his soul for such a glance and smile. Tell me who she is, and why I have never been presented to her."

"I can further your wishes in the matter of an introduction, Count," Waldheim replied. "I am quite intimate at Frau von Heydeck's, and, although they are rather exclusive, I think I can obtain permission to introduce a friend."

"Frau von Heydeck? Married? I am bitterly disappointed," said Count Tiefstetten.

"You will have to relinquish all thoughts of conquest there," said Waldheim, laughing, "for Frau von Heydeck is not only a wife, but the happiest woman in the world, still desperately in love with her husband, who deserves it. He is a charming fellow, a nobleman in the truest sense of the word, and with a brilliant reputation as an artist besides."

"An artist?" Count Tiefstetten asked, in amazement. "And his wife drives in a splendid equipage with those magnificent horses?"

"It is easy to see that you have been abroad for some years and are just returned among us, or you would hardly ask such a question. Leo von Heydeck's picture, at our art exhibition last spring, a full-length of his wife, established his reputation as an artist, and he is besides one of the wealthiest men in our city. His wife, who was a Fräulein Schommer, was a great heiress. But he is an eccentric fellow in spite of his wealth. His habits are as simple as if he were obliged to work with his brush for his living, and he persists in his eccentricities, although his father the old colonel, whom you saw just now seated beside Frau von Heydeck, is highly indignant with him for doing so. Leo von Heydeck is not an amateur artist; art is his profession. He sells his pictures, which command very high prices, and supports himself entirely upon the proceeds of his profession, never making any use of his wife's income. You never even see him in her brilliant equipage. If you like, and do not mind paying a high price, you can order your portrait of him."

"Very odd! And what does his wife say to these whims?"

"Oh, she adores him! I verily believe she would like to throw her wealth to the winds and struggle along with him as the wife of a poor artist. It is owing entirely to her that old Colonel von Heydeck, Leo's father, who has always held in sovereign contempt all daubers who support themselves by the work of their hands, and who was furious at his son's ways, is nevertheless reconciled to him. The old fellow could not withstand the charms of his lovely daughter-in-law, who is ready to gratify his every whim. He is fairly in love with her himself, and has given up his love of retirement, taking up his abode in her charming villa, and living in perfect concord with her and her old uncle, Balthasar Schommer. He drives with her daily, and she has so thoroughly tamed the old bear that he consents to visit his son's studio frequently, and even begins to be proud of his work."

"They must be very remarkable people. I am more curious than ever to know them, and I rely upon your promise to present me to Frau von Heydeck."

"I will do what I can, but as I told you, the Heydecks are very exclusive."

"They do not entertain, then?"

"A small circle, frequently. There is no house in the city where I have had pleasanter evenings than at theirs, although they never give large parties. Leo is a queer fellow; he hates grand entertainments, and is happy only in the society of his intimates, artists, and men of science. In these tastes he is upheld by his friend and cousin, the wealthy Herr Delmar, and by another friend and former comrade, a Herr von Herwarth, with all of whom he and his wife are upon terms of the greatest intimacy."

"Who is this Delmar? Bourgeois, I suppose; some relative of the lovely Frau von Heydeck?"

"No; he is married to a cousin of his friend Leo, a daughter of an uncle who died about six months since. He was an early friend of Leo's, and by his marriage is still more closely united with him. He is also excessively intimate with the third in the small circle, Herr von Herwarth,

who married Frau von Heydeck's dearest friend. All three were married on the same day, and have since lived on terms of the closest intimacy.

"Leo, as I said, is upheld in his eccentric ways by Delmar, who is enormously wealthy and a very queer fellow too. He will give immensely to any artistic or scientific enterprise, in support of which Heydeck too will draw upon his wife's means, but neither of them has the least idea of the enjoyment their money might bring them.

"Delmar, to be sure, is something of a gourmand, but he is far from knowing how to spend his millions. He might easily purchase a title and orders, he might easily enter the court-circles, but he cares nothing for such things. Nevertheless he is an excessively interesting man, whom every one is happy to meet, and he is much respected for his benevolence and generosity.

"I in especial have cause to hold him in high esteem, for about a year ago he did me a great service in unmasking a certain scoundrel whom I had until then considered to be a man of honour, and my friend Delmar deserves the gratitude of the entire corps of officers for effecting the resignation in disgrace of the rogue, a Herr von Bertram."

"Bertram? Guido von Bertram?" asked Count Tiefstetten.

"Exactly; that was the fellow's name. Do you know him?"

"I think I do. I knew a certain Herr Guido von Bertram slightly about half a year ago in Saxony. He frequented the gaming-tables there. He was frequently seen with a very pretty woman, who called herself Frau von Bertram; but who, I was told, was not really his wife. He was said to be a professional gamester, and I rather avoided him during my stay in Saxony. I should hardly have remembered the name when you mentioned it had I not seen it half an hour ago in the newspaper. There is the paragraph, read it yourself."

Count Waldheim took the paper offered him by Count Tiefstetten, and read, "We have news from Florence which cannot fail to make a stir in our aristocratic circles. It concerns the scion of one of our most distinguished families, a Herr Guido von Bertram, who was a year ago the hero of a scandalous scene at Büchner's restaurant. On that occasion, in our account of the affair, we suppressed the names. Herr von Bertram was obliged to resign from the army in disgrace, and to-day there is no reason why we should spare him, since he will shortly receive his punishment as a common swindler and thief. We therefore give to our readers the letter which we have received from our special correspondent in Florence:

"The arrest of a German nobleman, a Herr Guido von B---, is the talk of the day here. You hear him discussed everywhere, and the most contradictory reports are abroad with regard to his antecedents and the reason for his arrest. We have the following intelligence from a trustworthy source:

"About six months ago Herr von B--- appeared here in Florence, renting superb apartments, where he lived in splendid style. He appeared at the theatre with his wife, who was not exactly handsome but very attractive in appearance, and who excited considerable attention by her brilliant toilettes, and especially by a magnificent parure of diamonds which she wore.

"Herr von B--- easily effected an entrance into our fashionable circles where he played his part as a wealthy man of the world, although it was noticed that the manners and culture of Madame von B--- by no means corresponded with her elegant appearance. Very unfavourable reports concerning the lady and the freedom of her behaviour, and even with regard to her relations with her husband, were shortly in circulation. It was said that the aristocratic couple quarrelled after a most plebeian fashion, and that Herr von B--- even maltreated his wife.

"In consequence of these reports certain houses closed their doors against the pair; others however were less particular, and the wealthy German nobleman was still received, especially at entertainments where there was sure to be high play.

"Herr von B--- understood so well how to maintain an appearance of wealth that he easily found credit whenever he wanted money. (One of our principal bankers has discounted his note to a large amount.) And he would perhaps have continued to play his part among us had not an accident induced our police to put him under surveillance. In fact, they received very strange information from a young German, Wilhelm Schultz by name, the servant of a nobleman but lately arrived in Florence from M---. Schultz saw Herr von B--- and his wife adorned with her diamonds in the theatre, and instantly recognized the latter as a former waiting-maid in a wealthy family where he had been footman. He informed the police that Herr von B--- had been betrothed to an heiress, but had eloped with her waiting-maid, stealing and carrying off at the same time a casket containing a large sum of money and a rich parure of diamonds.

"The information appeared incredible; but the story was maintained with such persistence that the police authorities felt themselves compelled to investigate the matter, and the result is that Herr von B--- proves to be a thorough-paced gamester and an arch swindler, who has procured large sums of money upon forged notes of hand. His arrest took place at the railroad depot, just as he was about to leave Florence forever. Upon his person was found the diamond parure worn by his wife, whom he had left without letting her know whither he was going.

"The noble pair are now quite harmless. The former waiting-maid has made a full confession, confirming all that was stated by Wilhelm Schultz. After the theft of the diamonds, which was effected in the Tyrol, she came with her betrayer--who promised to marry her, but never kept his promise--to Italy, where he led her from place to place, so maltreating her that she declares that she would have left him but for fear of starvation in a strange country. The diamonds in which she made such a show are the property of her former mistress.

"Herr von B--- boldly denies the truth of her tale, but as there is abundant proof against him in the forged notes of hand, he will not escape due punishment."

The correspondent's words were verified. A month later 'dear Guido' was condemned to several years' imprisonment with hard labour. Nanette was left at large. She could only have been prosecuted for theft, and as neither Frau Schommer nor Frau von Heydeck proceeded to such a measure, she went unpunished, although the diamonds were taken from her and returned to their rightful owner, Frau von Heydeck. Wilhelm Schultz, doubtless, having suffered from her wiles, would have gladly seen the waiting-maid sent to jail, but he was forced to be satisfied with the probability that her future fate would be far from prosperous.

FOOTNOTE:

[Footnote 1](#): Meadows high up on the mountains, where the wealthy peasants pasture their cattle in summer.

THE END.

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