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# **THE EICHHOFS**

**A ROMANCE**

**FROM THE GERMAN**

**OF**

**MORITZ VON REICHENBACH**

**BY**

**MRS. A. L. WISTER**

PHILADELPHIA:  
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY.  
1896.

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# THE EICHHOFS.

## CHAPTER I.

### SHADOWS OF COMING EVENTS.

In a box of the Berlin Opera-House sat three young officers. All wore the uniform of the same regiment of the Guards, and all three were directing their opera-glasses towards the same opposite box.

"The girl has just got home from boarding-school, and will have a *dot* of half a million in cash," observed Lieutenant von Hohenstein, dropping his opera-glass.

"The deuce she will! No end of pity that I am such an infernal aristocrat,—it would be such a fine morsel for a poor younger son," said the younger of the Von Eichhof brothers, with a laugh, as he stroked his blonde moustache. "She has a good figure, too, and any amount of fire in her eyes."

"True," said his elder brother; "but why under heaven does the portly mamma, with her double chin, and huge satin-clad bust, plant herself so close to her Rose of Sharon, proclaiming to all the world, 'As she is now so was I once, and as I am now so shall she one day be'?"

"Take warning, Hohenstein," laughed Lothar Eichhof.

"Pshaw! there's no danger," the other replied, leaning back in his comfortable chair and stretching his long legs as far out as the limits of the box would allow.

"Councillor Kohnheim greeted you with extreme affability, I thought, just now, and you are well informed as to the financial affairs of the family," Lothar persisted, in a teasing tone.

Hohenstein put up his hand to conceal a yawn. Among his peculiarities was that of being bored everywhere and always.

"Kohnheim thinks wealth no disgrace, and loves to acquaint people with the amount of his own," he said. "Besides, he is my landlord; of course we are acquainted. To my German eyes, however, the ladies are of too Oriental a type. I have no desire to know them."

"Thank heaven! then there is nothing to fear from that quarter. I confess it vexes me when one of our good old names is allied to such a family."

"Make your mind easy on my account," rejoined Herr von Hohenstein. "I do not undervalue wealth, but I prize blood rather more."

Lothar Eichhof meanwhile was scanning the house, while his elder brother, Bernhard, had withdrawn into the shadow, and was steadily scrutinizing through his glass the foreign ambassadors' box. He now dropped his glass, shook his head, then put up his glass again, and finally said, more to himself than to his companions, "That is--Marzell Wronsky--and---- He bit his lip, and did not finish the sentence.

"Marzell Wronsky?" Lothar repeated. "Where?" But as he spoke he discovered him. "I did not know he had come back!" he exclaimed. "I wonder if the handsome blonde beside him is his wife?"

"Probably," said Hohenstein. "Where does the lady come from? Marzell's marriage was so sudden that one hardly knows anything about it."

"She is a kind of cousin of his," said Lothar, "with a Polish name, ending in 'ky' or 'ka,' and was formerly married to a Hungarian, who either died or was divorced from her. Marzell met her last

year at Wiesbaden, and shortly afterwards they were betrothed and married."

"And where has he been hiding since?"

"He has been travelling with his bride. I must go over and see them in the next entr'acte. You will come, too?"

"Of course; this new addition to society must be inspected."

Bernhard Eichhof had taken no part in the conversation, but had frequently glanced towards the box where the persons under discussion were sitting. When, at the close of the act, the other two men arose, with the evident intention of visiting its occupants, he sat still, in apparent indecision.

"Well, are you not coming?" asked Lothar "Marzell is more your friend than ours. I confess I am going more from curiosity than from friendship."

Bernhard looked over at the box once more. "They are just rising; perhaps they are going to leave the house," he said, hesitating.

"Yes, they seem to be going," said Hohenstein, resuming his seat.

"Well, then, I will go and reconnoitre," said Lothar, "and if you see me in the box you two can come over."

In five minutes he returned. "The Wronskys are really gone. Marzell seems to have adopted high and mighty manners since his marriage. He puts in an appearance only during a single act. However, we shall certainly see his wife at Eichhof, if we should fail to meet her here."

"Quite time enough for the acquaintance. I have scarcely seen Marzell since the old school-boy days, and am not at all intimate with him now," Bernhard remarked.

If his two companions had been less occupied with the new prima-donna, and with the champagne supper at a noted restaurant after the opera was over, they must have noticed that Bernhard was unusually absent-minded and monosyllabic all through the evening. But his mood was entirely unnoticed by them,—all the more since several brother officers joined their party, which did not break up until long past midnight.

When at last the young men separated, the two brothers Von Eichhof walked together to their apartments, at present beneath the same roof, and for a while not a word was exchanged between them.

Then the younger asked, suddenly, "Shall I tell you the news, Bernhard? I'm at the end of my income,—the last thaler went to-night."

Bernhard turned with some impatience. "Lothar," he exclaimed, reproachfully, "this is really too much! When I helped you out last month you promised me----"

"Come, come, my dear fellow, there's no use in that," Lothar interrupted him. "I know as well as you do that I partake largely of the character of the domestic fly, provided, indeed, that that insect is endowed with a character. I frisk in the sunshine and buzz or grumble in the shade."

"I cannot understand your jesting in such a matter, Lothar."

"But what am I to do, then?" the other rejoined. "Whether I indulge in poor jokes or sit in sackcloth and ashes, the confounded fact remains the same. 'All I have is gone, gone, gone,'" he hummed, *sotto voce*; but suddenly he grew grave and sighed. "Shall I go to-morrow to Herr Solomon Landsberger, who has often and with great kindness offered to give me his valuable assistance?" he asked.

They walked a few steps farther in silence, and then Bernhard said, "I can't understand what becomes of your money. You have apartments just like mine and live very much the same life that I do."

"With the exception of the extra bills, which I dare not send to Eichhof."

Bernhard made an impatient gesture, but Lothar went on: "I know what you mean. You mean that I ought to think of the future, when our positions will be so different. I ought to consider that what is all right for the future possessor of Eichhof is supreme folly for a petty lieutenant. All true and just; but why the deuce, then, did our father put me in the same regiment with yourself? and why does every one expect exactly the same from the poor lieutenant as from the eldest son and heir? and why are people so infernally stupid as not to take into account the immense difference between us?"

"It was certainly unfortunate," said Bernhard, "that you joined just this regiment; no doubt you are led here into many expenses that can hardly be avoided; but still----"

"Well, then, I'd better go to friend Solomon to-morrow, and try my luck with him," Lothar

interrupted him.

Bernhard stamped his foot impatiently.

"Don't talk nonsense!" he exclaimed. "Of course I shall help you out, since, as you justly remark, I may send in extra accounts when I please; but pray listen to reason, Lothar. You know that we shall shortly cease to live here together. When I marry I can no longer place my means at your disposal as at present."

"Ah, when Thea is your wife, I shall quarter myself upon you so soon as my money is gone. It usually lasts until the twentieth of the month, and then I shall ensconce myself in your happy home. But I have not thanked you yet. Indeed, old fellow, you are a brick of a brother. Then I need not pay my respects to friend Solomon to-morrow?"

Meanwhile they had reached their lodgings, and, as Bernhard was putting his key in the lock, he said, "I will help you through this time, Lothar, but remember it is the last. You must learn prudence, and it is in direct opposition to my principles to encourage this perpetual getting into debt. I did not, as you know, make the laws controlling inheritance, and I cannot alter the fact that our circumstances will be very different in the future. But I say now only just what I should say were you in my place and I in yours. Every man must cut his coat according to his cloth."

"And if one is a six-footer and has only a scrap of cloth, he is in a desperate case," thought Lothar; but he kept his thought to himself, and softly whistled an opera air as he entered their apartments with his brother.

"It's no end of a pity that we must leave our charming quarters so soon," he sighed, as he threw himself upon a lounge in their joint drawing-room, which was certainly most luxuriously fitted up for a bachelor establishment, while Bernhard opened and read, with a smile, a letter lying upon his table.

Lothar watched him for a moment, then folded his arms and raised his eyes to the ceiling, with an expression half resignation and half disdain, while his thoughts ran somewhat thus: "Of course that is a letter from Thea. What under the sun can that little country girl have to say to him? A deuced pretty girl, and she'll make a capital wife. It's very odd that I'm not angry with her, for there's not another creature in the world so confoundedly in my way. If it were not for her, we should keep our comfortable lodgings, and Bernhard, who is certainly a trump, would go on paying my bills; and, besides, he has grown so infernally serious since he has had that little witch's betrothal-ring on his finger; before then we lived a jolly life enough. It is all Thea's fault,-- his immense gravity, his ceasing to pay my debts, and our having to give up our delightful rooms. It is, therefore, Thea who prevents my enjoying my youth, as I should do otherwise, and yet, in spite of all this, I am rather fond of her. But it is not my nature to bear malice towards any woman, even although she be such an unformed little country girl as Thea, who certainly might have been content to wait a few years longer."

"Bernhard," he suddenly said aloud, "I will withdraw to my inmost apartment, and leave you to your letter and to dreams of future petticoat rule."

Bernhard put his letter in his pocket. "I have finished," he said, "and am going to bed. Thea sends her love to you."

"Of course," yawned Lothar; "thanks. We'll talk about the other matter to-morrow?"

"Yes. Good-night, Lothar."

"Good-night, old fellow."

## CHAPTER II.

### TWO DISCONTENTED FATHERS.

A forest bridle-path. The ground is covered with gnarled, twisted roots, and the way is bordered with dark pines, and firs somewhat lighter in tone, between which only a narrow strip of spring sky shines down upon the two riders pursuing the dim pathway. Their horses, slowly walking abreast, seem by no means content to saunter thus; the chestnut upon which the man is mounted champs its bit impatiently, and the gray by its side pricks its ears, but the girl upon the back of the latter is as interested as her companion in the conversation going on between them,

and neither pays any heed to the signs of their steeds' impatience, while the groom riding at some distance behind them is enjoying a huge sandwich that he has produced from his pocket, in full security from observation.

"It is too vexatious to know nothing about it all!" the girl exclaimed. "I am almost ashamed never to have been in Berlin."

"But, good heavens, you are so young, Adela!" her companion rejoined.

"If we are to continue friends, Walter, you will not begin again about my fifteen years, of which there can be no further mention after next month, when I shall be sixteen," was the irritated reply. "I am in reality much, much older, as you know, and I know that I look older. Only the other day Lieutenant Müllheim took me for eighteen; and if papa would only allow me to dress suitably, and if it were not for that stupid Almanach de Gotha that tells everybody our ages---!" She sighed pathetically.

Walter laughed. "That sigh would sound more natural from the lips of a lady past her prime than from those of a budding girl in her teens," he said; adding instantly, with a meaning glance at his companion, "You must not look so angry with me, Adela dear. If you refuse to allow me more license in speaking than you accord to the rest of the world, I shall address you as Fräulein von Hohenstein and think all our good-comradeship at an end. Must I do so? In fact, you certainly are too much of a great lady to be my 'good comrade' any longer." He spoke without irony, and there was a mournful earnestness in his fine eyes.

She gave her horse a light cut with her whip, that his sudden start might give her the chance to conceal the bright blush that overspread her face. Then she looked up, half pouting, half in entreaty, and said, "If you want to tease me, Walter, I can't see why you came for me to ride; you might as well have stayed at home."

Walter smiled, and saluted with his riding-whip. "Well, then, let us be good comrades for the future, as neighbors' children ought to be," he cried.

Her reply was a merry glance from her blue eyes.

They had reached the borders of the forest, and before them a well-kept road, bordered by fine old trees, led directly up to an imposing pile of buildings.

"Let us have one more canter," said Adela; and away flew the two horses so suddenly that the groom behind them was, in his surprise, nearly choked by his last mouthful of sandwich, and followed his mistress coughing and gasping all the way up the avenue to the court-yard, where the two riders drew rein.

"It has really grown so late that I cannot come in with you," said Walter. "I must hurry home; you know we are terribly punctual about our meals at Eichhof."

"Well, then, good-by; for only a short time, I hope," said Adela, giving her comrade her hand, and then vanishing with the groom behind the court-yard gate, while Walter took the road to Eichhof.

He was the third and youngest son of the Baron or Freiherr von Eichhof. A few days previously he had passed a brilliant preparatory examination in Berlin, and was now spending a few weeks at Eichhof before leaving home for some university.

As he rode on he looked so grave and thoughtful that one would hardly have suspected in him the budding student for whom, so thinks the world, everything must be *couleur de rose*. And yet it was the thought of this very student-time that occupied Walter now day and night. He knew that his father had destined him for the study of law, whilst his own wishes led him in a contrary direction. He knew further that his wishes would meet with obstinate opposition, and he had therefore avoided hitherto all explanations with his father. This state of things he felt could not possibly continue longer, and he was pondering, as he rode on thus thoughtfully, how he should clearly explain his views.

Whilst Walter was preparing for a conversation with his father that would in all probability be far from agreeable, Adela was in the midst of an interview of a like nature.

The Baron von Hohenstein was in fact standing at the hall door as his young daughter reached it. He was just inspecting some young horses of his own breeding, from which he wished to select one for the use of his son in the capital. A magnificent gelding that had been judged by him quite worthy to support his son's soldierly form, and to maintain the reputation of his stud, had just been discovered to be lame. The Freiherr turned angrily from the horse to his daughter.

"You have been gone very long, Adela," he called to her. "And it's great nonsense your riding half the day with Walter Eichhof; you're too old for such pranks."

Adela curled her lip rebelliously as she dismounted, and without a word took her father's arm and drew him with her into the house.

"Papa," she said, "you are always saying, 'You are not old enough for this, you are too young for that,' and so on. What is the matter with me, then, that I am always too old or too young?"

But the Freiherr was not disposed to jest to-day.

"Nonsense!" he growled. "I may not think you old enough to wear a train, but you look sufficiently like a young lady to make people stare when they see you always with that school-boy."

"I beg pardon, papa, Walter has passed his examination."

"What is that to me? The long and the short of it is, that I won't have you riding with him."

"But, papa, Thea Rosen rode with Bernhard Eichhof when he was a lieutenant and she was only sixteen."

"That's an entirely different affair. Theresa Rosen was afterwards betrothed to Bernhard Eichhof, and has done very well for herself. But when such rides end in no betrothal they are a great folly; and if a fledgling scarcely out of the nest should have any entanglement with a young fellow who has neither money nor prospects, it would be a greater folly still; and I am not the man to allow my daughter to make such a fool of herself."

Adela had grown pale, and she looked at her father in a kind of terror as she left his side and slipped out of the room. What was all this? Betrothal? Such a thing had never entered her head. And to Walter? It was all perfect nonsense. Walter was her good comrade. What could put such ideas into her papa's head? And must she give up the rides which had been such a pleasure to her? No; it was simply impossible. She would tell Thea and Alma Rosen about it. What would they say? And Walter? Should she tell Walter too? She blushed, and discovered that it would not be easy to tell Walter. And he really had grown very tall and handsome since his last vacation. She must watch him, and see if he had any idea of falling in love with her. How hard it was to have no mother to turn to at such a time! Mademoiselle Belmont, her governess, was not at all a person to invite confidence. Adela fell into a reverie, and then looked into her mirror.

"I wonder whether Walter noticed that I dress my hair differently?" she thought; "and does he think it becoming? I can ask him that, at all events, when I see him next."

Meanwhile poor Walter was thinking of anything rather than of the fashion of Adela's hair.

The Countess Eichhof, his mother, had withdrawn to her room after dinner, and Walter was sitting on the castle terrace with his father, or, more correctly speaking, was walking restlessly to and fro, while his father, leaning back in a comfortable arm-chair, was smoking a cigarette. Count Eichhof, in spite of his years and silvery hair, was a tall, handsome man, with sparkling eyes and ruddy complexion. The early bleaching of his locks was a family inheritance, and became excellently well the present representative of the Eichhof estate and title.

In his youth the Count had been an officer in the Guards, in the same regiment where were his two elder sons at present, and where he had so enjoyed life as to become convinced that it was altogether a capital invention, and might still be very entertaining even with three grown-up sons about him. He was now watching with a kind of curiosity the manner in which these same sons would turn it to account.

The eldest had betrothed himself quite young.

"He is a susceptible fellow,--he gets his temperament from me," the Count said, with a laugh.

The second, Lothar, was forever at odds with his income, which never sufficed for his expenses.

"He is sowing his wild oats with a free hand,--a regular spendthrift,--but he gets that from me. I was just like him," the Count said, and laughed again.

And now it was Walter's turn.

In conformity to the wishes of his mother, whose family were all diplomatists and courtiers, he was not destined to enter the army, but was to pursue a juridical career. The Countess already saw in him a future ambassador or minister; the Count regarded him with a curious mixture of compassion and resignation.

"Our youngest child really should have been a daughter," he was wont to say. "Since that's impossible, they are going to make a quill-driver of him. Well, well, there's no help for it. I must make some concessions, and I had my own way with the two elder boys."

Thus, instead of entering a military school, Walter had been placed under the care of a distant relative of the Count, residing in Berlin, where he enjoyed the advantages of the principal preparatory school in the capital, to the surprise of his father's 'good friends and neighbors,' who thought that a first-class provincial establishment would have served the boy's turn quite as well, and even better.



"It is a good thing for Walter to become familiar with the capital, and to feel at home there while he is young," the Countess observed, without explaining, or indeed understanding herself, in what this 'good thing' consisted.

"Let him go to Berlin," thought the Count; "he'll have a chance there to see his brothers and his cousins in the Guards more often than elsewhere; and the deuce is in it if, after passing his examinations, the boy does not 'boot and saddle' and be a soldier. I know I should have done so in his place."

And now the 'boy' had reached this point of his career, and had already been one week at home without uttering a word upon the subject.

"There's not much of me in him," the Count thought, smoking his cigarette, as he watched his youngest son pace the terrace to and fro,--"not much of me; but he's a handsome fellow for all."

"'Tis a pity; your figure would suit a hussar's uniform much better than that dress-coat," he said aloud, involuntarily. "Walter stood still, and observed, smiling, that he could easily serve his year in the hussars.

"Are you really determined then to stick to the quill?" his father asked, incredulously. "You mean to go to the university?"

"Most certainly, father," Walter replied, seating himself beside the Count. "And, since we are upon the subject, let me tell you that I have long desired to discuss my future career with you."

"Aha! you want to change the programme?"

"Yes, father, it is my sincere desire to do so; but----"

"Now, that you get from me, Walter," the Count interrupted his son, with a laugh. "I should have done just so; there's no ignoring this soldier-blood of ours."

Walter leaned forward and fixed his eyes upon the marble pavement of the terrace. "I did not mean that, sir," he said, in a low tone.

The Count looked at him in surprise.

"You don't mean that?" he repeated. "What the deuce do you mean, then?"

"I wish to continue my studies, but I have not the slightest predilection for the law," the young man began again.

The Count looked at his son as though he were speaking some unknown tongue.

"What is there for one of your name save the law or the army?" he asked, his expression, which had hitherto been one of amusement, suddenly becoming very serious. "You must be aware that those are the only careers open to a nobleman."

"Both cost too much money and insure no independence. As a lieutenant of the Guards, or as an ambassadorial attaché, my expenses would be very great."

"The like of this I never before imagined!" the Count exclaimed, with a resounding slap upon his knee. "The fellow is my son, nineteen years old; and is thinking of the amount of his expenses. What the deuce put that into your head?"

"I know that our property lies chiefly in real estate, and that Lothar uses a great deal of money," Walter replied, shyly.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the Count. "You are a most extraordinary specimen of an Eichhof. I can't tell where you got that economic vein; but since there it is, let me tell you something, my boy. The net income of the Eichhof estates amounts to some hundred and fifty thousand marks. I have so improved and repaired everywhere that nothing more is required in that quarter; and we are not going to Berlin any more, it is too much for your mother's nerves. Well, then, we can easily live, and live well, upon sixty thousand marks a year. Therefore, if you use only sixty thousand marks yearly for the next five years, we shall have laid up a capital of four hundred and fifty thousand marks, without reckoning the interest. Add to that about a hundred thousand marks of income derived from other sources, and--you need not tell Lothar, for he spends quite enough,--but you can easily see that you will be very comfortable one of these days. We enjoyed our youth. Age exacts less of life; it will not be hard for us to retrench our expenses somewhat. And since there never was an Eichhof who died before he was at least fifty-five,--most of them live to be seventy or eighty,--there is quite time enough to save money. Poor fellow! your prudence is quite thrown away."

The Count was always rather inclined to pity his youngest son, and he did so now from the bottom of his heart, as he twisted himself a fresh cigarette.

But Walter did not yet seem quite satisfied.

"You are very kind to your children, sir," he began once more, after a pause; "but it was not only pecuniary considerations that influenced my desire to change my studies. There is a profession which I should embrace with enthusiasm, yes, which would even be more attractive to me, could I cease to see in it a means of income. There is a study that interests me far more than that of law,--a science to which I should gladly devote any talent that I may possess."

"Well, well, if we must discuss the matter, at least speak intelligibly, Walter," the Count exclaimed, impatiently. "What's all this about profession and science?"

"Father," Walter said, taking his hand and looking full into his face with sparkling eyes and flushed cheeks, "I want to be a naturalist and a physician."

If some one had informed the Count that Castle Eichhof was to be immediately converted into a lunatic asylum, he could not have looked more amazed and indignant than now upon hearing his son declare that he wished to be a physician.

"Physician?" he repeated. "Physician!"

He rose from his arm-chair and stood proudly erect. "You are insane, Walter!" he said, angrily. But with the anger there was evidently mingled a large share of that compassion upon which Walter seemed now to have established a special claim.

Walter, too, had risen, and looked frankly and honestly at his father. "It is the only calling for which I shall ever really care," he said, warmly, "and I know that I could devote myself to it heart and soul. I entreat you, do not force me into another career for which I am quite unfit. Give your consent to what, believe me, is no passing whim of mine. I have had opportunity to observe this calling in all its aspects. I pondered the matter earnestly before mentioning it to you. I----"

"Enough!" exclaimed the Count, and a dark shadow clouded his usually jovial face. "Enough of this nonsense! You may be in earnest, Walter, but I,--I too am just as much in earnest, and I solemnly declare to you that I never will consent that an Eichhof--a son of mine--should embrace such a senseless career. I will not have it; do you understand? I will not have it; and my will must be your law."

And the Count left the terrace with an echoing tread, while Walter stood still, utterly cast down.

"I knew it," he murmured, "and yet--and yet----"

He threw himself into the arm-chair that his father had left, and leaned his head on his hand.

Nevertheless there must have been in his veins some particle of the soldier-blood of the Eichhofs, for he had not sat there long lost in thought, when he suddenly sprang up, saying,--

"Well, that was the first attack, and it has been repulsed. Now for besieging the fortress, which may yield at last."

But the Count did not yield. He persisted in his refusal, and the Countess shed tears over Walter's 'inconceivable desire.' She was sure the idea must have been suggested to him by some association unfitting his rank and position, and she was, as we shall see, not far wrong in her surmises.

There followed some very disagreeable days at Castle Eichhof, and the result was that Walter, with a heavy heart, resolved to conform to his parents' wishes, and at least to attempt the study of law. He could not see how to act otherwise at present. He must, he thought, furnish this proof of his willingness to obey, but in secret he did not relinquish the hope of one day carrying out his own plans. The Count was seriously out of sorts for a few days, but upon Walter's submission his brow cleared again, and his thoughts turned from this annoying intermezzo to the approaching Easter holidays, when he expected his two other sons at Castle Eichhof, which should once more be, as he expressed it, "the headquarters of youthful fun and frolic."

"The boys must be entertained when they come home," was his watchword. The Countess had the ball-room newly decorated, and made out lists for dinner- and dancing-parties. Walter was a great deal alone in the library writing letters, and took many a lonely ride. He rode once to Rollin to invite Adela Hohenstein to ride with him, but the Baron declared that the physician had forbidden so much horseback exercise, and Adela's manner towards him was so strangely altered that, instead of confiding his grief to her as he had intended to do, he soon rode home again.

"Adela is playing the young lady, I see,--she really coquetted with me to-day," he said to himself; "but I am no longer in the mood to be entertained by her upon the subject of the fashion in which her hair is dressed. If she will no longer be my good comrade, she may let it alone. These young girls are very little good after all."

Still, oddly enough, he thought oftener than usual of Adela that day, and when he was occupied with the most serious plans for the future her fair curly head would intrude upon his thoughts in a most unnecessary and uncalled-for manner. "She certainly has grown extremely pretty of late,--there is no doubt of that," he thought.

## CHAPTER III.

### HIDDEN SPRINGS.

Thus Easter came 'slowly up this way,' and with the holidays the 'sons' from Berlin came to Eichhof and to Rollin.

No finer sight was to be seen than the handsome Count Eichhof and his wife, whose rather faded face and figure retained the traces of former beauty, surrounded by their three sons, the two elder models of manly strength and grace, while a kind of vague nimbus of future distinction hovered around Walter, for which, as the reader knows, his mother was far more responsible than himself. When her high-handed lord had yielded a reluctant consent that her youngest boy should be moulded according to his mother's desire, her imagination instantly perceived in him the future diplomat,--the one of her children born to act a part in the world's history. He was in her eyes a most remarkable child, and, since he really was a very docile, amiable boy, and in consideration of the fact that one of his uncles was an ambassador and another a lord of the treasury, there were found family friends on all sides ready, whenever Walter was spoken of, to whisper significantly, "A wonderful young fellow! He has a brilliant career before him!"

To complete the charming family picture another figure was now added, in the person of Bernhard's lovely betrothed. She was the daughter of a Herr von Rosen, whose estates were in the neighbourhood of Eichhof. Bernhard and she had been boy and girl lovers. Bernhard, indeed, knew something of society and of other women, but Therese--or Thea, as she was called--knew absolutely nothing of the outside world. Without her being in the least aware of it, the love of the child had grown into the pure devotion of the maiden. It had seemed the most natural thing in the world to be betrothed to Bernhard,--that he should henceforth be the centre around which every thought and hope of her heart should cling, and that he should typify to her all that she could conceive of beauty and excellence.

And now he was at home on leave. She saw him daily, and in May they were to be married.

"Thea is 'fearfully happy,'" said her younger sister Alma, Adela's bosom friend; and the servants at Eichhof, who were wont to consider their verdict as important in such cases, as well as all the neighbouring gentry, rung the changes upon the same theme.

The neighbours were soon offered a special opportunity for admiring and discussing the 'charming Eichhofs,' since very early in the Easter holidays they were bidden to a grand dinner at the castle. The state apartments were thrown open, and worthy representatives of the noblest of the county families--the Hohensteins, the Rosens, the Lindenstadts, and many others--gladly accepted this first invitation issued after the return home of the soldier sons.

And yet the betrothed pair were not on this occasion the cynosure of every eye, the theme of every tongue, as might have been expected. These guests were all either distantly related to one another or intimate from the association of years. One of them, however, appeared to-day for the first time in this exclusive circle, exciting universal attention and remark. This was the young wife of Marzell Wronsky, who, himself a very German of the Germans, had lately, by marrying a distant Polish cousin, revived in the minds of all the memory of his Polish ancestry.

"What do you think of young Madame Wronsky?" was a question often whispered at this dinner behind a lady's fan or in the recess of some window. The answer would consist either of a shrug of the shoulders and an elevation of the eyebrows, signifying 'not much,' or in the whispered reply, "Very elegant, yes, undeniably elegant, but not at all handsome; scarcely good-looking. Why, she has red hair and green eyes, and then she is so very pale."

But when Madame Wronsky came to be discussed after dinner in the smoking-room over a bowl of punch,--her husband having rejoined the ladies,--the opinions expressed concerning her were rather different.

"A striking creature, the Wronsky," was heard from Lieutenant Hohenstein,--"decided air of race; she would create a *furor* in Berlin."

"A perfect Undine," murmured the Assessor von Schönburg; "coy, cold, and immovable at first, but as soon as she is interested, all fire and passion,--indescribably attractive."

"Schönburg is off on his old romantic track," laughed Lieutenant von Z. "I rather think your fair Undine is quite capable of giving an eager admirer a bath of very cold water; there is

something absolutely freezing in her eye at times, and she has a way of throwing back her head that reminds one of an obstinate horse."

"A profane simile!" the Assessor declared, with a shrug, swallowing his irritation in a glass of punch.

"In what capital taste the Wronsky was dressed!" came from the other side of the table. "Everything about her is so *chic*. She's a great acquisition to the neighbourhood."

"Still, she is not regularly beautiful," said Lothar Eichhof.

Hohenstein looked at him with his eyes half closed, after his listless manner. "You are either in love with her, or she has treated you badly," he said, in a low tone. "I tell you that if the Wronskys go to Berlin next year, as Marzell says they think of doing, that woman will create a perfect *furor*. Remember this."

Meanwhile, the object of this discussion was leaning back negligently in one of the low arm-chairs in the drawing-room, adding a word now and then in broken German to the general conversation, while, with eyes cast down as though finding nothing worthy of their special notice, she toyed with a costly lace fan. Her dark arched eyebrows contrasted strangely with the transparent pallor of her face, and when a slanting sunbeam called forth brilliant sparkles of light from the diamonds in her hair, certainly, in her light-blue gown trimmed with water-lilies, she justified the Assessor's declaration that she was an Undine.

"How reserved and haughty she looks!" Thea Rosen whispered to her lover, as she was walking through the room upon his arm towards the conservatories.

"I do not think her attractive," he rejoined. "I cannot conceive how Marzell Wronsky could ever fall in love with that woman."

"It is a pity you do not like her."

"You never could be friends with her, my darling."

"Why not?" asked Thea, lifting her lovely eyes to his.

"Why not? I can hardly tell you; it's a matter of sentiment. You are my rosebud, you know, and the Countess Wronsky, if she can be likened to any flower, resembles one of those strange, unnatural orchids."

Thea looked up. Just above her hung one of the fantastic blossoms of which he spoke.

"Well, at all events, an orchid is far more distinguished than a poor little rose, that only needs a little sunlight to blossom and grow, while the grander flower must be petted in a hot-house."

"Do not talk so," said Bernhard, closing her lips with a kiss in the solitude of the conservatory. "I will not have you compared with that woman. What is she to us? You are and always will be my May rose, and I wish May were here, and that we were married. We will have charming apartments in a villa in the Thiergarten, with roses blossoming all over the door, and a wild grape-vine growing about the windows to the very roof. Such a pretty, comfortable, cosy nest as it shall be, with a boudoir---- But no, I'll tell you nothing about that; it shall be a surprise."

While these happy lovers were building their airy castles in one of the conservatories, in another two young people were also carrying on an eager conversation. There was much mention of "rides" and "papa's strange ideas," whereat Fräulein Adela von Hohenstein would frequently blush rosy red, and Herr Walter von Eichhof would put on a very grave and thoughtful expression.

In the mean time, the smokers were growing rather noisy in their talk and laughter, and there was now and then a suppressed yawn in the drawing-room, when suddenly new life was infused into the guests by the lighting of the candles and the throwing open of the ball-room, whence came the strains of the polonaise.

The gentlemen in the drawing-room were immediately largely reinforced, and all led their partners to the brilliant ball-room.

"A delightful surprise this for the young people," said Frau von Rosen, who, on Count Eichhof's arm, led the polonaise.

"We must entertain our children," the Count replied, with a smile; "and since we have enjoyed dancing ourselves, it seems to us the best thing to provide for the young."

"You have been rather sly about this evening, however, my dear Count," the lady continued. "If I had known that our pleasant dinner was to be followed by a small ball, I should have left my little Alma at home. She was, as you know, confirmed but very lately."

The Count laughed. "All the better then that you did not know it," he replied; "we could ill spare the buds from among our blossoms. Only look at Adela von Hohenstein; the child has

prevailed upon her father to let her appear to-night in a train for the first time, and she really looks a finished little lady, who would have probably cried herself to sleep had she been forced to stay at home to-night, although she is just Fräulein Alma's age."

"Adela is too precocious; but then the poor child has no mother, and has been forced to judge for herself and to depend upon her own intuitions now for so many years."

"And if she should be betrothed at eighteen, like our Thea, it is well that she should begin to enjoy herself now. I like to see these very young girls about us. Oho! *changement de dames*," he suddenly called out as he made a turn, resigned Frau von Rosen to another gentleman, and took for his partner Frau von Wronsky, who blushed a little at this distinction, then smiled, and really looked very charming.

The Count made a sign to the musicians, and the dignified polonaise was converted into a rapid waltz.

"*Au galop*," he called gayly, and away he flew with his partner, followed by all the younger dancers, while their elders smilingly retired from among them. The Freiherr von Hohenstein alone, who never would be outdone in anything by his neighbour Eichhof, joined in the galop, while his son, with Lothar Eichhof, to both of whom elderly partners had been assigned, after having led these to their seats, stood together and clapped applause of their several fathers whirling like the wind from one end to the other of the ball-room.

"Your governor dances famously," Hohenstein said to Lothar, who assented,--

"Yes, he is as light on his feet as any one of us. The Wronsky dances well."

"Just wait, my son, and you'll see what you will see. Then think of me!"

With these oracular words Lieutenant Hohenstein retreated privately to the smoking-room, for he was, as he expressed it, long past the age for the passion for dancing, and found his El-Dorado in the smoking-room, where card-tables were now laid ready for him and such as he.

The ball-room windows at Eichhof gleamed brilliantly until long after midnight, and the cocks were already beginning their morning concert, when the sisters Thea and Alma Rosen, leaning back among the cushions of their carriage, began to dream of the vanished delights of the evening.

Immediately after their departure, Herr von Wronsky's carriage drew up before the castle terrace. Frau von Wronsky appeared with her husband at the hall door, where Bernhard, who had just taken leave of his betrothed, was still standing.

The lights on the castle wall shone upon the equipage and the horses. Wronsky detected something wrong in the harness of the latter; and as he descended the steps to direct the groom to repair the error, his wife was left for a few moments alone in the vestibule with Bernhard. Their eyes met, and in hers there was a hasty, mute inquiry. Bernhard stepped close to her side. He looked very grave, and there was a gloomy fire in his glance, as he gazed steadfastly into her face, and said in a low tone, and yet so as to be distinctly heard by her, "You may rely upon my silence, but I impose certain conditions. Confine your intercourse with us within as narrow bounds as is possible without exciting remark, and never, never attempt to make friends with my future wife!"

The young wife's cheek first flushed crimson and then grew deadly pale, while the eyes, which were for one moment opened wide and riveted upon Bernhard's face, seemed fairly to flash fire. Then the eyelids drooped over them, and the same cold, proud countenance that had been shown all the evening in the ball-room looked out from among the snowy folds of her white wrap.

"Good-night, Herr von Eichhof," she said, calmly, putting her hand upon her husband's arm as he returned to her, and, passing the young man with the air of a queen dismissing a subject, she descended the steps and entered her carriage.

Bernhard followed the vehicle with his eyes as it rolled away. "Did she really suppose until this moment that I had not recognized her?" he thought. "She certainly betrayed herself by no look or gesture. Poor Wronsky, how could he----"

His thoughts were interrupted by other guests, who at that moment thronged into the hall. There was the usual bustle of departure, calling of carriages, searching for wraps, etc., and as the son of the house he was obliged to make himself as useful as possible.

At last every guest had left Castle Eichhof, the lights were extinguished, and its inmates were wrapped in the slumber which was to refresh them after past enjoyments. But Bernhard's dreams were not of his lovely betrothed, but of the brilliant eyes of Frau von Wronsky, and, instead of the cold 'good-night' she had given him, he heard her say, "I hate you, and I will work your ruin!"

## CHAPTER IV.

### GOSSIP.

Bernhard and Lothar returned to Berlin as soon as the holidays were over, and Hohenstein shortly followed them thither.

"I am glad he has gone," said Adela, one afternoon that she was spending with her friend Alma Rosen. "I am glad not to have him here any longer, for he grows more and more tiresome, and it spoils my enjoyment of everything to see him lounging about and yawning all the time."

"You ought not to say that so openly, dear child," said Frau von Rosen, who happened to be in the room, and who thought it her duty to admonish the motherless girl now and then. "It is sad enough when brothers and sisters do not agree perfectly, but there is no need to publish such lack of harmony to the world."

"But indeed I do not care. I am perfectly willing that everybody should know it," said Adela. "It is the truth, and I detest hypocrisy."

"No one requires hypocrisy from you, my dear," Frau von Rosen replied; "but there is a very wide difference between hypocrisy and a discreet reserve. Besides, there are, I think, certain sensations and opinions that are undesirably strengthened by being put into words."

"Ah, yes, dear Frau von Rosen, it is easy for you to speak so; you know nothing of such trials," Adela rejoined. "If you had any sons, Thea and Alma would have their own opinion too of fraternal amenities."

"Ah, Adela, I have always so longed for a brother!" Alma exclaimed. "When I see Lothar Eichhof he always seems like half a brother; and how delightful it must be to have a real one!"

"That is because you know nothing about it," said Adela, with a wise shake of her curls. "I will tell you how my brother Hugo conducts himself. Let me speak just this once," she went on, turning to Frau von Rosen; "it is such a relief to speak it all out, and you know I would not mention it anywhere else. Well, when he comes home he first goes directly to the stables, and in fact it is there only that he ever shows a pleasant face. Then he comes into the house, drops into an arm-chair in the drawing-room, and looks about him with a sneering expression which he knows I detest. If I chance to be alone with him, he says, languidly, 'Frightful taste, the furniture of this room! I really cannot understand why my father does not have this old-fashioned stuff replaced by something decent. If he will commission me to attend to it I will see that you have something here really *chic*.' If my patience gives way and I remind him that the furniture was all of our mother's selection, and that papa would never think of altering a single article, he sneers again,—that same odious sneer,—and either whistles some popular air or remarks, 'Of course not. I, however, never would live in such a beastly hole. In fact, Rollin is an infernally tiresome old nest, only fit for breeding horses, or some such colt as you are!' meaning me. Is that not enough to vex one? And papa is so kind and good to him, granting all he asks, and getting nothing from him in return but disappointment and grief."

"But, Adela, your father has great satisfaction in him nevertheless," Frau von Rosen observed. "He is an excellent officer, and very popular with his comrades, as I know from Bernhard."

But Adela would hear nothing of that. "Ah, that indeed!" she exclaimed, irritably. "You would hear very little more of his popularity if papa did not give him so much money. Walter says he gambles, and that his comrades win his money."

"Walter Eichhof says that?" Thea exclaimed. "And how came you, Adela, to discuss such matters with Walter?"

Adela blushed slightly, and replied that she had happened to speak of Hugo to Walter because he had been in Berlin and had heard about many things there.

Frau von Rosen looked grave, and shook her head, but Adela, now fairly roused, went on unheeding: "I know myself that papa has often to send him a great deal of money, and is always in a very bad humour for days afterwards, and very cross to the inspector and the steward and to me. And it is all Hugo's fault. He alone is to blame----"

"Hush, hush, Adela!" said Frau von Rosen. "If you do not choose to suppress your own sentiments with regard to your brother, it is at least your bounden duty to have nothing whatever to say of circumstances with which you have nothing to do, and which concern your father and brother only. Of such matters I must distinctly forbid you to speak here."

Adela stopped, rather startled, but her flushed, indignant face showed plainly that she thought herself unjustly treated. Frau von Rosen approached her, and gently laid her hand upon her fair curly head.

"Dear child," she said, softly, "have you not confidence in my affection for you?"

Adela was silent, evidently a prey to a conflict of feeling.

"I was your mother's friend," Frau von Rosen continued, gently, "and when I hear you utter such sharp, decided opinions upon matters of which you are, perhaps, incapable of judging, I cannot help fancying what your mother would feel if she heard you. Do you think she would be pleased with you at this moment?"

The tears started from Adela's eyes, and she hastily, almost passionately, pressed Frau von Rosen's hand to her lips.

"Oh, if my mother were only living!" she exclaimed. "Everything at home would be so different!"

Frau von Rosen clasped her in her arms and kissed her. "You have a tender and loving father," she said, softly: "be to him a good daughter in the true sense of the word."

Adela dried her tears, and smiled at the remembrance of her father. "Oh, yes, he is very, very kind," she said. "I know he is, even when he pretends to be angry. I know, too, that he will always do what I want in the end, if I do not contradict him. He has given me leave to ride with Walter again if I will only tell him when and where we are going, and I always like to do that. And then, too, he has let me wear long dresses at last. Yes, he is the dearest old papa,--but indeed Hugo spoils him!"

Frau von Rosen was rather shocked at the conversation's taking this turn, but when she looked into Adela's honest eyes--now gazing so frankly into her own--she found it impossible to be angry with the child. She thought it best to take no notice of her last words, and only said, "Remember, then, always that it is your first duty to requite your father for all the care and kindness he has lavished upon his children."

"Oh!" cried Adela, "if papa should ever have a fall from his horse, and break his leg or anything, I would nurse him day and night, and never leave his side; but then," she added, rather ruefully, "nothing of that sort ever happens to him."

Frau von Rosen smiled involuntarily. "There is no need, dear, of any extraordinary occasion for testifying affection," she said. "The greatest proof of love lies in overcoming one's self for the gratification of others. Think of this, Adela dear; you are quite old enough and sensible enough to know of yourself everything that I can tell you. Promise me to reflect upon it all. Will you try?"

Adela promised, with a mixture of emotion and of satisfaction with her own good sense.

Thea and Alma, who had withdrawn to the other end of the room during this conversation, now came forward and begged Adela to go with them into the garden.

Frau von Rosen nodded kindly, and the three girls went off together, at first somewhat embarrassed, but soon talking and laughing together as usual. The Easter holidays were indeed a fruitful theme for conversation, and the name of Eichhof occurred very frequently in their talk.

"Only think," said Alma Rosen, "Lothar told me that Walter wanted to be a doctor!"

Adela burst into a laugh. "Walter a doctor!" she exclaimed. "What a delightful idea of Lothar's! Walter a doctor? It is too comical!"

"Only ask Thea; she knows about it too," said Alma.

And her sister added, "Yes, it is true; Walter did get such an idea into his head, but he has given it up, and there is to be no more said upon the subject."

"Now I know why Walter has been so queer all through these last holidays," said Adela. "It is perfectly odious in him not to tell me a word of it. I will tease him well about it to-morrow if we ride together."

"Do you often ride together now?"

"Oh, yes. That was a perfectly ridiculous idea of papa's; I soon talked him out of it. He had consented to our rides even before we went to the ball at Eichhof. There's one good to be gained from Hugo's being at home, papa is so full of business at such times that he will almost always say 'yes' just to be rid of me. I take very few lessons now with Mademoiselle Belmont, and the good soul is being gradually transformed from a governess into a companion. I got papa to tell her that she might look upon herself as rather occupying the latter position. The only thing to do is to take papa just when he happens to be in a good humour; but----" She suddenly clapped her hand upon her mouth. "There, I promised your mother that I would not speak of that. I should like to know what kind of girls we should all be if I had a mother and you had a couple of

brothers."

"Well, Bernhard soon will be my brother," said Alma.

"Oh, that's very different," rejoined Adela; "made-up brothers like that never do anything to vex you. I know all about that, for I look upon Walter Eichhof as a kind of brother, and--but I forgot," she interrupted herself, hesitating,--"he does vex me sometimes. I'll have my revenge to-morrow at all events, and I wish to-morrow were here."

Twenty-four hours later this wish of Adela's was fulfilled, and Walter and she were slowly riding towards the forest, followed at a discreet distance by the groom with a taste for sandwiches.

"I have been hearing sad tales of you, Walter," Adela began her attack, "and the saddest part of them is that you never, by word or look, confided anything with regard to your evil schemes to your faithful comrade."

"My evil schemes?"

"Yes. Would you not, if you could, torture poor mortals, cut off their arms and legs, and heaven knows what besides that is horrible and cruel?"

"Since you call that cruel, you certainly must admit that I was perfectly right not to mention to you the profession at which you jeer, but which I consider the noblest that can be embraced."

The gravity with which he spoke made some impression upon Adela. She looked at him almost timidly, and said, shyly, "Were you really in earnest, then, about being a doctor?"

"I have found it very hard to relinquish the idea,--for the present at least. But why should we speak of all this? Rather let us admire the exquisite beauty of the afternoon, and of the woods and trees. Shall we canter?"

Strangely enough, Adela instantly forgot all her vexation and her determination to be revenged upon Walter. She saw that he refused her his confidence, and, instead of being angry that this was so, she became very sad.

"You are very fond of that Doctor Nordstedt of whom you were telling me awhile ago, are you not?" she asked, suddenly reining in her mare after a long canter.

Walter turned and looked her full in the face. "I thought you had forgotten all that," he said. "I certainly thought that my comrade had grown to be altogether too much of a fine lady, too much taken up with dressing and visiting, to feel any interest in what I could tell her."

Adela blushed. Certainly she did very much desire to be a fine lady, but she could not give up her comrade. She replied, "Well, and what now, when you find that in spite of dressing and visiting I still have time to think of Dr. Nordstedt?"

"Now I tell you that I certainly honour and love him, and that I am proud to consider myself his friend."

"It is his fault, then, that you want to be a doctor?"

"On the contrary, it is he who is always pointing out to me all the difficulties of the profession."

"Good heavens! how did you ever come to make such an acquaintance? Your sight was always good. Certainly you had no need for consulting an oculist--the man is an oculist, is he not?"

"Yes; and I never went near him on account of my eyes. But, as I told you before, he is my aunt's family physician, and it was through her that I became acquainted with him and with his family."

"Oh, yes,--his family! And of whom does this family consist?"

"This family consists of the father, Herr Nordstedt,--a self-made man, sprung from the people,--of his wife, and of their son, my friend. They are charming people; you ought to know them, Adela."

"Do they speak the Berlin *patois* and mix up their parts of speech?" Adela asked, slightly turning up her pretty little nose.

Walter laughed. "What an idea!" he exclaimed. "It is true that Herr Nordstedt has worked hard with his hands to amass the modest competence that he now possesses, but he is too clever a man to have allowed his brain to lie idle in the mean while. His information is extensive and various, and upon every question of the day his opinions are those of the cultured class. The advantages of education of which he was deprived he has, however, taken good care that his son shall enjoy to the fullest extent. My friend is now entirely independent, pecuniarily, of his father, and takes pride in being so."



"I wish Hugo would take a few lessons of him, then," said Adela; "I think papa has to pay more and more for him every year. But then," she added, hastily, "I really should not like him to be a doctor."

Walter smiled. "And would you dislike to have me one?" he asked.

"Very much," she replied, emphatically.

Walter touched his horse with the spur, and started upon another canter.

"How rude you are!" Adela exclaimed; but she followed him, and in the rapid pace which Walter seemed to enjoy so much on this particular day there was no opportunity for any further serious conversation between them.

## CHAPTER V.

### MARRIAGE.

The larks were soaring high in air above the tender green of the fields, and the blossoming cherry-trees looked like white bridal bouquets in the midst of the sunny landscape, as the villagers of Schönthal, in their gayest holiday dresses, streamed towards their little church.

While the bells rang out their merriest peal, the brilliant marriage-train left the lordly mansion-house and walked down the broad avenue of chestnut-trees, the drooping buds of which had not yet begun to 'spread into the perfect fan.' No equipage of any kind hid either bridal pair or guests from the delighted gaze of the peasants who lined the wayside. Little girls dressed in white, their fair hair braided and tied with white ribbons, scattered violets and May flowers upon the broad carpet stretched, as a protection for satin-slippered feet, from the hall door to the gateway of the neighbouring church, and immediately behind them came the bridal pair.

An admiring "Ah!" from the spectators among whom they had grown up accompanied them as they walked slowly on; and certainly they were a fair sight to look upon. Bernhard, in his brilliant uniform, beaming with pride and happiness, could scarcely turn his eyes from Thea, hanging blushing upon his arm. Thus they trod beneath their feet the spring flowers scattered in their path on their road--to what? To happiness? Are these flowers of spring to be followed by the roses of summer and the golden fruits of autumn, or is a premature winter with its ice and snow to wither them all too soon? Who can tell? And who would ask such a question? Not Alma and Adela, the two bridesmaids, who follow Bernhard and Thea, conducted by Lothar and Walter Eichhof, and certainly not Count Eichhof, who, as he looks at the three couples with a smile of pride, reflects that flowers must always strew the pathway of the heir of Eichhof, and that there will be enough left to provide handsomely for the two other sons. He certainly seems right to-day at least, for Lothar and Walter look extremely happy. Lothar's debts have just been paid again 'for the last time,' and Walter had returned the previous night from a journey which seemed to have delighted and refreshed him.

The train vanishes beneath the church-portals; the solemn rite is performed, the mystic rings are exchanged, and two mortals plight faith and affection to each other until death shall separate them.

It is all over. The gay procession returns through the chestnut avenue, and the old mansion of Schönthal once more opens its portals to receive the maiden flower that has blossomed beneath its roof, to leave it to-day for another home.

Gradually the solemnity of mood which very naturally possessed every one during the ceremony vanishes. Congratulations have been showered upon the pair. There have been tender embraces, cordial hand-shakes; the due amount of 'my dear old friends' and 'precious darlings' has been uttered, and the evidences of unusual emotion disappear from all countenances, save those of the bride and her mother, who cannot quite regain their wonted composure. Gay laughter and lively conversation resound from all sides of the table, where justice is done to the wedding breakfast. Speeches are made, toasts proposed, and healths drunk amid much clinking of glasses. The wit of the gentlemen and the smiles of the ladies grow brighter with every toast. There are many new titles of relationship exchanged between the young people of the two allied houses, and blushes and smiles are frequent when Count Eichhof arises, glass in hand, and, repeating the old proverb,--

"Never a marriage here below

proposes the health of the "next bride and bridegroom." Alma Rosen's hand trembles slightly as it touches Lothar Eichhof's when they clink their glasses; and when later in the day, before he left her, he declared that a kiss was his right in pledge of their new relationship, and calmly availed himself of this right, he had no idea of how fast and loud her heart beat the while.

"She is a perfect child," he said, after they had risen from table, to Hugo Hohenstein, who had taken Frau von Wronsky to breakfast. "A perfect child, but a pretty little puss, and *faute de mieux*----" And he snapped his fingers, and then paused as his glance lighted upon his new sister-in-law, standing talking with Adela Hohenstein by one of the windows, her girlish figure draped in white satin and shrouded in her lace veil.

"*À propos*, Thea is quite dazzling," he said. "I never should have given her credit for so much dignity and self-possession."

Hohenstein put up his eye-glass, and bestowed a critical glance upon the bride.

"Yes, she has a good figure and rather fine features," he said, with the oracular air of a connoisseur. "Her face is an unwritten page as yet; but time will change all that, even although it may never show such a startling romance as may be read in the Wronsky's eyes."

Lothar was still gazing at his sister-in-law, and only half heard Hohenstein's words.

"Was the lady very entertaining at table?" he asked, rather absently.

"Why, either she is not in a good humour today, or she is playing a part; I cannot make out which," Hohenstein replied. "At all events, she is excessively interesting. Before her marriage there was some very piquant story about her; she has had experiences. I know nothing explicit, but that woman has been through an immense deal, you may be certain."

Thea left the room to put on her travelling-dress, and Bernhard, who until now had been constantly near her, went into an antechamber, whence he was instantly about to withdraw upon finding it occupied by Frau von Wronsky, who was seated in a negligent attitude on a divan, her head resting on her hand. She called him, however, by name, and involuntarily, although with an air of constraint, he paused on the threshold.

"I should like to speak with you for a moment," she said, in a low, hurried tone. "You ought at least to know that I had resolved not to inflict my presence upon you to-day; that I have done so is owing entirely to your father, who paid us a visit the day before yesterday and was so pertinacious in his request that we should be present to-day that----"

"There is no need of this apology, madame," Bernhard replied, coldly. "It would have excited remark if you had absented yourself without sufficient reason, and it is my especial desire that your conduct towards us should be such as to invite no observation."

The lady's face was agitated for an instant as if by the suppression of a passionate outburst, but she only bent her head, and replied, "You have nothing to fear. However painful the consciousness may be, I know that you are right in not allowing me any intimacy with your wife. Believe me, I feel only too intensely and grievously the gulf that divides us. I know how hardly you judge me, and that you have a right to do so, even although I am more to be pitied than blamed."

"Madame," Bernhard rejoined, approaching her in some confusion, "I pray you let the past rest."

"Ah, I wish it would rest, that I could forget! But even when I succeed in doing so for a moment, as when but now, attracted irresistibly by the grace and loveliness of your wife, I longed to approach her as any other woman might do, my past rises as an avenger, and I bow before the Nemesis; for, hard as it is to endure, I know it is not wholly undeserved."

Her voice, as she uttered these words, was full of such melancholy sweetness, her eyes shone so with unshed tears, and she arose and stood with such touching humility before Bernhard, that he could not help expressing his regret at having recalled to her an unhappy past. She cut his phrases short by a forbidding wave of her hand.

"You were quite right," she said. "Forget all this, and may you be happy, very happy!"

Tone and manner were so full of a heart-felt sincerity that Bernhard was almost moved to offer her his hand. He bethought himself in time, however, and, in obedience to a wave of dismissal, left the room.

"Forget all this," she had said, but he never could forget the look or the tone with which these words were uttered.

Thea returned clad in travelling costume to bid farewell to all. Bernhard hastily changed his dress, and, when the travelling-carriage drove up, led his young wife down the steps of the hall, which were thronged with bridesmaids and their attendant squires. Alma burst into tears as she

threw her arms around her sister's neck. Herr and Frau von Rosen called out their adieux in faltering tones.

The wedding guests waved their kerchiefs from the open windows, and servants and peasants crowded about the carriage for one last look at their "dear young Fräulein." The swallows stretched out their heads from their nest under the eaves, and seemed to twitter "Good-by, good-by," and the hanging wreaths of the wild grapevine in which the veranda was embowered seemed to wave a mute farewell.

"Farewell, farewell!"

The carriage rolled out of the court-yard, and Thea hid her tearful face on Bernhard's shoulder. "Oh, Bernhard," she whispered, "you will always love me dearly, very dearly, will you not?"

He kissed away her tears. "My darling, what a question to ask!" he replied. "You know that you are my sweetest, loveliest May rosebud."

She smiled at him through her tears, and he vowed inwardly that she never should shed a tear caused by word or deed of his.

The road here made a turn, and the mansion of Schönthal, upon the windows of which the last beams of the setting sun were shining, came into view once more.

Thea leaned from the carriage window and looked back. Bernhard, clasping her hand firmly in his own, looked back also. The windows of the balconied room, the same in which he had spoken with Frau von Wronsky scarcely an hour before, gleamed brilliantly.

"Is she there still?" he thought, and he seemed to hear again her low, penetrating tones, "Forget all this,"--her pale face and brilliant figure were like a shadow dimming the sunshine of his marriage-day.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A FAREWELL GLASS AND A DEATH-BED.

Far removed from the fashionable quarter of Berlin, in one of those east-end streets where labourers' carts are far more numerous than gay equipages, stood Herr Nordstedt's house. It was quite a stately structure, with two projecting wings, between which extended a little front garden, lending a retired air to the whole, and distinguishing it pleasantly among the old and rather shabby houses of the neighbourhood. The hall door was adorned by rich carvings in wood,--"The old cabinet-maker in me takes great delight in such things," Herr Nordstedt was wont to say,--and yet was so simply fashioned that it must always be regarded as a door, never as a 'portal.' Through this door on a certain evening in May walked Walter Eichhof, who had returned to town shortly after his brother's marriage, and who, before departing to continue his studies in a university town on the Rhine, desired to take leave personally of his friend Dr. Nordstedt. He passed through the hall leading to a small court-yard, and into a garden which was really very large for a city so closely built as Berlin. The wing looking upon this garden contained Dr. Nordstedt's study and his office, where he received all in need of his advice as oculist.

Walter made sure of finding him in his study, and was not disappointed. He was seated at his table, writing busily.

"I have been expecting you, my dear fellow," the doctor exclaimed, springing up and holding out both hands. "As you did not write, I knew you would come. Well, and----?" He looked expectantly at the young man for an instant. "Hm!" he went on, "clouds in the sky, I see. Well, well, I expected them. But come, take a cigar, and tell me all about it."

"There's not much to be told. It was very short work, and what will come next I do not know,--which is what troubles me," replied Walter. "At present I am on my way to Bonn to study law."

The doctor silently nodded.

"There would have been entire estrangement from my parents if I had insisted upon my wishes," Walter continued.

"And I think you are quite right in yielding," said his friend. "You owe it to your parents to

make an attempt at least to adopt the career in life that they have chosen for you. There must be difficulties to be encountered everywhere. We cannot escape them, whatever freedom of choice may be granted us."

"If I could only get up some small amount of interest in the law," sighed Walter.

"You know nothing about it yet," the doctor replied, seriously. "Reflect, investigate, contemplate the *corpus juris* in every possible light, and depend upon it you will attain that ideal standpoint which is what you desire, and which will give you all the interest you lack in the study of equity. The struggle will strengthen your mental muscles."

"At present, however, any old skull or bone interests me more than the most complicated legal process," said Walter.

The doctor leaned back in his arm-chair, and puffed forth clouds of smoke.

"Well, go on," he said, when Walter paused.

The young man looked at him surprised. His friend smiled. "Apparently you come to-day not to discuss this matter, but to bewail it," he said. "For many people this is a positive necessity when they find themselves face to face with irritating circumstances. So go on, my dear fellow, I entreat."

Walter arose and paced the room hastily to and fro. "If I did not know you better I should take my leave of you this instant, convinced that you were the most unsympathetic man in the world," he said; "but I am sure that, in spite of your ridicule, you thoroughly understand what I feel, and only mask with sarcasm your compassion for me."

"And I am sure that, in spite of your groans and complaints, you will apply yourself to your new task like a man of courage," cried the doctor. "There is genuine content and satisfaction to be found in the conscientious performance of duty, however irksome that duty may be. You have excellent powers of mind, and I know you will use them well."

Walter paused in front of his friend, and offered him his hand.

"I will try," he said. "You are right. 'Things without all remedy should be without regard.' So there's an end of my groaning."

"When do you leave town?" asked the doctor.

"To-morrow, or the day after," was the reply. "There is not much time left before the long vacation, and my father wishes me to spend that in travelling."

"You will like that, at all events."

"Yes, that will be pleasant enough."

"I believe you. At your age it would have been the realization of my most cherished hopes."

"Have you never travelled?"

"I spent a couple of years in Paris."

"Oh, yes, studying your profession; but you would have liked entire freedom, and to wander where the paths were not quite so well worn, if I am not mistaken in you."

The doctor laughed again. "He first bewails his own fate, and now is bewailing mine," he exclaimed. "My dear Eichhof, you are in a deucedly morbid, sentimental mood to-day, and farewells are scarcely propitious to the cure of such maladies. If you are really going away to-morrow, come and say good-by to my father and mother, and afterwards I will walk home with you."

They repaired to Herr Nordstedt's study in the main portion of the house.

"Ah, Herr von Eichhof," said the old man, as Walter entered. "Glad to see you once more before you go to the university. Well, what cheer? Is all right between you and your father? Has the Baron consented?"

His son in a few words made him acquainted with the state of the case.

"Well, well," said the father, running his fingers through his thick hair, only faintly streaked with gray, as was his wont when anything went "against the grain" with him, as he expressed it,-- "well, well, it will all come right in the end, and you will reconcile yourself to the law, as I did to carpentering. You see, Herr von Eichhof, I believed I was more of an artist than an artisan, and I was wild to take up the brush instead of the chisel and plane. I longed to study, but that would have cost money. I turned to the plane instead, and, thank God, all came right in the end."

"And you never could have married me, Nikolas," said Frau Nordstedt, who had entered the

room meanwhile, "if you had been a learned man. For I have heard my blessed father say a hundred times that like should mate with like, and that a master-carpenter's daughter should marry some one skilled in her father's trade."

"So, you see, my carpentering brought me happiness," said old Nordstedt. "Nevertheless, now that my days are all holidays, I look back with indulgence upon my youthful dreams. And since my wife and I took our Italian journey together, she has nothing but respect and admiration for art."

"As if I ever had anything else for what you delighted in," his wife said, parenthetically.

"Take care," the old man rejoined, holding up a warning finger. "But no, Therese, I must admit that you are and always were the most sensible of women."

"We women always are sensible," she said; "and, since you acknowledge the fact so frankly, you shall have some punch brewed by my own hands in which to drink success to Herr von Eichhof."

She left the room on hospitable thoughts intent; the doctor pushed forward the large, leather-covered arm-chair in which Walter had so often sat, and the young man took his place between the father and son and discussed the past, present, and future. The old man related many an episode from his past life, which had been full of trials and struggles, which he recounted as a soldier recounts the victories he has won, lingering upon the incidents of many a well-fought field. And the punch having been brought in and placed upon the table by a stout maid-servant, Frau Nordstedt filled the glasses of the three men, and in snowy cap and apron seated herself with her knitting at her husband's elbow, nodding now and then with a smile as he spoke of early days in their life together, her kind old eyes beaming with placid content and pride in her 'boy' and his father.

"It is strange, and no less true than strange, Herr von Eichhof," said the latter, "that life is made up so largely of mistakes and errors. And it is an impregnable fact that content is the result of the performance of one's duty, and that no man need look for anything beyond genuine content."

"You are right, Herr Nordstedt," Walter said, eagerly, and the doctor nodded a silent assent.

"To a faithful discharge of duty, then, and a successful career at the university," exclaimed the old man, as he raised his glass filled with the steaming mixture. The others touched it with their own and exchanged a silent pressure of hands.

Shortly afterwards Walter took his leave, carrying with him the farewell blessings of both the old people.

"How often I shall think of our pleasant evenings here!" he said to the doctor as they crossed the street together. The doctor muttered a few low words in reply, and strode on as if he were in a great hurry. Walter knew him well, and that he always grew monosyllabic when agitated by any emotion. Thus they reached Walter's lodgings in silence.

"And now good-by," the doctor said, grasping the young man's hand; "I know how I shall miss you, so I will cut short all leave-taking."

His voice was deep and low, as though he feared to betray how much he felt his friend's departure. Then he turned hastily away, and walked down the street with a rapid stride. Just as he reached his own door a dark figure emerged from the shadow where it had apparently been crouching, and said, timidly, "Ah, Herr Doctor."

"Is that you, Marianne?" he said, with a hasty glance at the woman. "What do you want? Is anything going wrong?"

"Ah, Herr Doctor, very, very wrong, I am afraid," she sighed. "He is out again, and indeed it would be better he should not come home, for he earned a trifle to-day, and he is spending it in drink, I suppose. If he should come home in one of his raging moods the lady will die----"

"Is she worse?" the doctor asked, hastily.

"Ah, good heavens! I don't know, but she talks so strange-like that I begged Christine, who lives just over me, to sit by her for a moment, and I ran all the way here to beg you to come to her if you can. She talked about you, and then prayed, and called herself wicked and ungrateful; it's hard to hear her talk so, when I know how good and gentle and unhappy she is, and how thankful she is for everything that is done for her. I thought to myself that the Herr Doctor would know just what to do, when you are so good as to pay my rent to the landlord to let me nurse the poor lady, and I came directly to you; and when they told me you were not at home I waited here until you should come, for---- But here we are already; indeed, doctor, you can run faster than I can."

Whilst Marianne had talked on they had reached the house where was lodged the patient whom the doctor had been called to visit at this late hour.

"Only wait one instant, Herr Doctor, till I light a candle," Marianne called out, when they had entered the passage-way. But before her match was lighted the doctor had groped his way up the narrow staircase and stood at the door of the sick-room.

The woman hastened after him, and both entered a low room but feebly illuminated by the light of a tallow candle.

A young girl, from her dress one of the working class, arose from the bedside where she had been sitting and came towards them.

"How is she, Christine?" the doctor asked, under his breath.

"She is sleeping," was the whispered reply.

Nordstedt went to the bed, upon which lay a young woman, her face turned to the wall, while her abundant fair hair hung down from the pillows in two thick braids. Her little emaciated hand, upon the third finger of which glistened a broad golden ring, lay upon the coverlet, now and then twitching nervously in its owner's feverish sleep.

The doctor noiselessly took his seat by the bedside, and his eyes grew dim with moisture as they glanced from the fair braids to the small hand, and then to the bare, smoky walls of the room. Some minutes passed in profound silence. Christine had left the place; Marianne sat by the stove, her hands folded in her lap, looking anxiously towards the bed where the sleeper was breathing painfully. The doctor leaned over her, and smoothed her pillows with the tender skill of a father watching beside the sick-bed of his child. Suddenly the invalid sat up in bed and gazed at him from large blue eyes that gleamed with unnatural brilliancy in the poor little face, deadly pale but for the hectic flush of fever. "I cannot help it, Robert; don't be angry with me!" she cried, clasping her hands in entreaty.

The doctor laid his own cool, strong hand upon them. "Robert is not here," he said; "be quiet and calm."

She gazed at him, the eager, distressed expression fading from her eyes, her face growing more natural and placid. "Oh, it is you!" she said, with a sigh of relief, sinking back upon her pillows. "I have had such a terrible dream! How kind of you to come to me when it is so late!" she added, softly. "How can I ever thank you!"

"Hush, hush, child! you must not talk so much, and there is no occasion for any gratitude. It is a doctor's duty to look after his patients."

She gazed at him with an intensity of fervour in her gleaming eyes. "I shall not give you much more trouble," she said; "but I have something to say to you," she added, entreatingly; "tell Marianne to go out of the room."

The doctor motioned to the woman, who left the room, and then turned to the invalid, saying, "But I cannot let you talk much; you must say only a very few words."

A sad, weary smile passed over her face. "Nothing now can either harm or help me. You know as well as I do that I shall soon be at rest."

The doctor would have interrupted her, but she begged him by a look to let her speak, and he mutely inclined his head.

"I know that the end is near, and I am so glad of it," she said, softly; "but before it comes I want so much to thank you,--thank you from my very heart, and to beg you to think of me kindly when I am no longer here. Tell me that you have forgiven me. Although you have shown me your forgiveness in a hundred ways, I long to hear your lips utter it."

"Hedwig," he murmured, and his lips quivered; for a moment the strong man was unable to utter a word.

"Have you quite forgiven me?" she asked again, looking eagerly up at him.

"Utterly and entirely," he replied, controlling his emotion.

"Ah, how happy you make me! My suffering has atoned for my sin against you. Ah, how I thank you,--I thank you!" She paused suddenly and put her handkerchief to her lips.

The doctor sprang up and called aloud to Marianne, as he raised the invalid's head from the pillows and supported her in his arms.

She opened her eyes and gazed into his. "Friedrich," she whispered. But a crimson stream choked the words she would have spoken. A spasm passed through her frame; she threw back her head. All was over. The doctor gently laid her back upon the pillows, and, kneeling beside her, pressed his lips upon the cold little hand that lay motionless on the coverlet.

Marianne was not in the next room; she did not appear in answer to the doctor's call, and her presence was not needed.

A moment afterwards he arose, covered the quiet figure, so that only the pale, calm face was visible, and then sat down beside the bed, riveting his gaze upon the marble features as if to call them back to life,—the life that now informed them in his mind's eye. Yes, she stood vividly before him, a little fair-haired girl, the daughter of a neighbouring tradesman, his playfellow through many childish years. And then she was again the blushing, still childlike girl, who replied to his passionate wooing by a low 'yes,' breathed almost inaudibly as she hid her face on his breast. Then came a change in the picture. The petty tradesman, her father, embarked in a lucky speculation and suddenly achieved wealth. And the girl was clad in costly silks and velvets, and lived in a showy villa surrounded by luxurious gardens,—a fit home for a parvenu millionaire, where the daughter, but lately so shrinking and modest, suddenly learned to talk and laugh loudly and to bandy pert jests with the young fortune-hunters that thronged about her. She grew to delight in their homage, and would have missed it had it been withdrawn. She never was haughty or arrogant towards the friend of her youth, but she began to suppress a yawn when he spoke of his love. She had just begun to live, she said, and wished to enjoy for a while. They had deferred any public announcement of their mutual affection until Nordstedt should have passed the coming examinations, and he left her to her new-found enjoyment, coming but seldom to visit her. The day before he was to go up for examination he went to her house, and was told that she had been betrothed the week before, and was paying some visits of ceremony. He turned away, and a few steps from the house passed her carriage returning home. He saw her smile, saw the handsome faded face of her lover, and the satisfaction in her father's air. He was proud of the wealthy son-in-law, who had, moreover, lately become his partner. Nordstedt hurried along the street where he had so often walked with his head and heart filled with dreams of future happiness, and from that day her name never passed his lips. Thenceforth he belonged only to his books and his patients. The years went by. He knew that her father had become bankrupt, and that her husband had suffered some losses in consequence. But he did not know how soon the remainder of his property had been lost or squandered. Without either the capacity or the desire to exert himself, the man had sunk into depths of abject poverty, until at last his wretched wife was discovered by chance by the lover of her youth in a garret room, the victim of a mortal disease. He did not now dwell upon the care that he had from that moment lavished upon the first, the only woman whom he had ever loved; pictures of a distant past floated too vividly before him, and the quiet face on the pillow was to him as a last greeting from his youth, the faint, fading shadow of what once had been. Youth and love, how far away and unattainable they were now! Lost, gone forever. He bade a long farewell to that pale face and to all of which it spoke to him.

At last he arose, and, walking slowly and like one in a dream, left the room, and, calling Marianne, gave her directions as to the decent burial of his lost love. And as the street door closed behind him and the black night received him, the strong man shivered. "She is dead, and Walter is gone," he muttered to himself. "It is my lot to be a lonely man."

## **CHAPTER VII.**

### **UNEXPECTED.**

Summer had gone, and autumn was tinging forest and field with crimson and gold.

The Freiherr von Hohenstein was driving in a little open vehicle through his forest,—that is, over that part of his estate which a few years previously had been covered with fine old trees, but where now some labourers were removing a few stumps, while at intervals a solitary giant of the woods seemed to tell of his brothers, certain of whom were now sailing the seas, while others upheld the roofs of city dwellings.

The Freiherr von Hohenstein looked gloomily about him upon the desert plain, dotted here and there with small spots of future forest in the shape of low scraggy shrubs, and found as much food for vexation in the quick disappearance of the former forest as in the slow growth of the young trees. He was powerless, however, to alter either of these annoying facts, and he sighed heavily as his thoughts wandered oddly enough, and yet by a strictly logical train of ideas, from the forest-trees to his son Hugo, who had not indeed any personal connection with ship-builders and carpenters, but who could have told a great deal about the money paid by them for the trees.

"The deuce knows how it is all to end!" the Freiherr growled to himself. "Every year living is dearer and the income smaller; everything to be bought goes up in price, everything to be sold comes down. It is enough to drive me mad!"

Such had now for some time been the usual conclusion of the Freiherr's reflections, and after

these deep-drawn sighs he was wont to fall into a still gloomier revery, in which he arrived at no single clear idea except that fate was using him with singular injustice in so complicating his financial affairs from year to year.

"Was he extravagant in any direction? No, assuredly not! It is true, he bred racers, and in order to do so was obliged to employ certain people who required high wages; but it was his only pleasure, and could not be altered. His domestic affairs were conducted upon a very liberal scale; but, as the neighbour and friend of the Eichhofs, it was his duty not to allow any difference to be observed between the Baron's style of living and his own; he surely owed this to his rank and station in life. His son required enormous sums; but the Freiherr had but two children, and his daughter cost him almost nothing. And it was natural that Hugo should enjoy life,—he must represent his name worthily. The Hohensteins had never been bookworms or arithmeticians, and if the young fellow sometimes went too far and his father resolved that he should be 'brought to book' the very next time, still his debts must be paid; the boy could not be dishonoured. All these expenses were really matters of course; they would not have troubled the Freiherr in the least except for this unaccountable yearly deficit in his income.

"I suppose the bad harvest years are at the bottom of the mischief," the Freiherr thought, and consoled himself with the reflection that the good years must come, and that then the 'unavoidable expenses' would be met, and the 'inconceivable deficits' be made up. He had of late positively loathed the books of the estate, and had in consequence rather neglected them. Now he remembered that the time was at hand for the first instalment to be paid of a loan he had had of Count Eichhof, and that he could not possibly pay it. He looked up from his gloomy contemplation of the soil which had once been forest-land, and which was to be forest-land again in the future, and drove over to Eichhof to discuss matters with the Count. But he did not find him at home. "The Herr Count is hunting to-day," the footman informed the visitor. The Freiherr decided to await the Count's return. He could not be long away, for twilight was close at hand. He asked for the Countess, was most graciously received by her, and inquired after the welfare of her sons. When the Countess talked of her sons she adopted a manner and bearing which plainly indicated that, although the young men might very possibly conduct themselves pretty much after the fashion of other young people of their age and rank in society, still they were unquestionably very remarkable men, as she and indeed many others well knew. Bernhard was at present, after the usual wedding-tour among the Alps, installed in his vine-wreathed villa in one of the Thiergarten streets.

"He writes seldom," said the Countess, "and seems to spend much of his time at home. I could have wished that they had continued to travel until the *saison morte* was over in Berlin; for, although he is extremely happy with his little wife, a man of his force and intellect needs social excitement."

"Oh, your daughter-in-law is so charming that her husband's distaste for general society is easily understood," the Freiherr observed.

"She is a good child," said the Countess.

A more attentive listener than the Freiherr could possibly be at this time would have plainly heard in the Countess's intonation as she uttered the words 'good child' the unspoken thought, "but much too insignificant for my Bernhard." The Freiherr, however, was only listening to catch the first sound of the hoofs of the horses that were bringing home the hunting-party, and just as the Countess was preparing to tell him of the charming letter she had just received from her cousin the ambassador, with whom she had begun a correspondence "solely upon Walter's account," the wished-for cadence struck upon his ear.

"I think your husband has returned," he said, "Allow me to go and meet him."

"I don't think it is my husband," was the reply. "His voice usually makes itself unmistakably heard upon his return from hunting. But pray inform yourself about it, my dear Baron."

The Freiherr left the room, although there was still no sound of the Count's voice. The Countess sat gazing towards the western sky, where the last gleams of the dying day faintly lingered, and began to wonder why the servant had not brought in the lamp, and why the house was so silent, since, as the Freiherr did not return, her husband must surely be at home.

The room grew darker and darker, and silence still prevailed. This quiet was positively oppressive. The Countess arose, passed through the antechamber, and opened the door leading out to the landing of the grand staircase. No light was burning here either, but from below came a dull gleam, and the smothered sounds of hurried words and whispers.

"What is the matter? Why are the lamps not lighted?" the Countess asked, standing at the head of the stairs. The Freiherr, who stood at their foot with a candle in his hand, looked up at her with a face so pale and horror-stricken that a cold shudder ran through her as she repeated her question, "What is the matter? For God's sake tell me what has happened!"

"Be calm," said the Baron, who stood beside her in an instant, while his voice trembled as perceptibly as did the candle in his hand. "Be calm, I entreat you, dearest madame; your husband has met with an accident."



The Countess grew pale to the very lips. "Oh, God!" she shrieked; "where is he? where is he?" And she would have rushed down the staircase, but the Freiherr detained her. "He is not yet here,--he is coming. One of his huntsmen brought us the news."

"He is coming?" she cried; "he is only wounded,--he must be only wounded?"

"He is seriously injured, very seriously," said the Freiherr. "I fear we must be prepared for everything,--even for the worst!"

The Countess stared at him with eyes wide with horror; her lips twitched convulsively, as though unable to utter the terrible word written so plainly in the Freiherr's face,--uttered so distinctly in this fearful silence, which was interrupted only by the sounds of suppressed sobs from the group of servants in the hall below.

Suddenly she threw up her arms. "Dead!" she shrieked, "dead!"

The word was spoken, and she fell back senseless into the Baron's arms.

At that moment a vehicle drew up in the castle court-yard, and the Count, surrounded by his huntsmen, and a few others whom the accident had called together, was slowly carried up the terrace steps. They bore him into the castle through the same portal which he had left lusty and joyous only a few hours before, never to behold it again.

With drooping tail, and now and then uttering a melancholy whine, his favourite hound followed his master's body; he had long been the faithful companion of his sport. And in the wagon that had brought his master home dead lay the gun, which all shunned to touch, for it had caused all this woe, by its accidental discharge as the Count was leaping a ditch in the ardour of the chase.

A few hours later, mounted horsemen rode out into the night, and telegraphs and letters spread the news of the Count's sudden death far and wide.

In the big drawing-room heavy silver candelabra, with their myriad candles, are burning at the head of the couch where Count Eichhof is lying sunk in his last sleep. His head is turned slightly to one side, so as entirely to conceal the fatal wound in the right temple, and the smile that the excitement of the hunt had called to his face still lingers there.

"Can this be? Is it really true?" murmurs the Countess, seated in an arm-chair beside the couch, and gazing fixedly with dry eyes at the smiling face; while the old servant, kneeling at the dead man's feet, slowly shakes his white head. He cannot believe it, it is so unlike his master to die; it must all be an evil dream. But below-stairs all are fully convinced of its reality. The huntsman in the kitchen is telling circumstantially, for the twelfth time, the whole terrible story,--how the Count jumped across the ditch and the gun went off. Nor does he forget to mention the black rabbit that crossed their path when the chase had just begun, or his own frightful dream of the previous night, which had caused him to say to his wife when he left her, "Look out for some accident to-day!" And the cook listens with the same shudder that he felt the first time the story was told, only it passes off rather more quickly, and he is able to find consolation not only in the tankard to which he has frequent recourse, but also in the thought that he stands very well "with the young master" and will in all probability retain his position. At last the huntsman goes home, the kitchen is gradually deserted, and the lights are extinguished, leaving the castle in darkness, save for the broad glare out into the night from the windows of the big drawing-room, where he who was the castle's lord now lies at rest.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### AT THE TOMB.

The Count's three sons hurried to Eichhof immediately upon the receipt of the sad news, and the obsequies were performed with all the gloomy pomp demanded by the occasion and by the rank of the deceased. The sarcophagus, in accordance with a traditionary custom of the family, was placed before the altar in the Eichhof monumental chapel, where it was to remain three years before it should be finally consigned to the tomb. The road to the chapel was still strewn with cut hemlock boughs, when Walter Eichhof slowly walked along it some days after the funeral ceremonies, while Bernhard and Lothar were busied over the affairs of the estate and the settlement of the Count's testamentary dispositions.

Although the dead man had annihilated all Walter's plans for the future, he had always been to him a tender and loving father, whose merry voice and resounding tread he seemed still to hear everywhere in Eichhof, so indissolubly were they connected in his mind with his home. And now that voice and that tread had died away forever! Walter wandered restlessly through the well-known rooms of the castle, lingering in those where he had been with his father during the last few months, pacing to and fro on the terrace where he had talked with him about his future, when the Count in his sanguine way had spoken of his expectation of living to an advanced age and of providing handsomely for all his children. Where now were all his plans, and what was Walter's future to be? He knew that there would be no means to further him in that diplomatic career which might perhaps have reconciled him to the study of the law, and the prospect of passing his youth as the legal authority of some petty town seemed as insupportable as was any idea at present of transgressing the injunctions of the dead.

The Count's "I will not have it!" still rang in the son's ears. Oh, if his father were only here now, that he might appeal to him once more! An idle wish. That "I will not have it!" had been spoken, and Walter bowed to the decision of him whose untimely departure would greatly change his home for him, as he well knew. He was not upon intimate terms with Bernhard; their training and education had differed so widely. He had never appealed to him for aid as Lothar had been in the habit of doing. And he had paid but little regard to his brother's claims as the future head of the family. So long as their father lived, he had felt himself upon an entire equality with his brothers. They were all 'sons of the house.' Now he was the younger brother of the heir who had entered into possession. He had no rights to assert, and only his brother's kindness could justify him in regarding the castle as a home in the future. And this very feeling of dependence which united Lothar with his brother estranged Walter from him. He was more reserved with Bernhard than before, partly perhaps because he thought he observed that Lothar, and even his mother, treated him with a degree of deference. It wounded him deeply to hear his mother lament not only her loss, but her changed circumstances. To his irritated sensibility it seemed as if the settlement of the estate thrust grief for the departed into the background, and as though life had put forward so many claims that but small time could be spared in which to pay due tribute to death. All this distressed him, and hence he often strolled away to the quiet chapel, where nothing offended his filial affection or disturbed his memories of his dead father.

No one out of the family, except the sexton, who lived close by, owned a key to the building; and therefore Walter was surprised to find the door unlocked and ajar. He looked in. The light through the stained-glass window fell full upon a female figure, dressed in black, kneeling beside the sarcophagus, and engaged in hanging about it wreaths of ferns and autumnal leaves. Walter entered softly. The kneeling figure was so occupied with her pious task that she did not observe him until he stood close beside her. Then she looked up.

"Adela!" Walter exclaimed, in surprise. "You here? I never expected to find you here."

"And why not?" she asked, a gleam of defiance in her eyes, which nevertheless showed traces of recent tears. "Did I not love your father dearly?" she continued, with a perceptible tremor in her voice, "and do I not know how dearly he loved the woods?--and--and--there were only flowers from the garden and greenhouse laid upon his coffin."

Walter was silent for a moment, looking down at the forest wreaths that Adela had brought. Then he took her hand in his. "You are right," he said, gently. "Your heart is true and kind, after all."

Instead of replying, the girl turned from him, and, hurrying out of the chapel, sank down upon the steps, covered her face with her hands, and burst into a passion of sobs.

Walter followed her, startled, and yet touched, by this outbreak of grief.

"I thank you for these tears, Adela," he said, beating himself on the step beside her. "You loved him, and can understand what we have all lost."

"Oh, I know there is no one left like him, so good and kind!" the girl sobbed. "And he loved me, too, and was always tender to me. I can never forget it, for no one else cares for me!"

"Adela!" Walter exclaimed, interrupting her.

She dried her eyes, and looked up at him. "Yes," she went on, "no one gives me credit for anything good; no one really cares for me; but he--he said, only a few days ago,--the last time he came to us,--'Little Adelaide,'--oh, no one will ever call me that again!--'Little Adelaide, some day you will----' But why should I repeat it, and to you, who are surprised that I have a warm, kind heart? Oh, I am so unhappy!"

In spite of her naïve egotism in the expression of her grief, Walter felt that she was really deeply moved, and the unaccustomed spectacle of one who was always laughing, always gay, giving way to such a heart-breaking burst of tears, touched him profoundly.

"Adela, dear Adela, I pray you be calm," he entreated. "How can you say that no one cares for you,--you who have a father, and so many others who love you?"

"Don't speak of them," she interrupted him, angrily. "You do not understand. Papa lets me do

as I please because he cannot help it, and, besides, he thinks of nothing but his business affairs and of Hugo. He cares about that for me," and the girl snapped her fingers. "My governess is going back to her home, and is immensely delighted to be rid of me. Frau von Rosen is angry with me, and will not let Alma come to see me, because I persuaded her the other day to disguise herself with me in two new liveries that had just come home, and to drive into town, where nobody recognized us, and where all that we did was to eat a couple of queen-cakes at the confectioner's. And all because of that perfectly innocent frolic I am thought unfeminine and odious, and I must lose my best friend. And now you come, and give me to understand that you think me heartless; and your dear, good, splendid father is dead, and will never speak kindly to me again. I am alone,--all alone!"

Walter took her hand again; he knew that she was indeed alone if the Rosens had forsaken her, and he was so grieved for her that he almost forgot his purpose in coming hither.

"And it hurts me more than all," Adela went on in an agitated way, "that you, who have been my good comrade ever since we were little children, should think all manner of ill of me, and should treat me so coldly as you did the day of the funeral. Then I thought it was because of your grief, but now I know that it was something else. No, no, do not contradict me. I know you were surprised to find me here, and to see my wreaths, because you thought me too frivolous and childish, and heaven knows what beside, to think of what your dear dead father loved best. Can you deny it?"

"No, Adela, I will not deny that I was surprised," Walter frankly confessed; "but I cannot tell you how happy I am to find I was wrong."

"Why did you think so of me?"

"Because, Adela, you have lately seemed 'so' to me. We were always good friends until a few months ago, and then you suddenly changed your manner to me. When we rode together you talked only of new dresses, of the officers from the neighbouring garrison, of your plans and prospects for the winter, which you hoped to pass in Berlin, and of heaven knows what nonsense besides. If I tried to talk of something else, you yawned, and I felt that we no longer were in sympathy with each other. And when I called upon you in Kissingen in the summer, as I was passing through the town, instead of my old playmate I found a fashionable little lady flirting with a couple of affected fops and quite ready to make game of her old 'comrade.'"

"That is not true!" exclaimed the girl.

"Oh, yes, it is," said Walter, who had quite talked himself into a heat; "remember the day we made a party on the mountain, and you gave your shawl to Herr von somebody, and your parasol to that other fellow to carry, and when I asked whether you had nothing for me, you answered, although you must have seen that I was not in jest, 'Oh, yes: my caprices; you may have those; the youngest always ought to carry the heaviest burden.' And then you ran on laughing with the others, and we never spoke another word to each other the whole day long. Do you remember?"

"Yes; but I did not mean anything."

"Nevertheless you were ready enough to laugh with the others at your 'comrade's' discomfiture; and that laugh broke the bond between us. From that moment you were no more to me than a strange young lady; and that I forget this and tell you all that I am saying now, is due to the sight of those wreaths and of your tears."

"And when the wreaths are withered and the tears are dried, must we be strangers again?" Adela whispered softly, with a questioning glance.

"Would you have it otherwise?" he asked.

She was silent, her looks bent on the ground. He, too, looked away from her beyond the crosses and marbles of the church-yard, where the autumn asters were blooming and a few belated white butterflies were fluttering. All was so quiet around them, except for the low rustling amid the old oaks on the other side of the church-yard, and a soft twitter from a little bird perched on the roof of the chapel, who hushed his note suddenly, as though silenced by the influence of the spot.

Walter's gentle mood had changed. He was irritated by the provoking silence of this girl, who had no kind reply for him, and he was wellnigh ashamed of having made an attempt to renew the youthful friendship the loss of which had given him more pain than he liked to acknowledge even to himself.

He arose and touched his hat.

"Farewell, Fräulein Adela," he said, and turned to go.

Then she looked up, and all the former bravado had vanished from her eyes. "Walter!" she said, and at the sound of her voice he stopped involuntarily. "Walter, do not go; stay for one moment and listen to me."

"I thought you wished me to go," he said.

She shook her head emphatically. "Do not tease me, Walter," she said, imploringly. "You see, it is not so easy to confess that one has been in the wrong. I know I was wrong, and that I am really very vain and often behaved very foolishly to you. You were quite right to be displeased, and I am glad to know that you were so, but for all that you need not be so very angry with me. You see, I know what a foolish girl I am; and indeed I don't care in the least what people in general think of me, but it cuts me to the heart when I see that you take my nonsense seriously and believe me heartless."

"Walter sat down again beside her on the step.

"I never thought you 'heartless,' Adela," he cried, interrupting her; "only superficial and----"

"But that's just the same thing!" she exclaimed; "and I cannot change your opinion of me all in a moment. Perhaps you are partly right; but one thing I can and will promise you, and that is, that I will always in future be honest and frank with you, and never again play such idiotic pranks as on that day at Kissingen. I will not pretend to be better than I am, and neither will I pretend to be worse than I am, and you shall always have the right to lecture me and tell me what you think of me. In return you must promise always to be my friend. If ever I vex you again, tell me so, and scold me, but do not instantly run away from me as though I were too contemptible a thing to turn back and look at. Will you promise me this?"

She looked up at him with eager anxiety, though with a childlike confidence, and held out her hand, which he grasped cordially.

"Yes, Adela," he said, "I will be a true and faithful friend to you. I cannot tell you how glad I am to find my dear little playfellow once more. I know now that she may sometimes hide herself, but she will not vanish utterly. Be sure I shall remember this."

Adela gave him so sunny a smile that he smiled too, and then, passing quickly to other things, she asked after his mother and his brothers.

"You are alone too, Walter," she said. "You are very unlike your brothers, and your mother cannot be much to you. She sees you more in the future than in the present."

"Why, Adela!" said Walter, almost startled, "what puts such ideas into your head?"

"I keep my eyes open," she said, and then grew suddenly very grave. "I only mean that your father is a terrible loss to you, and that Eichhof will be much changed. Thea will come, and I am glad of it, although she is something of a prig, like all the Rosens. I love her dearly for all that, and she will be a good sister to you."

Walter gazed sadly before him.

"Come," said Adela, laying her hand upon his arm, "do not look so troubled; you know I am just like a sister too."

He pressed her hand; they rose, and she noticed that his eyes sought the door of the chapel.

"Shall we not go in again together?" she asked, gently, and they ascended the steps and entered the building. Adela knelt down beside the sarcophagus, and hid her face for some time upon the wreaths that she had placed there. Walter looked down at her, and it seemed to him that they were in the presence of his father, who smiled upon them.

When Adela rose from her knees she looked him gravely and earnestly in the face, and then left the chapel with him in silence. They went out into the calm autumn evening; the skies were naming with crimson and gold, for the sun was just sinking behind the line of forest that bounded the horizon, and the bell in the little village church began to ring for vespers.

"How solemn!" said Adela, pausing before the chapel. Suddenly she turned to Walter again: "From this moment we are friends for life, are we not?"

"Yes, Adela; at least I promise to be your friend for life," he replied.

She took from her finger a ring set with a sapphire. "Take this ring in remembrance of today," she said. "It was my mother's, and I have always worn it, first on my chain and then on my finger. Take it."

"But, Adela," Walter said, delighted, and yet hesitating to accept so strange a gift, "will it not be missed from your finger?"

"Who is there to miss it? No one cares enough for me to notice whether I wear it or not," she said, with some bitterness.

He took the ring, and as he did so detained her hand in his for some moments, as they walked down the steps and across the church-yard.

"I thank you, Adela; the ring will be most precious indeed to me," he said, in a low, earnest voice. "But I do not need it to make me remember this evening."

She smiled, and at the gate of the church-yard they took leave of each other. The chapel lay about half-way between Rollin and Eichhof, so that each could reach home before dark.

Adela felt very happy this evening, and, as there was no one to whom she could speak of her happiness, she carried a basket of sugar into the stable and fed her various black and brown pets.

"Some living creatures shall be happy with me, at all events," she said, stroking the necks of the horses as they took their sugar from her hand.

No one shared Walter's happiness. Indeed, he was not clear as to whether the emotion that filled his heart at the thought of Adela was precisely happiness. But he thought much of her all through the evening, and was even more quiet and dreamy in his mood than usual.

## CHAPTER IX.

### CLOUDY WEATHER AT EICHHOF.

Several months had passed since Count Eichhof's death. The Countess had withdrawn to her dower-house, about half a league distant, whence, however, she drove over at least once every week to complain of the miserable condition of her present abode. She witnessed, with a resignation made apparent amid many sighs and tears, the alterations effected by her son and her daughter-in-law in Eichhof. She found it perfectly right and proper that Bernhard should be master there, but that Thea--"that insignificant little girl," as she called her--should have usurped the position so lately her own, was more than she could understand or endure.

It required all Thea's gentleness and amiability to enable her to endure her mother-in-law's visits, and her task was made none the easier by Bernhard's passing almost the entire day out-of-doors. The Freiherr von Hohenstein, who had found the son quite as accommodating a creditor as the father had been before him, said that Bernhard was "launching out tremendously," which was his way of designating the restless energy with which Bernhard had entered upon the duties of his new position.

It was not in vain that the young man had so often heard from his mother that his position would be one of unusual distinction, and that he himself was endowed with extraordinary powers of mind. He was convinced that much, very much, was due from him to himself and to his position, and his head was so crammed with ideas of the reform that was to be effected in the management of his estate, that he could not waste an instant before beginning to carry them out in action. His father had employed clever agents, and had left all the farming to their care, prudently aware that he was quite ignorant of rural economy; but Bernhard was determined to see to everything himself, to have every operation conducted under his own eye. An unfavourable crisis in the business world had greatly depreciated the iron-works on the Eichhof estate. Bernhard determined to indemnify himself for the loss of income in this direction, and to this end established various extensive factories. Eichhof was to be a model estate in every respect.

It must be confessed that results by no means kept pace with his purposes, and his orders, issued as they were with autocratic decision, produced terrible confusion when, as frequently happened, they were hostile not only to traditional customs, but to especial existing arrangements. His bailiffs would gravely shake their heads at the young Count's excessive though praiseworthy energy, and slight differences would arise, which were, however, speedily adjusted by his personal amiability and the rare kindness of his manner towards his inferiors.

Owing to his personal qualities, and to the influence of his old superintendent, whose faithful attachment to the Eichhof family knew no bounds, Bernhard suffered no losses of any significance, and was saved from the disastrous results that might have ensued from his ignorant interference in all sorts of affairs connected with the estate.

"He is hardly more than a boy, but he'll come all right," the old superintendent would declare. "Others lose their money at cards or on the race-course, we waste some on these 'useless improvements;' but there's enough left after all, and it will all come right with time. The Count has not lost his head, but the sudden possession of such an estate and such an income has confused it a little, that's all. He is so young."

Thea sometimes sadly missed her idyllic Thiergarten home, but in her secret soul she was proud of Bernhard's untiring energy, and thought it only natural that he should have but little time to devote to her, since, as she had been educated to think, wealth entailed many duties upon its possessor.

What she did regret was that, even when he came home to her, it was often with a clouded brow. He could not forget even in her presence the business of the day. She told herself that this was also quite natural; he must take more interest in these important and weighty matters than in her small joys and sorrows. Nevertheless, she felt a certain void in her life, which could not be filled either by her domestic occupations or by her intercourse with her parents or with Adela Hohenstein. Adela was friends with Alma again, and had promised to be very quiet and good; but it is to be feared that she was a sad romp still at heart. Thea laughed and gossiped with the girls, as she had always done, but somehow she did not seem really to belong to them any longer.

Thus the winter passed, and Easter came again. Lothar and Walter both came to Eichhof at Bernhard's invitation, but the holidays were very different from those of the previous year. Lothar's debts amounted to such a sum that Bernhard, who now needed all his money for his improvements, declared that he would never again pay one penny for his brother, and would help him now only upon condition that he would have himself transferred from Berlin to his native province, where the cavalry regiments were scattered about in small garrisons and there was not so much opportunity to spend money. Willy-nilly, Lothar was obliged to agree to this condition, since he was utterly powerless to extricate himself from his financial embarrassments without his brother's aid, and was only too grateful to be helped out of a scrape once more.

"I believe you are the only one who has any real compassion for me," said Lothar one day to Alma Rosen, with whom he had been left alone in his sister-in-law's boudoir. "You pity me, do you not?"

"And so does Thea," Alma replied, a little embarrassed, as she always was with Lothar; "but then she is glad too, for she thinks that you will be near us--that is, near Eichhof--in your new garrison."

"Well, yes, that would be the best thing that could happen to me," he said, smiling. "And Thea is glad? That's very good of her. You both have excellent hearts, you and Thea, but your father and mother, you know, look upon me as a terrible black sheep."

Alma was silent, and looked out of the window. She could not deny the truth of his assertion, and she would not have admitted it for the world.

Then Lothar, in default of any other occupation or amusement, proceeded to give Alma a short lecture upon himself. "Pray don't turn your eyes so resolutely away," he began; "indeed, I am not quite such a black sheep as I am called; only I cannot, somehow or other, manage my money affairs. It's contrary to my nature, and nobody ever taught me how to do it, and yet when I go all wrong every one is vastly surprised. Now, my dear Alma, is not that perfectly unjust? There's no denying that money in itself is a very low, vulgar thing, and consequently only common men can manage it properly. I like beautiful things, and never want to ask their cost. I enjoy, and I like to share my enjoyment with others, without pausing to consider its price. I bask in the sunshine and consider the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, who never count the cost and yet continue to live. Suddenly a black cloud thrusts itself between me and the sun, and a perfect hail-storm of unpaid bills comes pelting down upon me, while all my dear friends and neighbours join in a chorus of 'You are not worthy to enjoy the sunshine, for you never remember that twice one are two.' Oh, yes, my dear Alma, life is very hard, especially when one is so alone in the world as I am. Yes, if I had a wife as gentle, wise, and lovely as your sister Thea, something might be made of me after all. I might become a really respectable member of society."

It was perhaps quite as well that Thea's entrance interrupted the conversation at this point; and half an hour later Lothar was making preparations for his departure, whistling an opera air, and with as little thought of the pelting storm of unpaid bills which his brother was sure to convert to sunshine as of Alma's sweet serious face. The girl meanwhile sat by herself in the bow-windowed room, and would have fervently prayed heaven to send Lothar a wise and gentle wife like Thea, if only her heart would not have throbbed so loud and fast in its protest against any such petition.

Adela Hohenstein came running in and roused her from her dreams. "Here you sit lonely and forlorn as an enchanted princess in her tower gazing drearily from her window in hopes of a glimpse of some princely deliverer!" she cried, laughing. "Good heavens, how stupid and quiet Eichhof is, when one compares it with what it was awhile ago!"

"How can you talk so, Adela? You know they are all in deep mourning; any entertainments are quite out of the question," said Alma, conscious that just now she would infinitely prefer her solitude to Adela's society.

"Oh, I don't mean that," exclaimed Adela; "but just fancy, I came all the way up-stairs without meeting a living soul except the servants, whose faces are so long and solemn since the funeral that it gives one the horrors to look at them. What in the world has become of the entire Eichhof family?"

"Thea is walking in the park with her mother-in-law, Lothar is getting ready to leave Eichhof, and Walter is having a talk with Bernhard. They have been closeted together for more than an hour."

"So Lothar is packing up? Then the bomb-shell has burst, and Bernhard has turned him out. You need not deny it, my dear, I know all about his debts; Hugo told papa of them to console him. And what is to be done now?"

Alma told all that she knew, but Adela listened with only half an ear. "What is Walter discussing with Bernhard?" she asked, suddenly.

"I am sure I cannot tell."

"Something is going very wrong with Walter," Adela observed; "he is altogether too solemn. I used to have so much fun with him; but when he paid us a visit the other day it was like the shock of a shower-bath, he was so changed. Lothar, who had far more reason for being grave and solemn, was very merry and amusing, while Walter--but indeed, Alma, you must have seen yourself how fearfully stupid and tiresome Walter has grown to be."

Alma had not noticed Walter's increase of gravity; what she did observe at this moment was the arrival before the hall door of Lothar's travelling-carriage.

She looked anxiously towards the door through which Lothar entered to take his leave, just as the Countesses Eichhof returned from their walk. Judging from the countenance of each, their *tête-à-tête* had not been of a very edifying nature. Bernhard and Walter also made their appearance, and were quite in harmony with the rest of the party, for they looked irritated and discontented.

"Good-morning to some and good-by to others, in most admired confusion," said Adela, offering her hand right and left, and exchanging greetings and farewells, until Lothar's carriage had carried him away.

The Countess wiped her eyes with her lace handkerchief, and pitied in one breath her "dear Lothar, who is such a fine fellow after all," and her "beloved Bernhard, who has so much worry and vexation on his brother's account." And finally she clasped Walter in her arms, declaring that he would never be anything but a blessing and comfort to every one. Whereupon Bernhard instantly left the room, closing the door after him with unnecessary violence, whilst Walter looked the picture of dejection.

"Ah! all joy has fled from this household," sighed the Countess, with a reproachful glance towards her daughter-in-law, who was silently bending over her embroidery-frame.

"Upon my word," whispered Adela to her friend, who looked quite cast down by Lothar's sudden departure, "it is too terrible here to-day. If you do not want me to order round my carriage instantly, ask Walter to take a walk with us."

"He does not look as if he wanted to take a walk."

"No matter; ask him, or I will go immediately."

Walter made no objection to going, and the three young people left the bow-windowed room. Thea looked after them with entreaty in her eyes, as though to detain them, but they paid her no heed, and she turned again to her work with a resigned face, resolved to endure in silence the further unavoidable *tête-à-tête* with her mother-in-law.

It was not destined, however, to last long on this occasion, for in a very few minutes Herr von Rosen's light wagon drove up; he had come for his daughter Alma. Thea hastened to meet him, and brought him in triumph into the room, which was instantly illumined as by sunlight by the old man's genial smile, the brightness of which called forth a pale reflection even on the old Countess's sad face. No human being could remain unresponsive to Herr von Rosen's cordiality. It was so easy to see that his kindness was not the result of conventional habit, but was due to the genuine warmth of a noble heart, that it cheered and refreshed every one around him.

"I knew that I should find you here," he said, turning to the old Countess, "for I stopped on my way hither at your cottage, and they told me you were at Eichhof. You have planted new shrubberies around the house, I see, and the balcony is an immense improvement. The old house will soon be a charming little retreat."

"Indeed, did you really think it pretty?" asked the Countess. "Good heavens, it is so plain and simple!"

"I think it charming; and if you find it too quiet, why, you always have Eichhof, you know. I am so glad to think of you so near here, for my wife is, as you know, too much of an invalid to drive out very often, and my dear little daughter will often need counsel and aid in her new sphere of life. She has learned something already, however, for her manner of receiving her guests at her last small dinner reminded me a little of old times at Eichhof. I was proud of you, my little Thea, and I was sincerely grateful to you for your influence over her, my dear Countess."

Herr von Rosen put his arm around his daughter's waist, and his frank blue eyes as he looked at her were full of affection. For the first time to-day the old Countess really smiled, and also looked kindly at her daughter-in-law.

Scarcely, however, had Herr von Rosen succeeded in banishing the clouds from the brows of the ladies, when Bernhard entered with the threatening of a positive tempest in his face.

"I am very glad to see you to-day, sir," he said, as, after greeting his father-in-law, he seated himself beside him. "I have arranged Lothar's affairs after the manner you advised; they are all right: but now it is Walter's turn."

"Walter? Surely the boy has no debts?"

"No; but I almost wish he had, for then I should know what to do, inconvenient as it might be for me just at present."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the old Countess, "what is the matter now?"

"You must be told of it, mother, and perhaps there is no better time than the present for the telling. Walter has gone back to his insane idea of last year,—in fact, he seems never to have really relinquished it,—and he has been attending medical lectures in addition to those upon jurisprudence. He insists that he shall never be worth anything unless he pursues the study of medicine."

"Impossible!" exclaimed his mother. "I never will give my consent to so crazy a scheme. Besides, my cousin the ambassador has promised him a position."

Bernhard made an impatient gesture with his hand. "You know, mother, that we have already discussed this matter," he said, "and you know that I have given up all thoughts of a diplomatic future for Walter, because such a career requires an independent fortune, far larger than any I could give him. My plan was that he should first become an assessor, and then a provincial judge somewhere in the country. Thus he would become entirely independent----"

"But not before many years, and in the mean time he would be called 'Assessor' and 'Circuit Judge,'" moaned the Countess. "You cannot seriously entertain the idea of your brother's being a circuit judge? He had better enter the army immediately. Oh, if he only had never studied anything!"

"The army would have been best, but it cannot be thought of now, and that is not the question at present; he insists upon studying medicine."

"Did you tell him it was entirely out of the question?"

"I told him my opinion on the subject, to which, however, he opposed his own. He declares that he has done his best conscientiously to comply with our father's wishes, and that it is upon his account alone that he has silently endured and struggled. He has, he says, been very unhappy, and is firmly convinced that he shall miss his vocation and live a useless life if he does conform to these wishes. In short, he said a great deal to me that sounds plausible enough, but that nevertheless does not alter the fact that this idea of his of studying medicine is insanely absurd. I told him that if he persisted in it I would not help him with a single penny, to which he replied that he had no intention of applying to me for assistance; he meant that his income of five hundred thalers should suffice for all his needs, and nothing would induce him to accept anything further from me. Of course after this we can have no more to do with each other. He declares that nothing I can say will have the least influence upon his determination, which is the result of mature deliberation, and that he does not want any aid from me. The case is clear, and a breach is unavoidable if Walter will not listen to reason. He values your opinion highly, sir, and I thought perhaps you would expostulate with him. I can do no more."

"Yes, yes, you must talk to him," said the Countess, wiping away her tears, while Thea looked eagerly at her father, quite undecided whether to side with Walter or with Bernhard.

"And what in the world can I say to him?" Herr von Rosen asked. "Certainly, from what I know of Walter, I judge it very unlikely that he should arrive at any over-hasty conclusions, and I am not at all competent to overthrow in an hour a resolve that has been the result on his part of a year of struggle and endurance. Besides, if I did as you desire, it would be in opposition to my own conviction. Walter is subjected to the necessity of carving out his own fortunes, of winning his own means of subsistence. A hard task under all circumstances, why should we make it harder for him by forcing him to do what he positively dislikes? The beginnings of every career are arduous enough, and, since Walter does not possess sufficient means to surround himself with outward luxuries, it is surely natural that he should covet inward content. This he can find only in a calling in which he takes a genuine interest, to which he can cheerfully devote all his powers of mind."

"But how can he do that as a doctor?" wailed the Countess.

There was a slight smile upon Rosen's kindly face as he replied, "Your son probably wonders how he can do it as circuit judge. It is all a matter of taste and temperament."



"Oh, don't speak of a circuit judge! If he is to be nothing but that he may as well be a doctor." The Countess sighed heavily, and, putting her handkerchief to her eyes, again burst into tears.

"One is certainly as honourable a calling as the other," Rosen said, calmly.

Bernhard maintained a gloomy silence. Thea gazed at her father with eyes that understood and appreciated him. His view of the matter was new to her, but she agreed with him.

Fortunately, the young girls with Walter made their appearance at this moment, and the conversation was not prolonged before Adela. Countess Eichhof, finding it impossible to control her agitation, and with very vague ideas as to what really was Walter's intention, withdrew to bury with many tears her enchanting dream of Walter as an ambassador.

Adela, who found the air at Eichhof to-day not at all to her liking, ordered her carriage, and Walter and Alma accompanied her into the hall. "Oh, I forgot to bring down the book you lent me, Alma!" she exclaimed, standing on the lowest of the flight of steps. "No, Walter, you cannot get it; I left it in Alma's room."

Alma good-naturedly ran to fetch it, and Adela looked after her with a smile.

"I left it there on purpose," she said to Walter; "and I hid it a little, for I wanted to speak to you one moment alone."

Walter smiled at her small plot, though he shook his finger at her. "What have you to say to me?" he said, stepping close to her side.

"First, I want to know whether you are still my good friend."

Instead of replying, Walter took out her ring, which he wore on a ribbon around his neck, and kissed it.

Adela blushed.

"Put it away quickly," she said, with a shy glance around. "No one must know that you have it, for people are so stupid; too stupid! They could not understand. But what I really wanted to ask was why you are so terribly serious and quiet. Has anything gone particularly wrong?"

Adela's blue eyes were so near Walter's face that his breath stirred the curls upon her forehead, and she looked at him so earnestly and kindly that his cheek suddenly flushed, and the voice in which he answered her was rather unsteady. "I cannot explain it to you now, Adela. It is a long story, and everything seems to me to be going particularly wrong just now."

"But I am fairly dying with curiosity; tell me about it, quickly!" she exclaimed, impatiently.

He shook his head. "Not now; I will come to Rollin to-morrow."

"Ride through the park, then, and I will be waiting for you on the round white bench near the pond. Some one is always sure to interrupt us at the house, and you never will be able to finish your story. By the white bench, then, at eleven o'clock in the morning; I cannot possibly wait until the afternoon."

She had scarcely issued this *ordre de bataille*, which was given quite in the tone of a military commander, when Alma appeared with the book, and Fräulein Adela drove off, well satisfied with the success of her plot and with the prospect of Walter's visit.

## CHAPTER X.

### FOUND AND LOST.

There was a misty green, betokening the coming spring, upon the bare boughs of the trees in the park at Rollin, and the little lake in its midst reflected the clear blue of the skies above it. Adela, seated on the white bench, near the water, was hardly aware either of the budding branches around her or of the gleaming mirror before her. Her thoughts were occupied with her expected visitor, and her hands and eyes with a beautiful brown greyhound that never seemed to tire of leaping to and fro over the riding-whip she held out for him.

"What will Walter tell me?" she thought. "Jump, Fidèle!" she called out to the dog, who had

paused for a moment and looked dubiously at his mistress. "You are a good creature," she went on, stroking his handsome head, and again her thoughts flew to Walter. "Poor dear fellow, his eyes have so sad a look in them now; and indeed it is too uncomfortable in Eichhof. Thea really looks quite ill; she must be fairly bored to death. Come, Fidèle, you shall jump once more, and then I'll give you some sugar."

And the dog jumped again, and was fed with sugar, while his mistress began to think that Walter allowed himself to be waited for too long. Suddenly she sprang up. The sound of a horse's hoofs was audible, and in an instant Walter turned into the avenue of oaks that led to where she was sitting. Fidèle ran towards him, and leaped beside the horse barking his welcome, while Adela, in sudden and unexpected confusion, which she strove to hide behind an affectation of indifference, fixed her eyes upon the surface of the lake beyond the rider.

"Well," she said, when Walter, having tied his horse to a tree, stood beside her, "I have only just arrived. I nearly forgot our appointment."

"I should have been so sorry not to find you," he said, "for after our offensive and defensive alliance it would have pained me to leave Eichhof without telling you myself of what you will be sure to hear from others, coloured, probably, by their prejudices."

"Leave? You are going away? Where? You have only just come!" the girl exclaimed, evidently alarmed, and quite forgetting her part of indifference, as she drew Fidèle towards her and put her arms around his neck, as if craving some sympathy from him, while she looked up at Walter anxiously.

"You perhaps remember a ride we took together, about a year ago, when I told you how hard I had found it to resign the idea of studying medicine," Walter began.

"Good heavens, Walter," she interrupted him, "you are not going to begin about that again?"

He gazed at her seriously and sadly for a moment in silence, and noted the eager and yet terrified expression in her eyes.

"But I am," he then said, softly. "I am firmly, unalterably resolved----"

"Walter!" she exclaimed loudly, thrusting Fidèle from her. "You cannot! you dare not! Think of your father!"

"I have thought of him and tried to do as he wished. But do you not think that my father loved me and earnestly desired my happiness?"

"Yes; and for that very reason you ought to do nothing that he would have disapproved."

"And suppose I am perfectly convinced that I never could be contented, but, on the contrary, should be positively miserable, in the career he chose for me?"

"You still ought to pursue that career."

"And live but half a life, tormented by the consciousness that I was entirely unfitted for my position? No, Adela, my father never could have wished me to do this. When I told him of my wishes I had not yet made an attempt to conform to his. This was my duty, and I have done it. Now what I only suspected has come to be a certainty. I have no interest whatever in the study of the law. I cannot make it the business of my life. Do you not believe that the knowledge of this would alter my father's views?"

"Your father never would have allowed you to be a doctor."

"Then he would have sacrificed his better self to a prejudice. The very essence of his being was a kindly enjoyment of life, and it would have caused him the greatest sorrow to have been the occasion of unhappiness to one of his sons. I believe that if he had lived he would have seen this and would have yielded to my wishes. Happiness and unhappiness are dealt out to us by heaven, but human will is not without influence in their distribution. As far as I can I choose to be happy, and in so being to fulfil what I know to have been my father's chief hope for me."

"But your mother,--think of your mother; she never will consent to what you desire."

"No, my mother never will consent until some brilliant result justifies my choice. But she is just as averse to a commonplace legal career, which is what I should now be obliged to pursue, since I cannot be under obligations to my brother. I must be independent. My mother has no decided views for me at present. I hope to win her over in time. Bernhard is angry with me; Lothar only laughs at me. I am very much alone in my family, Adela. But I never shall forget that I am an Eichhof, and I shall try, so far as I can, to do honour to my name. I hope that my mother may one day be proud of me; at all events she shall never be ashamed of me."

He had spoken with some emotion latterly, almost more to himself than to Adela. He suddenly paused and looked at her. Her eyes were opened wide, and tears were rolling down her cheeks.

"Now you know all. Are you still my friend, Adela?" he asked, bending over her.

She seized his hand, and cried, between laughter and tears, "Dear, dear Walter, I know I ought to be angry with you, but I cannot, I cannot."

He pressed her hand to his lips. "Then you think I am right, Adela?" he asked, gazing earnestly into her eyes.

"Good heavens! I do not know, Walter," she sobbed; "but you are so good, and we have known each other so long, and I know you will go away now and never come back again for years."

"And you are sorry?" he whispered.

She did not reply, but her tears continued to flow silently, and, as if to conceal them, she leaned her head upon Walter's shoulder. He put his arm around her, and she made no resistance.

His lips almost touched her curls, and she wept so uncontrollably that his heart was inexpressibly touched. Her tears, and the gentle pressure of her head upon his shoulder, annihilated all the fixed resolves he had made with regard to her; all the prudent reasonings with which he had silenced the promptings of his heart were melted by those 'kindly drops,' like the last snow beneath a warm spring shower. "Dear, dearest Adela!" he whispered, and kissed her brow. She threw her arms about his neck and nestled close to him.

The larks trilled above them, and the sunbeams kissed open the buds of the elder-bush that grew beside the lake, while Fidèle looked at the youthful pair clasped in each other's arms with a certain expression of comprehension in his honest eyes, as if it were all a matter of course.

"And so the very words which I feared would separate us have united us forever, my darling," said Walter, after a long and ecstatic pause. "Ah, how proudly I shall now pursue my path, since I know that I shall not be struggling and working only for myself, but for you! And you will believe in me, and will be patient until the goal is reached, and I have a home for you where you shall be shielded from every blast that blows?"

She suddenly freed herself from his clasp, and, stroking her curls from before her eyes, looked at him in a kind of terror. "Walter," she said, hastily, "for heaven's sake, don't talk so!"

He smiled, and drew her towards him again. "Never fear, dear love," he said. "Be sure that my strength and courage will be all-sufficient to provide for our future. I know now that you love me, and will one day consent to be my wife, although I still persist in being a doctor."

Again she broke away from him. "I never said that, Walter," she cried; "no, no; and I never will say it. You ought to know that if I love you,--and I am not so very sure that I do love you,--all this happened so quickly,--but even if I did love you, I never, never would consent to be a doctor's wife."

Walter looked at her like some sleeper awakening from a dream. He found it hard to understand her, but her words could bear no other meaning except that she meant to break with him if he adhered to his resolve. "It was all a mistake, then,--the saddest mistake of my life," he said, slowly and monotonously. "I do not understand how it could be, Adela, but I understand that you now send me from you." He stood still for a moment, as though awaiting a reply. Adela was silent, and pressed her handkerchief to her lips to restrain her sobs. Walter still looked inquiringly at her. "Farewell!" he suddenly said, and turned to go, but she seized his arm and clung to him as in desperation.

"Walter!" she cried. "Oh, heavens! I--I think--I love you, Walter. You must not go!"

"Adela, do not torture me so!" he entreated. "After what has passed between us, I do not, I cannot know what you mean. You say you love me, and---"

"Yes, yes, Walter; but you must not be a doctor. If you are poor, no matter; we will wait until you are a Landrath, and I will learn all about housekeeping and whatever you wish me to, for--even if I do not know exactly whether I love you--yet---"

"You do not know whether you love me, Adela?" he said, with a bitter laugh. "You do not know exactly? Well, I know, and I will tell you. No, you do not love me, or you never, after what I have told you, could demand such a sacrifice of me! You do not love me, Adela; it was all a dream, and"--he drew out the ribbon upon which he wore her ring--"and it is past and gone!"

He held out the ring to her. "There, take it back," he said, his voice trembling with agitation. "I cannot any longer be your friend. There is only one relation possible between us. I must have all or nothing. Take it, take it back!" And he still held the ring out to her.

"I will not have it," she said, turning stubbornly away.

"Take it, or I will throw it into the lake. I will not keep it."

"Do as you please."

Walter tossed the ring from him. For an instant it glittered in the sunlight above the waters of the little lake, into which it sank with a faint splash.

Adela never looked towards it. She stooped and stroked the head of her dog, who pressed close to her side as if in dread of some coming misfortune. The girl thought that Walter would speak again. Suddenly she heard the sound of a horse's hoofs behind her. She started up, to see both steed and rider just disappearing at the turning of the oak avenue.

"Walter!" she almost screamed.

But he had gone. She sank on her knees, and laid her head upon Fidèle's neck.

"Walter," she sobbed, "I love you! Oh, now I know I love you!" But Walter could not hear her.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THEA ROUNDS HER FIRST PROMONTORY.

His brother's affairs were soon driven from Bernhard's mind by anxiety with regard to his own. The building of the factory was in full progress, and the new agricultural machines were to be tested. Meadows were being cleared and fields drained, and Bernhard wanted to be everywhere, and to have everything under his personal supervision. He spent the greater part of the day riding or driving to distant parts of his estate, and his dreams at night were of ploughing-machines, and of new leases for farms. Thea, who had at first accompanied him in his rides and drives, now generally stayed at home, and grew graver and more silent every day,--a fact which Bernhard had no time to notice. He never, it is true, left the house without a hurried visit to her room, when he would leave a hasty kiss upon her forehead, with a "Well, Thea, how are you? I'm off on horseback!" and then, without waiting for her reply, he would leave her and run downstairs as if in hopes of making up for the minute he had wasted upon her. Now and then she ventured a timid question with regard to his occupations, but, since a fitting reply demanded explanations for which Bernhard had no time, and to comprehend which would require more technical knowledge than she possessed, the answers she received were brief and vague. Whenever anything occurred, however, that was especially unfortunate, Bernhard appealed to his wife for sympathy, which she freely gave him, although in doing so she often betrayed her entire ignorance of the matter in question.

Visits and social events were rare, since the family were still in mourning. Thea's girl friends were all, with the exception of Adela Hohenstein, now married, and had left the neighbourhood, where there were no young married women save Frau von Wronsky, with whom Bernhard did not wish Thea to associate, and who since the death of the Count had paid only one short visit of condolence at Eichhof. Thus Thea was very much alone, and although she did her best to kill time with china-painting and reading, with embroidery and new music, she could not always escape ennui. She had no special talent for either music or painting, only a certain facility which always requires encouragement for practice. This encouragement was wanting. She thought of her mother, who had been continually occupied, but the household at Eichhof was very different from that at Schönthal. Everything at her old home had been comprised in a much smaller compass, was much more simple, and Frau von Rosen had held unlimited sway, had overseen her people, and arranged her housekeeping herself. At Eichhof there was an omnipotent housekeeper, who had lived more than twenty years in the family, and for whom Thea entertained an immense respect. The cook was a very fine gentleman, and the footmen were correspondingly grand. All these people knew so much, and had been in the house so long, that Thea, with her eighteen years and her inexperience, scarcely regarded herself as their mistress. Everything went its way like a clock that has been wound up, any interference with which would only do harm.

Thus Thea felt that the following of her mother's example was quite impossible here; and she was equally conscious that her small occupations were far from sufficient to fill up her days. As she was too proud, however, to admit to any one that she was discontented, she said nothing of this to her parents or to Alma.

"They cannot help me," she thought, "and why should I trouble them? Let them believe me perfectly happy."

One day she was sitting in the bow-windowed room, vainly endeavouring to concentrate her thoughts upon a forget-me-not that she was painting upon a china cup. These same thoughts would fly off to Bernhard, and she wondered, as she did perpetually, whether there was no way in which she could be nearer him, could share his interests, and really live with him instead of only at his side. She was interrupted by a visit from her father, who often came to Eichhof at this time.

When Herr von Rosen entered his daughter's room she joyfully bade him welcome, and took

from him a package of books that he had under his arm.

"Books for Bernhard," he said, as Thea opened the bundle and began to arrange the volumes. "Nothing for you, my dear; nothing but treatises on agricultural matters, and descriptions of just such factories as he is now building."

Thea bent over the books with great interest. "And why should they be nothing to me, papa?" she asked. "Is it impossible for me to share Bernhard's interests?"

The tone of the question was so peculiar that Herr von Rosen looked at his daughter in surprise. "Impossible?" he repeated. "Oh, no; women can do a great deal if they choose." And, as he stood by his daughter, he suddenly put his hand beneath her chin, lifted her face to his, and looked into her eyes. "What is it you want, Thea? Ah, tears in your eyes! Then the matter is serious. What is it?"

Then Thea broke down; she had always made a confidant of her father in the old days, and her reserve had been hard to maintain. She threw her arms around his neck, and they sat down together on the small sofa in the corner. Here father and daughter had a long and earnest talk, and when they arose from it Thea's eyes and cheeks glowed, and there was a mysterious smile as of a secret understanding upon Herr von Rosen's lips as in his subsequent conversation with Bernhard he frequently glanced towards his daughter. It was arranged that Thea should go oftener than had been her wont to Schönthal,--that she should drive over at least twice a week, since Frau von Rosen's health did not at present permit her to leave the house. Bernhard gave his consent to this willingly, as he was obliged to be absent from home so much himself.

"He will not miss me," thought Thea; "he would rather talk with his superintendent than with me." But this thought did not sadden her to-day. Her eyes sparkled, and there was a certain resolute expression on her face that seemed to declare, "All this shall be different."

Two days afterwards she drove over to Schönthal and spent the whole day there. She took with her one of the books which her father had brought for Bernhard, and when she came home in the evening another package of books accompanied her. At some distance from Eichhof, Bernhard came riding to meet her. Thea blushed and stood up in the carriage,--he had missed her, then, after all!

But that did not prevent her from going to Schönthal again the next week. Meanwhile, Herr von Rosen came frequently to Eichhof, where he took long rambles with his daughter through the fields and farms, and had prolonged conversations with her on the small sofa in her favourite room.

Thus several weeks passed, until one day Thea begged her husband to let her go with him to the factory, which was now roofed in, and where the machinery was just being set up.

"Yes, my child," he said, "come if you choose, but it will bore you terribly. I have so much to attend to about which you know nothing."

She smiled, and put on her hat and gloves to accompany him.

It was a lovely warm afternoon. The little open carriage flew along the broad road, but Thea made no observations upon the beauty of the sunset or the misty colours of the distant forest, although she saw and enjoyed both. She knew that Bernhard's thoughts were occupied with far other topics, and her questions bore such evident reference to these that his replies, at first vague and constrained, soon altered their tone. He was so absorbed in these interests of his that he had no time for surprise at his young wife's sudden accession of knowledge, but at least he made no objection when, upon arriving at the factory, she prepared to accompany him in his tour of inspection. She listened attentively to all that the workmen had to tell, examined the machines, and now and then asked questions, which the machinists answered eagerly, and which so astounded Bernhard that he several times found himself looking inquiringly at her as if to make sure that it really was his 'May-rose' who was discoursing so learnedly of machines, and water-power, and steam-power. He himself had never been so absent-minded before upon a visit here. Scarcely were they seated in the carriage again on their homeward way when he turned to her and asked, "For heaven's sake, tell me, Thea, where you learned all this?"

She laughed merrily. "Learned what?" she asked, in her turn. "I have but the merest superficial knowledge of these things."

"But a short time ago you had no idea of them."

She gave him a look from her large dark eyes that was half saucy, half entreating. "Will you not try me and see whether I have not some more 'ideas' perhaps, and take me with you oftener?" she asked.

"Good heavens, Thea! I was only afraid of boring you."

"And you thought I had better be bored at home alone than in your society?"

"Have you been bored at home?"

"Very nearly; but just at the right time something pleasanter occurred to me."

"And that was?" he asked, when she paused.

"And that was,--guess what."

"Good-evening, Bernhard; good-evening, Thea," a joyous voice called out very near them, and Lothar galloped up, followed by a second horseman in uniform.

Lothar had in fact been transferred to a regiment of hussars stationed in the neighbourhood of Eichhof, but he had been sent until lately to a distant garrison, and had but just arrived at the small town near by.

"I am making my first formal neighbourly visit to you," said Lothar, riding close up beside the carriage, while the other horseman also approached and saluted Bernhard and Thea.

"Lieutenant Werner is my stay and consolation in my present Gotham," said Lothar, as the carriage proceeded slowly, escorted by the two riders; "he knows Berlin as well as I do, and we exchange reminiscences."

Lieutenant Werner smiled. "Yes, it was hard enough at one time to be away from Berlin, but I am very well content now to be in R---."

"And what of your studies, Herr von Werner?" Thea asked. She was already acquainted with the young officer, and knew that he was interested in science.

"Ah, madame, there is much to be desired in that direction," he replied.

And Lothar called out from the other side of the carriage, "He lives like a hermit, Thea; but I hope to spoil his books for him."

"You will hardly do that," said Werner.

"Nonsense, my dear fellow! 'All printed stuff is dull and gray, the tree of life is ever green and gay,'" Lothar declared, in a rather free paraphrase of Goethe. Then he turned to talk with Bernhard about his horses, while Werner rode by Thea's side until the carriage stopped at the gateway of the castle.

"I am so glad to see you here; I hope you will come often," Thea said, as she got out of the carriage and offered her hand to Lothar.

Lothar kissed it, and replied, "I am only afraid of coming too often, Thea; so let us have it settled in the beginning that if I come to Eichhof as often as I have the time and desire to come, you will turn me out if I come at the wrong time."

Thea laughed. "I agree," she said. "You shall at all events have a room always ready for you, and plenty of almond-cakes."

"Oh, you have not forgotten what I like best. Bernhard, your wife is an angel!"

"I knew that long ago," Bernhard said, with a laugh, as he led his guests into the bow-windowed room, where the servants were just lighting the lamps.

"I must set Werner afloat," Lothar said, in the course of conversation; "to-day we call here, to-morrow at the Wronskys, the day after to-morrow----"

"Are the Wronskys at home?" Thea interrupted him. "I thought they were travelling."

"They have been back for two weeks," Lothar replied. "I saw her at a dinner at the Schönburgs'. She is really a very charming and interesting creature. I was not half so much pleased with her at first as I am now. They tell all kinds of stories about her, but----"

"What are the stories about her?" asked Thea.

"Nonsense, Lothar!" Bernhard interposed, as his brother was about to give his version of an *on dit*. "Why repeat silly stories, which no one will vouch for, and of which every one has a different version? The lady is now Marzell Wronsky's wife; he is our neighbour, and for his sake we ought not to repeat such reports."

Thea looked at her husband in surprise. He had so often expressed his dislike of this woman, and yet he was suddenly so eager in her defence.

She said nothing, however, because she suspected that it would be better not to have these 'reports' retailed at her table, and Werner, who thought he detected a shadow of annoyance on her countenance, said quickly, "The lady's conduct certainly is at present perfectly correct, and she is very interesting in conversation. I lately took her in to dinner somewhere, and I was amazed to find how much she had seen of the world. She is perfectly familiar with Europe, and has been to Palestine and spent a winter in Cairo besides."

"Did you not envy her?" said Thea, to whom Werner had formerly confided his great love of travel, and the fact that with all his economy he could only contrive to take a short journey every other year.

"Just a little," he replied; "but we had one memory in common of one of her smallest journeys and of my largest one. After the Paris Exposition she went to Trouville."

"You were there too, Bernhard, and just at that time," said Thea.

"Oh, there must have been many people there at that time of whose existence I was entirely unaware," Bernhard said, hastily; but something in his tone of voice and in the expression of his face struck Thea, and, little prone as she was to suspicion, the thought occurred to her, "He knew her."

"Of course, society at Trouville is so mixed," said Werner, "and so various, that it is impossible to know every one. Frau von Wronsky seemed not to have enjoyed her stay there very much."

"Naturally." Thea turned to her husband. Had he spoken the word, or had she been mistaken?

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I said nothing," he replied.

"Heavens, Thea, you have an entire agricultural library here!" Lothar exclaimed at this moment. He was never quiet long, and while the others had been conversing he had been walking about the room on a tour of discovery in search of new books or pieces of furniture. He was now standing before a pretty open set of book-shelves, from which he took several books and brought them to the table. "Since when have you been perusing works upon drainage, irrigation, and plans for factories?" he asked, laughing, and pointing to the titles of the volumes.

Thea blushed, and piled the books together. "Don't be so rude as to disarrange my books, Lothar," she said, as she took up some to put them away again.

But Bernhard detained her. "Thea," he said, "now I understand where your 'ideas' came from. Have you really been studying all this tiresome, dry stuff, and was this what you meant the other day when you declared that you had discovered an excellent antidote for ennui?"

"Why, of course, I wanted to be able to talk about all these things with you, and to know something at least of what is absorbing your thoughts," she said, with a still brighter blush, forgetting for the moment both her guests and Frau von Wronsky, as she noted the expression of her husband's eyes. The next instant she turned away, with a laugh, to rearrange her books.

Bernhard looked after her with an emotion that he would have found it difficult to express: never had she seemed to him so enchanting, so charming, as at this moment. Lothar laughed; Lieutenant Werner looked grave, and, when Thea again joined the group around the table, gave her a glance of intense admiration.

A servant announced that tea was served in the dining-hall, and thither the party repaired.

Thea tried to lead the conversation to the Wronskys again, but Bernhard persistently changed the subject whenever they were alluded to.

"Why is it so disagreeable to him to hear that woman talked of?" Thea said to herself.

It was tolerably late when the two officers took their leave, but Thea was not at all tired, and while Bernhard accompanied them down into the hall, she fetched a large photograph book, in which were the photographs of all the landed proprietors of the neighbourhood, with their wives, and when Bernhard returned he found her lost in contemplation of Frau von Wronsky's face.

"I am glad they are gone, Thea," he cried, more quickly and merrily than was his wont to speak, "for now I can thank you as I should for reading all those books for my sake. I know you did it all for love of me, my darling."

He drew her tenderly towards him; but although his words would have made her perfectly happy a few hours before, she now returned his kiss rather coldly, and said,--

"Good heavens, it was not much to do; it really interested me very much, and papa explained everything to me that I did not understand. But," she added, without explaining the strange sequence of ideas, otherwise than by pushing forward the book of photographs,--"tell me, Bernhard, did you not know the Wronsky at Trouville?"

"What put that into your head?" asked Bernhard, thrusting the book aside. "I told you before---"

"You spoke of *many* people, Bernhard, but you did not say that you did not know *her*."

Now Bernhard smiled. "Oh, you women!" he exclaimed, drawing his wife towards him. "Well, since you are developing such a talent for diplomacy, you may learn that I certainly did have a

distant acquaintance with her, but that she belonged to a circle that makes it very desirable that I should ignore all former acquaintance with her whatsoever. Yes, I owe it to Marzell Wronsky to preserve entire silence with regard to that time, and all I can tell you is that she did not so conduct herself as to lead me to regard her as a fit associate for you."

"Why, what did she do?"

"She was very imprudent, my child. But pray let us drop this subject; we neither of us care anything about her, and I have told you what I have because I know you are no gossip and would rather help me to keep the secret of my former acquaintance with her than prevent me from doing so. You now know that my only reason for silence as to my ever having seen her before is a reluctance, for her husband's sake, to being questioned with regard to her former life."

"Yes, Bernhard, but----" Thea hesitated, and hid her face in her hands, although Bernhard could see her forehead and neck flush crimson.

"But? What is it that you want to know?"

"Bernhard," she whispered, still covering her face, "tell me truly and really, were you never in love with her?"

"Never!" he exclaimed, drawing down her hands.

"Look in my eyes, Thea, while I tell you that I never cared for this woman, and never had any association with her whatever."

"Thank God!" she whispered, drawing a long breath of relief.

## CHAPTER XII.

### ANOTHER PROMONTORY COMES IN SIGHT.

The long summer days as they passed were happy indeed for Thea, and all the more cloudless and sunny because of the absence at a watering-place of the old Countess Eichhof.

The young wife had wellnigh forgotten the shadow that had been cast upon her path for a moment by the figure of Frau von Wronsky, and she was no longer in the least jealous of the old superintendent, for she was now Bernhard's daily companion and her advice and opinion were eagerly sought for. Bernhard was almost as inexperienced as herself in the management of an estate, and, since she had more leisure and less ambition for distinction than he, the old superintendent sometimes declared that the Frau Countess really understood matters better than the young master. Lothar frequently occupied his room at Eichhof, rode Bernhard's horses, ate almond-cakes, and entertained his comrade, Werner, with accounts of his sister-in-law's constantly increasing beauty. Werner seldom came to Eichhof, but when he did come, Thea always had much to tell him. She read the books that he recommended to her, and he was the only one who seemed to take any interest in Walter. Thea corresponded with her youngest brother-in-law, and hoped in time to be the medium of reconciliation between him and Bernhard, who made no objection to this correspondence, although he refused to listen to Walter's letters. Lothar was not so decided in his antagonism towards his younger brother, but he yawned whenever Thea spoke of him, and so she was driven to seek sympathy solely from her father and from Werner. Each listened attentively to all she had to say of Walter, for, although Werner did not know him personally, the young fellow's pluck and determination interested him greatly.

In all things else perfect harmony existed between Thea and her husband. And yet these sunny summer days were not long cloudless. For some time it had seemed to the superintendent that his master's enthusiasm was on the wane. "It will increase again," he thought at first, but before long he began to shake his head over the state of affairs. At last Thea too noticed that Bernhard was often out of sorts and not so actively employed as heretofore. The reason for this was to be found not in outward circumstances, but in Bernhard himself. He had, it is true, had many disappointments, and had encountered many obstacles, but what especially galled him was the reflection that he was not turning his talents to sufficient account. When, young as he was, he entered upon his inheritance he had determined to effect extraordinary results. In his ardour for accomplishment he had forgotten that there must be a certain knowledge acquired for such accomplishment, and now he could not but frankly confess to himself that he had really done very little, that those in his employ had been the real workers and had understood matters far better than had their master. There had been much outlay of capital also, and it was questionable



whether this outlay had always been judicious.

"I fritter away my powers of mind in too many directions," he said to Thea one day, "and I fear I am not precisely fulfilling my vocation. I attempt to be architect, mathematician, grazier, and ever so many other things besides, and I know that I am really none of all these, and do not indeed desire to be. I fancied the management of a landed estate to be something vastly more important."

"But it certainly is a fine thing to arrange and to create as you are doing," Thea replied. "I feel proud as we drive through the meadows, where your will has transformed what was unprofitable land into green grassy fields."

"Yes, I am pleased with that too, but in fact I have had very little to do with it; others have done it for me, and would have done it as well without me."

Thea sighed; she was so content, and she had been so proud of this very industry of Bernhard's that he was now depreciating.

Then Lothar came to Eichhof one day and reported that several of the most respectable citizens of R---- had asked him whether he thought that his brother would accept a nomination for the Reichstag. Bernhard knew that there had been some such proposition talked of in official circles, and he had cherished the idea, since he was the largest landed proprietor in his district, and the seat that it commanded would fall vacant just when he had completed his twenty-fifth year and was thus eligible for a nomination.

"I know that some of our neighbours are thinking of you, too," said Lothar; "and you will see, when you come to the Diet-assembly to-morrow, that you will be offered the nomination."

Bernhard's eyes sparkled. "I confess that the possibility occurred to me," he replied. "Hohenstein said something about it the other day; but I'm afraid that the ultramontane candidate has the only chance."

"That's a question," said Lothar. "Herr M----, it seems, has some blots on his scutcheon, which his opponent will use to the best advantage; and since Wronsky, in view of his Polish ancestry, I suppose, is to be their second candidate, there will hardly be a due amount of enthusiasm among the ultramontanists, since he is, to my certain knowledge, a very lukewarm Romanist. And, besides, you, with all your dependants here, have more votes at your disposal than any one of them."

"I never would force my people to vote against their own convictions."

"Nonsense! If they are not convinced that their master is the fittest man to represent them, let them find another master."

"Now you are talking just like Hohenstein," said Bernhard, laughing. "Did you not discuss a bowl of punch together last night while he explained to you his views upon the coming election?"

"You're right as far as the punch goes, Bernhard, but as for the views, they are my own, and I think you owe it to the good cause to accept the nomination, since every one says that you have by far the best chance to defeat the ultramontanist."

"Well, we shall see how matters look to-morrow at the Diet," said Bernhard.

"You will be there, at all events?"

"Of course."

Thea had hitherto listened in silence. "Bernhard," she now said, suddenly, "if you were elected you would have to go to Berlin in the autumn."

"Possibly."

"But, Bernhard, you know----" She leaned over him and whispered a few words in his ear.

"No need to trouble ourselves about it, my child," he replied. "In the first place, my nomination is entirely uncertain, not to speak of my election----"

"But you would accept it?"

"Good heavens! I really do not know. 'Tis a matter for grave reflection."

He tried to convince himself that he had come to no decision, and he was nevertheless exulting in his inmost heart at the thought of political activity. Politics were assuredly fitted to employ all his powers, to call forth all his energy. Here was a field in which a man could gratify his ambition and achieve prominence without the petty labour, the commonplace effort required by the management of an estate.

Lothar, usually so slow to reflect and to draw conclusions, was clearer-sighted than Thea in

this matter. He knew that his brother would accept this nomination, while the young wife hoped to induce him to decline it. She had taken great pains to fit herself to share in her husband's present interests, and she was proud that she had succeeded. What possibility was there of her gaining any insight into politics, when that was to take place in the autumn which would prevent her from accompanying her husband to Berlin?

There was no room for doubt upon the subject, however, by the evening of the next day, when Bernhard came home, accompanied by the Freiherr von Hohenstein, who presented her husband to Thea as "our future member for the Reichstag, madame."

"Bernhard?" she exclaimed, in involuntary alarm.

"Certainly not member yet," said Bernhard: "but the confidence reposed in me by my old friends and neighbours is so flattering, dear Thea, that I could not do otherwise than accept the nomination with thanks."

"Nonsense! your election is a certainty," said Hohenstein; "leave that to us. I'll have no one in my service or on my land who does not vote with me; nor shall those who do not vote with me be benefited by my bounty during the winter. Every man of them has something to gain from us, and must do our pleasure if he hopes to retain our good will."

"But, papa," cried Adela, who had ridden over to Eichhof to meet her father, "you must not send Jusak away. He is the best groom we ever had, and keeps my mare in such beautiful trim; besides, he rides superbly. Only a week ago the poor fellow was groaning over the coming election, because his wife is such a terrible scold and the most devout Catholic in the entire village, always going twice to church every Sunday and holiday. He says his vote must cost him either dismissal from your service or a terrible row at home that will last he cannot tell how long."

Hohenstein laughed. "Why doesn't the rascal keep his wife in better order, then?" he rejoined.

"He keeps the mare and everything else in his charge in perfect order."

"Nevertheless, if he votes against me he shall go. All our neighbours think as I do in this matter, and you, Eichhof, are, I suppose, no exception."

"Bernhard, you would not really act thus?" asked Thea. Her husband shrugged his shoulders.

"Hohenstein has far more experience in such affairs than I," he replied. "Such a course is hardly what I should like, but it may be the only one to pursue. It is not simply a personal question; the principles that I advocate are at stake, and they must be maintained; each vote that I lose adds one to the opposition. We must look to the end in view."

"And shut your eyes to the means; there speaks the Jesuit, Thea!" Adela exclaimed, laughing.

"You do not understand, Fräulein Adela," said Bernhard, who was still under the influence of the excited speakers to whom he had been listening in R----. "I was disposed to be of your opinion, and even now I am not in favour of harsh measures to secure votes, but I see clearly that some pressure must be brought to bear. The vote of one of us, trained as we have been to reflect and decide, to draw logical conclusions, is of no more weight than is that of an ignorant groom, whose ideas are centred in his stables. These people scarcely know what questions are at stake in the choice of a member for the Reichstag, and cannot possibly judge who would best represent the interests of the country. They have been strongly influenced all their lives long, and to suppose that they can suddenly form an independent judgment in so important a matter as an election of this kind is perfect nonsense. Therefore it is for their own good that they should be influenced now."

"Yes, with food, fagots, and dismissals," exclaimed Adela. "Very well, Count Bernhard; if I lose Jusak through your fault all friendship between us is at an end."

"Then all I can do to regain your good will, Fräulein Adela, is to raise my voice in the Reichstag, if I ever get there, in favour of the emancipation of woman."

"That would go far to appease me, to be sure," she said; and then, taking Thea's arm, she added, "Come, Thea; when men begin to talk politics they are simply detestable, and I see very well that they are to be the topic here."

"Not at all; we would far rather enjoy your charming society," said Bernhard.

"Oh, yes; and in order to do so plunge into discussions as to where the next election meeting shall be held, and what you mean to say at it, and what some one else will say then, and how many votes you have, and how many your opponent has. It's all excessively interesting, no doubt. I heard it all last year at the official elections for the lower chamber, and I know that papa and you and all the rest will think of nothing else for weeks to come, and that I shall be bored to death. Thank heaven, officers cannot vote; my hope is in them for the present."

The gentlemen laughed, and even Thea smiled at Adela's irritation. Since, however, Herr von

Hohenstein was evidently eager for the discussion which his daughter so reprobated, she allowed herself to be drawn away to the next room, where Adela instantly began to describe a dress she intended to wear at a picnic to be given by the officers of hussars in the neighbourhood. Thea listened but vaguely, for her mind was much occupied by Bernhard's election. She could not quite understand or approve his sudden enthusiasm for political life. She felt it her duty as a wife to rejoice in the distinction conferred upon him, and yet she could not control her dislike of this hasty change in her husband's views and plans.

"Alma is to be dressed just as I am," Adela chattered on meanwhile. "Tell me, Thea, have you noticed that Lothar seems very attentive to Alma?" Thea's attention was aroused.

"Lothar?" she repeated. "How did such an idea enter your head? I have seen nothing of it."

Adela declared that she did not believe there was anything in it, but Thea resolved to watch Lothar more closely and to talk more with him, for hitherto, although he was older than she, she had treated him as a younger brother, who told funny stories very well and ate almond-cakes with a grateful relish, but who could not possibly be suspected of falling honestly and seriously in love. But when her own sister was thus spoken of, it behoved her to be more observant.

Adela, whose moods were as variable as an April day, suddenly fell silent and looked very grave. Then she asked, "Walter is not coming to Eichhof this year, is he?"

"No; Walter is very economical, and, since he will accept nothing from Bernhard, he must find going to Berlin quite expensive."

"He is going to Berlin, then?"

"Yes; he is to continue his studies there. Did you not know that? Oh, I remember you would not listen to his letter the other day when I wanted to read it to you."

Adela blushed crimson, and rejoined, with a laugh, "I wish I could stop saying everything that comes into my head, without stopping to think. But come, let us see if the gentlemen are still as tiresome as ever."

When they returned to the drawing-room they found Bernhard and his friend still discussing the election. But Adela joined them, and sat still between Bernhard and Thea for the remainder of the evening, as though she dreaded another *tête-à-tête* with the latter.

Bernhard was extremely animated. He spoke with more energy and fluency than usual, and Thea thought, "Perhaps he is now choosing the career for which he is best fitted, and it is silly and petty of me not to rejoice in it." When he looked towards her inquiringly, she nodded with a smile; but still it seemed to her as though there were another shadow rising between her husband and herself.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### A PERIOD PUT TO A LONG ROW OF FIGURES.

It was a gray, rainy day. Adela was sitting at the window watching the falling drops and stroking Fidèle, who laid his head upon her knee and gaped.

"The world is very tiresome, Fidèle," said Adela, and the dog looked at his mistress out of his wise brown eyes, evidently with no disposition to gainsay her verdict.

"There is nothing to be done with papa," the girl continued, still addressing her remarks to Fidèle. "Scarcely is the election over when he buries himself in accounts, shuts himself up all day in his room, and if ever I stay with him there he is silent and *distract*. I wish he had been a candidate and had been elected instead of Bernhard Eichhof; then we should have gone for the winter to Berlin, where I could have consoled myself for Jusak's loss. Poor wretch! he must go, I suppose; and it's all nonsense, for Bernhard did not need his vote; the Catholics had no chance after Herr von Wronsky withdrew his name."

The rain beat against the window-pane. Adela sighed, and then pursued her train of thought: "I wonder if it is true that Frau von Wronsky persuaded her husband to retire? It may have been so, for they say she believes in nothing and has the upper hand of him; but Thea says that's all mere gossip, and that Herr von Wronsky went to see them himself to tell them that he did not wish to oppose Bernhard, and that he would rather retire voluntarily than have any interruption

of kindly feeling between them. Who can tell? The Wronskys are going to Berlin this winter, at any rate. Oh, everybody is going to Berlin; if we could only go too!" And then she thought quite naturally of Walter, who was also in Berlin. Her thoughts usually strayed in his direction, although she believed herself firmly convinced that she had reason to be very angry with him, and that she was so in reality.

Suddenly Fidèle raised his head, and Adela sprang up. A carriage drove past the window and stopped before the house.

"Thank heaven, some one is good enough to pay us a visit in this storm!" Adela exclaimed, and hurried out of the room to receive the guest. But when she reached the hall she started in surprise. There stood a tall young man, who took off his overcoat and hat and stood revealed--her brother Hugo!

"Heavens, Hugo! where do you come from?" she called out to him.

"Apparently from Berlin," he replied. "Where is my father? He is at home?"

"Yes; but how is it that---"

"Be good enough to spare me all questions for the present," Hugo rejoined, impatiently. "I have important matters to discuss with my father, and I must return to Berlin to-morrow. Is my father in his room?" And without awaiting a reply, he hurried past her and went into his father's study.

Adela involuntarily followed him thither as far as the door; then she suddenly paused, and turned away angrily.

"What can be the matter? More debts, I suppose," she said. "But----" The next moment she opened the door.

"What do you want here?" the Freiherr fairly shouted, so that she retreated in dismay.

"Curious, as women always are," Hugo said, with a shrug.

Adela shut the door behind her and ran along the passage to her room, where she threw herself into an arm-chair and burst into a passion of angry tears. Fidèle nestled close beside her, and she stroked his head.

"You love me, Fidèle, do you not?" she said, wiping away her tears. "Ah, you dumb brutes are far better than human beings!" The girl threw a shawl over her head, and, followed by the dog, ran out to the stables. "Here, at least, I know that I am welcome," she said, going from one horse to another; and finally seating herself on a bundle of straw, she propped her head on her hand, gazing in most melancholy fashion at her favourites.

"Fräulein! Fräulein Adela!" a voice near her called suddenly, and as she sprang up from her straw seat a servant entered the stable.

"Good heavens, Anton, how you look!" the girl cried, startled by the old servant's pale face. "What is the matter? What has happened?"

"Ah, Fräulein Adela, do not be frightened, but the Herr Baron has had a fainting-fit or something. I don't know----"

Adela heard not another word. Fast as her feet could carry her she ran towards the house, and was in her father's room the next moment. The Freiherr lay upon the lounge, his eyes wide open and fixed, while the housekeeper and one of the younger servants were rubbing his forehead and his hands with hartshorn. Adela took the hartshorn-bottle from the old housekeeper's trembling hand, and bent over her father. "Dear, dear papa!" she whispered. His eyes had a look of recognition in them,--a spasm passed over his face, but not a word issued from his pale lips.

"Good God! how did this happen?" Adela, trembling like an aspen leaf, asked of old Anton, who entered the room.

"I do not know," he whispered. "The Herr Lieutenant arrived suddenly, and they were talking very loud together, and as I was carrying the Herr Lieutenant's portmanteau past the door the Herr Baron said, 'I cannot!' and the Herr Lieutenant cried, 'It must be done!' And then, when I had passed by, I suddenly heard a heavy fall, and the Herr Lieutenant called me."

"My poor, poor father!" Adela whispered, bending over him again. She thought she understood it all now, and glanced furtively at her brother, who, having despatched a mounted messenger for the doctor, now entered the room and approached his father. The Freiherr cast upon him a glance of such utter agony, and his agitation so evidently increased at sight of his son, that Adela said, "Go out of his sight, Hugo; it is best that he should not see you."

This time she encountered no angry reply, but Hugo quietly obeyed her, and retreated to the recess of the window, where he threw himself into an arm-chair and sat motionless for the next fifteen minutes, his head buried in his hands, as if his spirit were far away and his body only

present beside the couch whereon his father lay--through his fault.

At last the doctor arrived, and explained that the Herr Baron was suffering from a stroke that had paralyzed his tongue and his right arm. Adela and old Anton never stirred from beside him, while Hugo wandered restlessly about the house, now looking through his father's papers and locking up those still scattered about, now taking down the weapons that hung upon the wall to examine them, and often opening the Freiherr's case of pistols and passing his fingers over the smooth steel barrels.

After midnight the Freiherr fell asleep, and Adela's eyes, too, closed, and her head fell back against the high arm-chair in which she sat. Hugo was in the next room, but no sound betrayed his presence there. He was sitting at the table, upon which stood the open case of pistols, and his head was buried in his hands. Fiery balls that turned into long rows of figures seemed to dance before his eyes. Longer and longer grew these rows; there seemed to be no end to them.

"And he can pay nothing more; he is bankrupt," Hugo muttered, clenching his fist convulsively. "There will be no more Hohensteins at Rollin." He had so often despised his home, and now he suddenly became conscious of how closely the name of the estate was connected with that of the family who had owned it for two hundred years. And again the long rows of figures danced before his eyes. Could no period be put to them? Yes, one--in the shape of a small round ball. He shuddered and shrank back--his hand had touched the cold barrel of a pistol. He opened his eyes for an instant, but closed them again, and--another period that might be put to the endless row of figures hovered before him. It was round, too, in form, but instead of a ball it was a ring. He sprang up, pushed away the case of pistols, and, going to the writing-table, took a sheet of paper, and began to write. Suddenly he noticed that the paper was edged with black. He threw it aside and took another sheet. The sick man was still sleeping. Adela's head had sunk farther back in her chair; she was dreaming that her father had been thrown from his horse and was lying lifeless on the ground. Then some one suddenly came between her father and herself and--laughed. It was a bitter, terrible laugh. Adela started in terror, and rubbed her eyes.

The same low laugh came from the next room.

She shuddered, rose, and went to the door. There she saw her brother sitting at the writing-desk. The open case of pistols was on the table behind him, and before him lay a letter which he was folding to put into an envelope, while the bitter smile had not yet faded from his face. A fearful thought flashed upon the girl's mind. With a timid glance at the open case, she hurried across the room and laid her hand upon her brother's shoulder.

"For heaven's sake, Hugo, tell me what you are going to do!" He shook off her hand.

"Go!" he said. "It is the only means of salvation!"

"Would you add suicide to all the other misfortunes overwhelming us?"

Again there came the laugh, the echo of which had roused her from sleep.

"On the contrary," he said, "there will be joy throughout the family, and you will shortly have an opportunity to figure as a bridesmaid."

"Oh, Hugo, how can you think of such things?"

"These are just the things that I must think about, or we should soon cease to have need for thought of any kind. But you know nothing of it. Go to your father, and leave the rest to me."

Adela fixed her eyes on a white sheet of paper, edged with black, that lay on the writing-desk, and on which she read the words, "My dear Councillor, I am a man of few words, and therefore frankly ask of you the hand of----"

Hugo seized the paper and tore it in pieces.

"There is no need for you to look so horrified," he said. "Fräulein Kohnheim is a very pretty girl; her parents had her baptized some time ago; and her father could pay the debts of an entire regiment if he chose."

"Hugo!"

"Leave me in peace, and be thankful that there is one way out of this for all of us. To-morrow morning this letter goes; to-morrow evening I go, and the next day our troubles will all be over."

"And papa?"

"Our father will soon recover; the doctor says so. A first stroke is never so dangerous----"

"Adela!" a weak voice called at this moment.

"You see he has already recovered his speech, as the doctor said he would," said Hugo.

Adela flew to her father's side and covered his hand with kisses. For a moment her brother

was forgotten; she only felt that a change for the better had come, that her father would recover, and that he had wanted her--her; that the first use he had made of his returning voice had been to call his daughter!

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE MISTRESS OF EICHHOF AND HER GUESTS.

With the first fall of snow there was born in Eichhof a little son and heir, and Bernhard, who had been summoned from Berlin, whither he had gone for a short autumn session, stared helplessly at the little creature that Thea presented to him, and which he proudly called his son, although how that red, wrinkled mite, quite buried in laces, could ever develop into a stalwart representative of the Eichhofs he could hardly imagine.

Consideration for her child kept Thea at Eichhof this winter, and Bernhard allowed her to follow her inclination in this respect, all the more willingly that his 'improvements' at Eichhof had cost a great deal, and he would scarcely have been able to maintain the state which he deemed required by his rank had his wife gone with him to Berlin and been presented at court.

"You are the dearest and most prudent of wives," he said to Thea; "and you are quite right to stay here this winter. But for all that you must not live the life of a recluse, for, since our year of mourning is over, we owe it to our position and to our neighbours to open our house again, even although I must be away. Your father and Lothar are close at hand, and will supply my place."

Lothar was enchanted with this prospect, although he was, upon the whole, more cool and reserved in his demeanour towards his brother at this time than he had ever been before. He had found Thea in tears once or twice during Bernhard's absence; for these tears he considered his brother responsible, and not wholly without reason.

"Now that is really a sensible idea of yours, Bernhard," said he. "Thea, we will give charming entertainments. We must take good care to have no more tears," he added in a low voice, meant for his sister-in-law's ear alone.

Herr von Rosen shook his head, and pronounced Thea still too young to go out and to give entertainments without her husband, especially this winter, when, in consequence of a cattle-plague in neighbouring Poland, there was a strong *cordon militaire* established in the vicinity to keep guard over the frontier.

"There are many young officers hereabouts now," he said, "and the Schönburgs and Lindenstadts have some young girls staying with them, so that the feminine element is not wanting. There are balls and all kinds of entertainments in the air, which my wife and I shall not always be able to attend, although I wish with all my heart that Alma could enjoy them all."

"Well, if you cannot go, Thea can chaperone her; the greater the gayety, the more frequent the balls, the more reason, it seems to me, that Thea should not shut herself up. She owes it to her position not to do so; and if her going out without me, young as she is, seems unusual, why, we must remember that she is an unusual woman. Much that would be very unbecoming in a Frau Miller or Frau Schmidt would be quite fitting in the Countess Eichhof."

Lothar entirely agreed with his brother upon this point, and all that Herr von Rosen could do was to try to persuade the old Countess Eichhof to spend this winter in the castle with Thea.

Bernhard left home, after having made known far and wide that Castle Eichhof was no longer closed to visitors, and the old Countess, who had actually come to her daughter-in-law, soon followed him, as she had accepted an invitation from a relative who lived in great splendour in Dresden. She explained to Herr von Rosen, with many sighs and tears, that she found it impossible to be only number two in a house where she had so long held sole sway; she assured him that upon the whole Thea was a dear child and could not help it, but her visitors showed such an inconceivable lack of tact as constantly to make her conscious of the great difference that there was between Castle Eichhof now and what it had been formerly, and so on, until she exhausted Herr von Rosen's patience, and he mutely assented to whatever she had to say and made no more efforts to induce her to remain.

Nor did Thea try to detain her. She was so proud and secure in the possession of her little son that she was quite ready to undertake to fulfil her social duties without any timidity, and she received with extreme dignity the young officers, who of course hastened to avail themselves of

Bernhard's invitation to call at the castle.

"Thea is absolutely famous," Lothar repeated incessantly to Werner, and he was quite irritated that his friend did not join in his enthusiastic praise of his sister-in-law, merely assenting by a cool nod of his head, and even going less frequently to Eichhof. Lothar reproached him with this, and yet was never in a good humour when Werner accompanied him thither. For this man, usually so grave and silent, knew how to introduce subjects of conversation that absorbed all Thea's interest. He would become really talkative and brilliant, and, since the topics under discussion generally had some reference to literature or art, Lothar was soon bored, and felt himself quite *de trop* and thrust out in the cold. It was odd that Werner had lately seemed to have a perfect talent for irritating Lothar, who often, nowadays, was very impatient with his friend without any reasonable cause, for Werner's demeanour towards him was not changed in any respect.

One day Thea was seated in her bow-windowed room in full council with the cook, the housekeeper, and the major-domo. The matter in hand was the arrangements for an entertainment to be given the next day at Eichhof, and Thea was availing herself of the experience of her trusty retainers. She sat at a table with a sheet of paper before her, jotting down various memoranda, and the three people stood by with grave faces, evidently quite aware of the enormous responsibility resting upon their shoulders. There had been a slight difference of opinion between the housekeeper and her young mistress, and Thea had for the first time asserted herself and carried her point with quiet firmness. She was so much interested that she bestowed only a careless 'good-day' upon Lothar, who entered the room and, seated in a low arm-chair, became both spectator and auditor of the debate. He sat with his back towards the window, so that the light fell full upon Thea. She wore a black silk gown, with a profusion of rich white lace at her throat and wrists, her sole ornament being a cross upon a broad, heavy golden chain at her neck. The very simplicity of her dress set off the delicate noble outline of her face, from which the large dark eyes, beneath the finely-pencilled eyebrows, were now gazing with a gentle, kindly expression upon the servants who were receiving her orders.

"How beautiful she is!" thought Lothar, as he sat and looked at her. "Bernhard is a fool to leave this woman here while he busies himself, or thinks he busies himself, with politics in Berlin. To be sure, she is an angel, and can do everything that she attempts, even to representing her husband in his absence. But it is not right of him for all that, and I should just like to know what she thinks of it. I wonder whether she misses him much?"

Thea now dismissed her people and turned to Lothar. "What! alone again?" she asked, offering him her hand. "Has Herr von Werner repented his promise to help us with the decoration of the ball-room?"

"Oh, you never can count upon him," said Lothar; "he said he could not possibly come with me, but would make his appearance later."

"Well, then, let us go to the greenhouses and pick out what we want from there."

Half an hour afterwards Lieutenant Werner arrived. He did not follow the young people to the greenhouses as the servant suggested, but awaited their return in the bow-windowed room. Here he walked slowly to and fro, paused for a few seconds before Thea's writing-table, and then went into the bow-window, where stood her low chair and her embroidery-frame. He passed his hand over her work with a touch that was like a caress, then suddenly turned away and stood at the window, leaning his forehead against the glass pane. Here he remained motionless until Lothar and Thea entered the room.

"Oh, I am so glad you are come!" the Countess exclaimed upon seeing him. "Now we will go immediately to the ball-room to arrange the plants and the table for the cotillon favours."

"Ah, we are to have a cotillon, then?" said Werner.

"Yes; this is to be a dinner followed by a dance, after the old Eichhof fashion. My husband writes me that our section of country is actually falling into undeserved disrepute from a social point of view, and he makes it my bounden duty to do the honours of the castle as well as possible. I pray you, therefore, to do all that you can to help me to entertain the young officers from the frontier posts."

Lothar and Werner arranged the pretty favours for the cotillon on a satin cushion placed on the table for the purpose, while Thea disposed little flowering plants around it. It all looked very bright and fancifully gay.

"I want it to be all ready by the afternoon," she said, "for my father and sister are coming over to tea, and the dance is a surprise for Alma."

"It absolutely delights my soul to see you busy with anything so frivolous as cotillon favours," said Lothar to Werner, who was just arranging a refractory ribbon.

"Do I weary you with all I give you to do?" asked Thea.

Werner laughed. "For heaven's sake, my dear Countess, do not take me, as your brother-in-law

does, for a mere bookworm in uniform."

"Not at all; I take you for a profound philosopher."

"Greatly obliged, I'm sure; but really, Eichhof, I cannot see why I should not like to unpack and arrange these pretty little things, or why my books, which you so despise, should hinder me from winning some of them in the cotillon."

"I know how well you dance, and ride too, and that is just why I cannot understand how you can read so much. When did you learn that habit?"

"I learned it when my income would not allow of my passing much time outside of my four walls."

Lothar was silent, and Werner went on very composedly: "At the time of the universal money-panic, after those years when gold seemed to be lying about by millions in the streets, and when many a man, in stooping to pick up what he fancied he saw, lost his own hard thalers out of his pocket, I suddenly found my modest income reduced by one-half. All the choice I had was either to make it suffice or to leave the service, and as I was a soldier, and nothing but a soldier to the very marrow of my bones, I got through."

"Couldn't you give me a receipt for the process?" asked Lothar.

Werner laughed. "The receipt is simple enough: 'Determine to do what you must.'"

"And then it was that you began to read?" said Thea.

"Oh, I had tried somewhat before to fill up the gaps in a cadet's education, but then it was that I began to read in earnest, for my books had to indemnify me for so much else. Now that I have no longer that reason for study, my taste leads me in the same direction. Did you look through the book I sent you the other day, Countess?"

Here they were again launched upon one of those confounded literary topics that made Lothar feel his presence so superfluous. He gave a vicious dig to the pin by which he was fastening a knot of ribbon to the cushion, and then went and worked away among the flower-pots, wishing fervently that Herr von Rosen would come and interrupt this bookish talk, and altogether getting himself into a desperately bad humour.

When at last the carriage from Schönthal drove up, he hurried out to meet the guests. Thea observed for the first time this afternoon that Lothar was certainly attentive to Alma; he devoted himself to her exclusively, and no wonder, she looked so bright and pretty that it was but natural that Lothar should be fascinated.

Thea brought out Walter's last letter, from which she wished to read a few extracts to her father. As she opened it, two photographs fell out of the envelope and made the round of the table about which they were sitting over a cup of afternoon tea. One was a late picture of Walter; the other, which he asked to have returned to him, was Dr. Nordstedt.

"A fine, earnest face," said Werner, looking at the latter.

Lothar glanced at it over his friend's shoulder. "By Jove, that is a beard!" he exclaimed. "Look, Alma: how do you like that?"

He handed her the picture. She looked at it with a smile. "He has fine eyes," she said, "but otherwise the picture does not please me. I detest those huge beards."

Lothar stroked and twisted his handsome blonde moustache, and Alma cast a glance at him as if to compare the two heads,--heads so dissimilar that there was absolutely no comparison between them.

"Does Walter say nothing of the Hohensteins?" asked Herr von Rosen. "Adela and her father have been two weeks now in Berlin."

"Walter does not seem to have seen them," replied Thea; "he never mentions them."

"I should like to see how papa Hohenstein comports himself towards his new relatives," said Lothar.

"He does not comport himself towards them at all," Alma answered him. "Adela wrote me that her father seems very well, and is very amiable to everybody, except that he will neither hear nor see anything of the Kohnheims, and if his affairs did not compel him to be in Berlin, he would, owing to them, far rather never have gone there."

"I am very curious with regard to Hugo's wife," said Lothar. "I really never dreamed that he would make such a marriage. In the spring the happy couple are to come to Rollin, because papa-in-law Kohnheim absolutely must see his daughter installed there as a noble châtelaine. Aha! our part of the country is growing excessively interesting; we have a Polish countess already, we are going to have a Jewess, and we may hope shortly to have a third,--a Japanese."



"Matters are bad enough," Herr von Rosen said, seriously, "when the salvation from ruin of a young nobleman and of an ancient family must be sought at the hand of a Jewish heiress."

"Before resorting to such means it surely would be better to send a bullet through one's brains," said Lothar.

"Or to live within one's income," Herr von Rosen gravely corrected him.

"Of course; and Hohenstein might have done so, since he was the only son of a man who certainly some years ago possessed considerable wealth."

Herr von Rosen fixed his eyes earnestly upon Lothar for a moment, and then said, "My dear Lothar, I think it can be done in every case. He who has but little must rely solely upon that, and not try to build himself a house of cards."

A flush mounted to Lothar's forehead; he passed his hand through his hair in some embarrassment, but said nothing. It seemed to him that Herr von Rosen had laid special emphasis upon the word 'cards,' and it awakened in his mind all kinds of disagreeable memories.

"I am so sorry for the poor rich girl,--I mean Hugo Hohenstein's wife," said Alma; "although, for Adela's sake, I cannot but be glad that matters are to be arranged at Rollin."

Lothar had conquered his embarrassment. "Nonsense!" he said. "The 'poor rich girl' is my lady Baroness von Hohenstein, wears Parisian toilettes, and will be quite content if you do not all treat her too badly. Why, Rollin is being turned inside-out to make it worthy to receive her. A regiment of tradesfolk are at work there, and the Rollin wagons are rolling to and from the railroad station every day, transporting the adornments of the cage that is to imprison the golden bird."

"Adela will be unhappy if much in Rollin is changed," said Alma.

"Oh, Adela will be a lovely sister-in-law for the little Jewess; she is not to be pitied so far as Adela is concerned," Lothar declared.

"Most certainly not," said Thea.

"Werner had taken no part in the discussion. He looked at his watch, and rose to take leave.

"I am seriously concerned about Lothar," said Herr von Rosen, when the young officers had departed. "There are a couple of incorrigible gamblers among the officers of the frontier posts, and it is reported that Lothar lately played with them all night long."

"But that would be horrible, papa," exclaimed Thea, "when he promised Bernhard so faithfully that he would be prudent----"

"He is too heedless!"

"And yet such a dear good fellow withal," Thea said, affectionately, inwardly resolving to entreat Werner on the morrow to have an eye upon her brother-in-law while Bernhard was away.

"Yes, he is an amiable fellow, but thoroughly untrustworthy," Herr von Rosen rejoined.

Alma said nothing, but her cheek flushed and paled. She knew her father was right, but then she could find so many reasons for excusing Lothar. Thea looked very grave and sad. She suspected how it stood with her sister. She had honestly taken pains to know Lothar, and, although she could not but be prepossessed by his frank amiability, she had arrived at the conviction that he was wavering and uncertain in his views and principles. She had not sufficient experience of life to judge whether his character would ever become firm and stable, but with true feminine instinct she suspected what she could not know, and felt instinctively that it would cost her many an anxious fear to see her sister's happiness intrusted to a man like Lothar. Often when Alma had involuntarily betrayed her affection Thea had wished for an instant that Lothar might reciprocate it, but the next moment she would gladly have known them miles asunder. And on the morrow they were to dance together in her house, and to enjoy all the opportunity for familiar intercourse afforded by an entire evening! She wished Alma had fallen in love with Werner, who she could see was attracted by her. Else why should he come to Eichhof whenever Alma was there? And why else had she so often surprised that dreamy expression in his eyes? Oh, if Alma had only loved him! He was so trustworthy and honourable! Long after she had retired for the night her thoughts were occupied with her sister and the young officers.

## CHAPTER XV.

## IN BERLIN.

The chorus was intoning a grand polonaise, to the strains of which a glittering train of splendidly-attired couples was marching around the magnificent ball-room of the Berlin Opera-House. The Emperor's tall, venerable figure was followed by the various royal pairs, at whose approach the guests of the opera-ball stood in line and bowed respectfully while the court passed by. Twice the royal party made the circuit of the room, and then for the most part retired to their private boxes. Meanwhile the glittering crowd of the public--the truly mixed metropolitan society--thronged the foyers and public boxes. Magnificent toilettes surged up and down the broad flight of steps that to-night replaced the box usually appropriated to the court, and that led down to the parquette, now flooded over for the dancers, the number of whom was still on the increase. At the head of these steps stood a couple who had already been the subject of frequent remark. The cavalier was a distinguished, aristocratic figure; the lady, unique in air, with bright sparkling eyes and a bewitching smile upon her delicately curved lips, wore a robe of sea-green satin, that suited well the red gold of her abundant hair.

"Count Bernhard Eichhof, the youngest member of the Reichstag, and Frau von Wronsky," whispered one of the initiated to a guest from the provinces.

Count Bernhard Eichhof and Fran von Wronksy! How came it to pass that her hand rested on his arm? How came it to pass that she was clever, witty, amusing for all the rest of the world, and gentle, often humble, always femininely delicate and reserved towards him alone? The one manner perhaps explained the other.

Certainly since the election it was Bernhard's duty to be civil to Marzell Wronsky, and just as certainly it was the fact that Marzell's wife attracted a throng of ardent admirers around her in the metropolis, although she passed for a very cold beauty. None of the men who worshipped at her shrine could boast of the least distinction accorded them by her. It was said of her that she had witty, clever words for all, but a heart for none, unless, indeed, her husband was its fortunate possessor, as to which there was a great diversity of opinion. This cold, haughty woman was meekness itself towards Bernhard. He could not himself tell why it was, but he was never with her without a conviction that she hid a warm, nay, a glowing heart beneath a coldly composed exterior.

Bernhard had believed himself justified in despising her. She had endured his scorn without remonstrance, only showing him that she suffered fearfully beneath it. He began to pity her, and the thought that he had perhaps been too harsh towards her gradually gave way to the conviction that there might be many reasons for a milder judgment of her. He saw all the homage that was paid her here, and often heard women in whose opinion he placed great confidence declare that her conduct was always exemplary. At last he came to regard himself as an insufferable prig, and decided that his manner towards the lady must undergo a change. She was so grateful for every little attention from him, while any such from others was received so coldly, that Bernhard felt himself exalted to the position of her magnanimous protector. He really desired to hear from herself the explanation of a dark point in her past, about which, as he knew, all the world was in error. And thus it came to pass that Count Bernhard Eichhof offered his arm to Frau von Wronsky to conduct her about the opera-house, and to be conscious that she was admired by everybody, and that he was envied of many. The couple paused for a few minutes at the head of the steps, observing those going and coming.

"What exquisite toilettes!" said Julutta Wronsky, indicating with a scarcely perceptible motion of her fan two ladies who were passing. "This is an excellent post of observation."

"Unfortunately, you cannot see the most exquisite toilette here, madame," said a young officer who stood on the other side of her.

She looked at him inquiringly.

"You could only see that by standing opposite a mirror," the officer said, with a meaning smile, stroking his moustache and scanning her figure with a bold glance of admiration.

Bernhard felt her hand rest somewhat more heavily on his arm, as she replied, with a certain far-away look in her eyes which did not seem even to see the young fellow, "It is a pity you cannot exercise your talents in a milliner's shop, Herr von Dollen; that is the place for mirrors and a certain kind of complimentary speeches."

Herr von Dollen laughed rather constrainedly, and soon took his departure, while Bernhard and Julutta descended the steps.

"Dollen has had a lesson," said Bernhard, smiling.

"I cannot endure that sort of compliment," Julutta replied, impatiently,--instantly, however, bending her head slightly, while a faint flush rose to her cheeks.

"Forgive me," she whispered; "I forgot that you, very naturally, cannot believe this of *me*." The words were uttered with no appearance either of offence or of irony; there was only a slight

vibration, as from suppressed, painful emotion, audible in her voice.

Bernhard looked at her. Her face wore the sweet, timid expression that it was wont to assume for him alone.

"Nay, madame," he said; "I can easily believe that the expression of such coarse and impertinent admiration may well wound your pride."

"I thank you," she rejoined, with a glance of fervid gratitude raised for an instant to his face; "it would, however, have been but natural for you to disbelieve in any genuine pride on my part."

"If I had done so before, this winter would have convinced me of my error," he replied, in a low voice, bending towards her.

He saw her sudden blush; her breath came quicker and her lips quivered. She said nothing, but she looked at him again, and in her eyes there was so much gratitude and happiness that Bernhard was involuntarily touched. Suddenly her hand trembled, and the blush on her cheek faded, to be succeeded by a mortal pallor.

"Let us go," she murmured, pausing abruptly and turning from the direction in which they were walking; "for God's sake take me away from here!"

"What is the matter?"

"Good heavens, do you not see?" She took her hand from his arm and tried to penetrate alone the crowd which had gathered closely about the dancers. Bernhard looked around him,--a few steps off stood a tall, rather good-looking man, in the dress of a civilian, watching the dancers. Bernhard recognized the dark, sharply-defined features, the lofty brow, and the thin hair brushed away from the temples. He knew now why Julutta Wronsky had turned and fled. For an instant he hesitated; then he followed her. Just as he reached her she covered her eyes with her hand. "I am so dizzy," she moaned; "the whole room is turning round. Oh, my God!"

She tottered and seemed about to fall. Bernhard supported her to the foyer, where he found an armchair for her. Her hand trembled perceptibly upon his arm; she shivered. He addressed no word to her; she sank into the chair without speaking again, and, leaning back, half closed her eyes. "Find my husband for me; we must go," she said, at last.

"You are ill. Let me bring you a glass of wine," he said, looking at her marble-white face. She shook her head.

"I cannot breathe here, now that I know----" Her lips quivered, and she did not finish her sentence. Bernhard stood hesitating for a moment beside her.

"Go!" she entreated again.

And he went to let Wronsky know that his wife had suddenly been taken ill and wished to leave the hall.

A quarter of an hour afterwards Bernhard was standing alone at the head of the broad steps, looking listlessly down upon the surging crowd. The stranger whom he had observed was no longer there; the Wronskys had gone home. Bernhard thought the opera-ball rather stupid.

"Aha! where is your beautiful companion?" asked Herr von Dollen, suddenly appearing.

"Gone home," Bernhard answered, rather brusquely.

"Remarkable woman; cold and hard as an icicle, but piquante. You are very intimate there, eh?"

"Scarcely that. But the Wronskys are neighbours of ours."

"Ah! then you really know something of them, and can tell me about the lady's former marriage. They say it was short and unhappy, but no one seems to know whether she is a widow or a *divorcée*. She never alludes to her past----"

"I do not know why you should suppose her to have made an exception in my case, Herr von Dollen," Bernhard interrupted him, with some irritation.

"Ah! *pardon*, I only thought that perhaps you knew----"

"I know nothing," Bernhard briefly rejoined. He was not in a pleasant mood, and soon after left the ball.

As he was passing through the gateway, he suddenly heard himself called by name.

"*Vraiment, c'est Monsieur de Eikhoff*," said a harsh, grating voice that Bernhard seemed to have heard before. He turned and confronted the stranger.

"Ah, *enchanté*, charmed to see you, *mon cher ami*; an unexpected meeting."

"Most unexpected, Herr von Mõhâzy," Bernhard said, coldly, touching his hat, and apparently overlooking the stranger's outstretched hand. The latter took no notice of this oversight, however, but continued, in his grating voice and in German, spoken with a strong foreign accent,-

"Are you, too, tired of the ball? They say we are going too soon, the height of gayety has not yet been reached. *À propos*, do you make a long stay in Berlin?"

"So long as the Reichstag is in session. And you?" Bernhard asked, with sudden interest. "Shall you stay for the Carnival?"

"Heaven, or whatever other powers there be, forbid! Berlin is too provincial, although it has made some progress of late years. I come from Paris, and am on my way to St. Petersburg."

An expression of relief passed across Bernhardt face: "Ah? Allow me to wish you a pleasant winter." And he turned to go.

"*O çà, Herr von Eikhoff!*" Herr von Mõhâzy called after him; "I will not detain you if you are expected at a rendezvous!" He laughed, and Bernhard made a gesture of impatience. "Pardon, but I should like to learn something of a lady whom perhaps you know."

"I can hardly have anything to tell of a lady whom *you* inquire for," Bernhard said, sharply, while a flush rose to his forehead.

But Herr von Mõhâzy was not easily disconcerted. "Ah! pardon, I know you are *un jeune homme vertueux*; but my question refers to a lady of position, a Frau von--- Ah, what is her name at present?" He took out a note-book and turned over the leaves, while Bernhard, agitated by conflicting emotions, stood rooted as by a spell to the spot, instead of turning his back upon the man at once.

"Ah, here it is," said Herr von Mõhâzy,--"Frau Julutta Wronsky." And he looked at Bernhard again. "Do you know her? and could you tell me where to find her? It is merely for *un petit amusement sans consequence*."

"You can look for the name in the directory," replied Bernhard, well knowing that 'Wronsky' could not be found in it.

"You do not know her, then? But, *parbleu!* you did know her, *sûrement*. Ah, I must take you into confidence; the story is very piquant."

"I regret, Herr Mõhâzy, that I have not a moment to spare at present. Let me advise you to search the directory, and if you do not find the name there you may conclude that the lady is not in Berlin."

He jumped into his carriage and drove to his hotel.

"What will he do?" was the question that filled his mind, "and what *can* he do? He can certainly destroy the social position, and perhaps the very existence, of this woman, wretch that he is! But he must be prevented; he must!" He suddenly bethought himself and took himself to task.

"What business is it all of mine? I am very sorry for the woman, but it is none the less true that she went wrong, and must now bear the consequences, which may perhaps ruin her, who knows? I cannot prevent it; and, indeed, when I remember everything, I cannot even excuse her. And yet---"

The carriage stopped at his hotel.

In his room he found a letter from Thea, describing the dance at Eichhof. He read it with thoughts elsewhere. It all seemed like child's play, whilst here in Berlin there might shortly be enacted one of those tragedies which now and then disturb the smooth surface of society. He saw before him the unsuspecting husband, from whose eyes the veil was suddenly torn; the guilty woman, who had vainly tried to atone for the sin of her youth; the vile betrayer--oh, here were the same parts played in so many dramas, but each of these performers wore a face familiar to Bernhard. This husband, the happiness of whose life was perhaps to be annihilated at a blow, had been his schoolmate; he had exchanged friendly words with this woman--no, he would not think of the wife, but of the deceived husband,--only of him; and for the sake of this companion of his boyhood--for the husband's sake--the thought of this drama filled him with horror. Must he not try to avert its fulfilment? He believed that he must do so, and for the husband's sake alone; and whenever through the night the image of the pale, golden-haired woman intruded upon his thoughts, he thrust it from him. She must be sacrificed to his sense of justice in his thoughts, if not in reality. "Not for her,--she does not deserve it,--but for her husband, I must try to see this Mõhâzy once more, and in some way render him harmless. First, however, I must speak with her; I must clearly understand the matter, and consult with her as to the best measures for her protection."

With her! Yes; the indirect ways of the heart and of the devil are marvellous indeed. They led Count Bernhard Eichhof the next morning to Frau von Wronsky's boudoir!

## CHAPTER XVI.

### REVELATIONS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES.

"I did not love him, but I consented to be his wife. I loved no one except my father, and even he was more of an abstraction than a reality to me, for I saw him but seldom, and scarcely ever talked with him. He was always away from home, and I was left alone with my French governess at the lonely country-house in Russian Poland. Nevertheless I loved the being that my fancy had created, to which I had lent my father's form and name, little as it really resembled him. It was, therefore, not at all difficult for me, in order to save him from ruin, to promise to be the wife of a handsome man who had presented me with a *parure* of diamonds. I was, besides, weary of my quiet life, and longed to see something of the world of which I read in books. They told me that for political reasons my future husband was obliged to preserve a certain incognito in Russia, and that therefore our marriage must take place shortly and privately.

"I thought this very romantic, and packed my trunk--which was but scantily furnished--and got into the travelling-carriage, full of happy dreams of the future. The marriage ceremony was performed in the chapel of a castle which was entirely unknown to me.

"Thus I became the wife of Josef von M $\ddot{o}$ h $\hat{a}$ zy, and my father retrieved his fortune with the money paid him by my husband. I had been sold like a chattel, but I was such a perfect child that I saw nothing degrading in the transaction, but was glad to have been of use to my father.

"We went to Paris; Herr von M $\ddot{o}$ h $\hat{a}$ zy purchased exquisite toilettes for me, since I did not know how to select them myself, and engaged a French maid for me.

"Standing before a huge mirror in the Hotel Royal, I first discovered that I looked well, and the same evening I was told, also for the first time, that I was beautiful. From this day I continually contemplated myself in the looking-glass, and Herr von M $\ddot{o}$ h $\hat{a}$ zy rubbed his hands and told me I 'exceeded his expectations.'

"My expectations were also exceeded. I had not imagined the world so bright and merry, and if I had dreamed of love it had seemed to me that its home would be found in some quiet garden among blossoming roses, rather than in a ball-room with gas-lights and artificial flowers and finely-dressed people; but I soon perceived that the garden of roses existed for me only in my dreams, and that I must accommodate myself to the ball-room.

"Herr von M $\ddot{o}$ h $\hat{a}$ zy loved travel and variety. From Paris we went to Cairo, then to Naples, and thence still farther. I saw new countries and new people, and learned that there are two forces that influence the world and mankind--money, and the attraction between man and woman which they call love.

"There were days when life did not seem to me worth the living, only to repeat the same experience--days when all that I saw others engaged in wearied and disgusted me. But these were only passing shadows, sentimental emotions, deserving only, Herr von M $\ddot{o}$ h $\hat{a}$ zy thought, of a compassionate shrug. On the whole, I liked the splendour and the pleasure reigning everywhere in my world, and would not willingly have foregone them. We returned to Paris when the chaotic bustle of the great Exposition was at its height, and went thence to Trouville. We had charming apartments, comprising the larger half of a pretty villa. In the other half a couple of rooms were rented to a young German, whom I sometimes saw sitting on a little side-balcony near our veranda. Sometimes, too, I met him on the shore, and, as we lived beneath the same roof, we bowed to each other. At last, when driving one day on the Corso, it so befell that he was introduced to me. There was a certain distinguished air of cool reserve about him that struck me, because it was to me quite a novel characteristic in a man. I soon found that he differed entirely from the men whom I was accustomed to see in Herr von M $\ddot{o}$ h $\hat{a}$ zy's society, and although, in spite of his youth, he inspired me with a kind of diffidence, I nevertheless felt great confidence in him. I often thought that if some terrible accident were to happen where we were, all the other men of our society would take care of their own safety, but that Herr von Eichhof would think of me because I was the weakest. I believed he would do this, although he never paid me the smallest attention, much less made love to me, as did so many of the others. I regretted extremely that he evidently rather avoided us, and I told him so one day. I cannot remember his reply exactly, but I know that it made a deep impression upon me. Perhaps it was less his words than his manner that told me that he disapproved of our mode of life and did not enjoy our society.

"I ought, I suppose, to have felt insulted, but instead I only felt sad. I certainly began at this time to be less gay and more and more thoughtful.

"One day I thought that Herr von M $\ddot{o}$ h $\hat{a}$ zy paid very marked attentions to a lady of our acquaintance. I was by no means strait-laced on this point, and it did not pain me at all to be neglected by Herr von M $\ddot{o}$ h $\hat{a}$ zy, but my pride revolted at the thought that his neglect might be observed by others, and that I might be thought an object of compassion. An unpleasant scene between this lady and myself ensued, and I imperatively demanded of Herr von M $\ddot{o}$ h $\hat{a}$ zy that he should take me away from Trouville.

"At first he laughed, then he ridiculed me, and finally he angrily refused to listen to my request. I insisted upon my demand; he persisted in his refusal. The words we exchanged grew more and more sharp and bitter, until at last he uttered the dreadful revelation that influenced my whole future life, and separated me in my own eyes from everything which my instinct told me was good and noble.

"You have no right to demand this of me, for you are not my wife!"

"I staggered back, and stared at him as though I could not understand the words he spoke.

"You are not legally my wife," he repeated once more.

"Then the calm of despair seemed to take possession of me. I did not faint, I did not even burst into tears. I approached Herr von M $\ddot{o}$ h $\hat{a}$ zy and ordered him to give me a thorough explanation. Perhaps I still entertained a slight hope that he had only meant to terrify me.

"If this were so, that hope was annihilated in a moment. The priest by whom I had supposed myself married was a friend of Herr von M $\ddot{o}$ h $\hat{a}$ zy's, and had but worn the priestly garb over his uniform. I had been fearfully betrayed, and--my father had known the truth. When Herr von M $\ddot{o}$ h $\hat{a}$ zy told me this I lost consciousness.

"When I came to myself I heard talking and laughing in the next room. I could distinguish M $\ddot{o}$ h $\hat{a}$ zy's voice and the laughter of the woman who had been the cause of our quarrel. I sprang up and rushed out of my chamber and down the stairs, not knowing what I did, possessed by the one thought that I must leave the house, that I would rather die than ever again set eyes upon the man who had deceived me so terribly.

"At the foot of the staircase I met Herr von Eichhof. My disordered appearance probably struck him, for he stood still and addressed me. My teeth chattered as in a fever-fit; instead of answering him, I covered my face with my hands and burst into tears.

"You are in no condition to go out," he said, taking my hand; and his voice sounded so kind and gentle that I let him detain me for an instant as he tried to persuade me to go up-stairs again.

"It is your duty to stay with your husband," he said, "even although----"

"I extricated myself, and in an access of disgust and aversion the words escaped my lips, 'He is not my husband!'"

"Herr von Eichhof started, then turned silently away, and ascended the stairs without turning once to look at me. I stared after him until he had vanished. I was not in his eyes worthy of another glance. I knew it, and I knew that his judgment would be echoed by every one. I left the house almost mechanically.

"Outside it was growing dark. I pulled a black lace shawl that I had on over my head and passed on quickly, without an aim, without a resolve, desiring nothing, caring for nothing except to leave the house that had so lately been my home.

"Suddenly I found myself on the shore. It was a lonely spot, and I heard the roar of the ocean and saw the moon rise out of it like a fiery red ball. I went on until the waves broke almost at my feet, and I thought how it would be best for me to go on and on thus until the waters rolled over my head. Then all would be over; the sea would look unchanged, and on shore no one would miss me. In my thoughts death seemed far easier and better than life. Suddenly two points of light gleamed on the water,--a dark shadow glided over the waves across the wake of the moon, and the tones of a woman's glorious voice singing fell upon my ear. It sang a song that I knew and loved; the voice seemed to allure my thoughts and take them captive. I listened first, and finally I sang too. I cannot understand now how such a thing was possible at such a moment, but I did it. Some inward impulse urged me to unite my voice with those lovely tones. Perhaps the people in the boat would remember my voice after it was silent forever. I would have liked to leave some kindly memory behind me. And as I sang I thought of my lonely childhood, my ruined and desolate youth, and unutterable compassion for myself overcame me, and as the song died away I burst into a flood of burning tears.

"I went back from the shore. Life can be thrown away when it is hated or despised, but not when it is pitied.

"The singer had ceased; but the sound of voices came to me across the water. I could

distinguish no words, but it was the sound of kindly human speech, and I began to wonder if some voice might not speak tenderly to me at some future day; the world was so large, surely there was some quiet corner in it for me.

"I remembered to have heard that a famous songstress, who had retired from a public career on account of her health, and who devoted her powers to the training of other voices, was among the visitors at Trouville, and that I had also heard that she was to leave on the following morning.

"The thought occurred to me that it was her voice that had so attracted me, and with it came the determination to go to her, to tell her of my utter misery, and to beg her to grant me her protection. Her voice had called me back to life. I would ask her to decide my future fate. Perhaps she would employ me as her maid, perhaps she would think my voice worth training. I hurried on. There was still, then, a 'perhaps,' still a hope for me----"

Here the manuscript ended, and when Bernhard Eichhof had finished reading it he still held it in his hand, and his eyes were riveted upon the written page, as though it could afford him further intelligence. And yet he knew what must follow. He knew that Julutta's hopes were fulfilled, that she left Trouville with that same singer and came to Germany, where her distant cousin, Marzell Wronsky, met her beneath the roof of her protectress and married her.

At last he laid aside the sheets that she had given him at his visit of the morning, and sighed deeply. "Poor, poor creature!" he murmured. "I judged her too harshly; and she is so gentle, so humble to me in spite of the pain I have given her."

He remembered how pale and ill she had looked to-day. The event of the previous evening had evidently agitated and distressed her fearfully. And yet when Bernhard had offered to seek out M $\ddot{o}$ h $\hat{a}$ zy, to induce him to pursue his journey immediately, she had not hastened to accept his aid.

"You must first know the story of my youth," she said, "and then decide whether I am worthy of your help. I could not trust myself to tell you this story; but if you will read it--since my marriage I have indulged the idle practice of keeping a diary, and that it might be complete I have prefaced it with my sad story. No human eye save my own was ever to rest upon these pages; but I make an exception in your case, because fate has already willed that you should have some knowledge of my secret."

In this wise had Bernhard come into possession of these pages. "Fate has dealt cruelly with her," he thought, "and I have added to its cruelty wherever I could. Oh, I have much to atone for!"

He paced his room to and fro in some agitation, then consulted the paper for the list of names of new arrivals, among which he had already seen M $\ddot{o}$ h $\hat{a}$ zy's address, and, after re-reading it, tossed the paper aside and ordered his carriage.

Half an hour later a servant handed Herr von M $\ddot{o}$ h $\hat{a}$ zy the Count's card. Herr von M $\ddot{o}$ h $\hat{a}$ zy was wont to rise about noon, and was therefore still wrapped in his silken Turkish dressing-gown when his unexpected visitor was announced. As the visitor followed close upon his card, there was nothing for it but to prepare for his reception as best he might by tightening the silken cord and tassels around his waist.

"Excessively delighted to see you. Quite an unexpected honour," he called out, as Bernhard hastily entered the room and closed the door behind him; "but I must beg you to excuse this." And he indicated his brilliant habiliments.

"I have a very special reason for my visit, Herr von M $\ddot{o}$ h $\hat{a}$ zy," Bernhard replied curtly, without accepting an offered seat. "You asked yesterday for a lady who is held in high esteem in society here. I know that you had certain relations with this lady, which, by a monstrous deceit, as you know, you----"

"Sir!"

"I am ready to answer for my words,--which relations you established by a monstrous deceit."

"I must pray you to use less violent language!"

"I must pray you to hear me out!" Bernhard said, in a raised voice, and with flashing eyes. "From what you said yesterday, I cannot but suppose that you intend to compromise this lady, and to destroy the peace of a happy home."

"Not an idea of anything of the kind," Herr von M $\ddot{o}$ h $\hat{a}$ zy calmly remarked. But Bernhard had grown so eager in his part of chivalrous defender that he neither heard nor heeded.

"I am come to you now to give you an opportunity of leaving Berlin this very day, if you would not be so insulted by me as to make a hostile meeting between us inevitable."

Herr von M $\ddot{o}$ h $\hat{a}$ zy was speechless for a moment, staring by turns at Bernhard's tall, threatening figure, as it stood between him and the door, and at a singular object which the young man had taken out as he spoke, and which strongly resembled a braided leather riding-

whip. Bernhard's eyes were riveted upon him, and the singular object quivered meanwhile in his hand. But Herr von M $\ddot{o}$ h $\acute{a}$ zy was not bewildered for longer than a second, and, putting the entire length of the table between Bernhard and himself, he suddenly threw back his head and burst into a fit of laughter.

"Delicious!" he cried. "But, my dear Herr von Eichhof, all this could have been arranged very much more comfortably. I think your Berlin so insupportably tedious that I should certainly have left it to-day or to-morrow, and because I find it all so tiresome, I thought it might possibly have amused me to see that lady again; although, I assure you, she is far too indifferent to me to make it worth while to run the risk of a bullet or a sabre-cut for a sight of her. I am rejoiced to learn that she has found so devoted a friend in you. I--ha! ha!--I--'tis so excellent a joke that it more than atones to me for not seeing her again. A thousand thanks, Herr von Eichhof!"

Bernhard had grown pale. He had not looked for this turn of affairs, and it was his part now to be bewildered for a moment.

"You are as coarse as you are cowardly," he ground out between his teeth, coming up to the table, whereat Herr von M $\ddot{o}$ h $\acute{a}$ zy thought best to bluster a little.

"No need of such ugly words, sir," he said, with a forced smile.

"Will you leave Berlin to-day?" Bernhard insisted.

"*Mais oui, mon cher*; I see no reason why I should remain here."

"I should have no more difficulty in finding you to-morrow than to-day!" Bernhard exclaimed, with a glance of menace, as he turned towards the door.

Herr von M $\ddot{o}$ h $\acute{a}$ zy came out from behind his table. "Oh, you have nothing further to fear!" he cried, as Bernhard opened the door. "I dislike to disturb the amusements of others. My remembrances to Frau Julutta Wronsky!" And he laughed once more.

Bernhard slammed the door behind him.

Julutta now had nothing to fear, and Bernhard and she had one more secret, one more memory, in common.

Herr von M $\ddot{o}$ h $\acute{a}$ zy left Berlin the same day, and an hour later a note from Bernhard informed Frau von Wronsky that there was no reason why she should absent herself from the opera on the plea of illness, as she had resolved to do in case M $\ddot{o}$ h $\acute{a}$ zy did not leave town.

She appeared in her box, and when Bernhard paid his respects to her between the acts he read in every glance of her fine eyes the gratitude that she could not otherwise express in her husband's presence.

Hugo von Hohenstein sat in Councillor Kohnheim's box opposite, and his opera-glass was scarcely, during the *entr'acte*, turned away from his *vis-à-vis*.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE CONSEQUENCES BEGIN TO APPEAR.

Lothar was sitting in a rocking-chair by the window of his room in the officers' quarters and gazing after the blue rings of the smoke from his cigar. His thoughts were far, however, from being as placid as his attitude, and his eyes would now and then turn from the airy rings to various papers tossed in a confused heap upon his table. At last he threw away his cigar and took up these papers.

"Monstrous!" he muttered; "the man must be insane! How the deuce could I ever use one hundred marks' worth of soap and perfumes? The bill, to be sure, dates from last year. I can't prove that it's incorrect, but I believe it to be so. And here again, three hundred marks for gloves,--now that's an utter impossibility,--and the Berlin tailor insists, too, that he has never been paid. The scoundrels are rolling in the money they steal from the pockets of us poor lieutenants."

Then he remembered that he had the day before ordered another large supply of gloves and perfumery, for in that 'den of a garrison' there was nothing to be had fit to use. And for a moment



he really reflected upon some method of regulating his finances. In fact, it was all a mere bagatelle not worth mentioning, but then the 'scoundrels' dunned so insolently, and it would really be refreshing to be rid of them all. Werner had relieved Lothar of his large gambling debt, and the latter had had a lucky evening at play shortly afterward, and had repaid his friend every farthing. What if he should have recourse to his friend in his brother's absence? But then the fellow was so priggish. He had lectured him when he went to pay him because he had won the money at cards. As if there were any positive harm in cards! To be sure, he had never played in Berlin, there were so many other ways of amusing one's self there. But here in this 'infernal den' what else was there to do but play cards, unless one was a tiresome bookworm like Werner? And from his vexation with his bills Lothar passed into quite a fit of irritation against Werner, and decided that he certainly would ask no new favour from him.

"Haberdasher, perfumer, tailor & Co. may wait," he decided. "Why in thunder did they let their bills run on so?"

A knock at the door interrupted his disagreeable reflections, and upon his "Come in," a very unexpected visitor appeared,--Hugo von Hohenstein. He had come to pass a few days in Rollin to superintend the alterations there, and would not go back to Berlin, he said, without "hunting up" his old friend and comrade. He laughed as he noticed the pile of bills upon the table.

"Why not follow my example?" he cried, tapping Lothar on the shoulder. "Marry a daughter of Israel with heaps of money. 'Tis the only salvation for a poor lieutenant, and a very delightful salvation besides, upon my honour! The young Baroness von Hohenstein, in spite of the *née* Kohnheim, is a model of high-bred elegance, and our apartments and our equipage are quite perfect. Oh, absolutely aristocratic, I can tell you! As for Rollin, I am turning it into an El-Dorado. You would hardly recognize it."

"What does your father say to it all?" asked Lothar, who with all his levity could hardly bring himself to treat his former comrade with the old genuine cordiality.

Hugo shrugged his shoulders. "Since my governor no longer lives at Rollin, I see no reason why I should consult his taste, especially as it seems likely at present that I shall seldom have the pleasure of seeing him; that little witch Adela has turned his head with her high and mighty ideas. Fortunately, he was not himself when the bombshell exploded in the midst of us, and he could do nothing to prevent my arranging my affairs as seemed to me best. But now when he is perfectly well again and ought to be reasonable, he scolds and rages at my marriage."

"Then the reports are true? I had heard something of this----"

"Of course they are true, and it is all Fräulein Adela's doing. She has the governor absolutely in leading-strings. He has lately refused to see me."

"But what will he do?"

"Oh, Fräulein Adela has arranged all that. Unfortunately, she has a small income of her own, which was not lost in the universal crash, and which makes her independent of me, or I could soon bring her to terms."

"But that seems to me to be very fortunate for her, and for you too----"

"Hm! That's according to circumstances. I have not sufficient influence; people will talk, and it's deuced disagreeable to be at odds with the old man. It's all that witch's doing."

"Adela is a deuce of a girl!"

"She was always a good-for-nothing hoyden, but I never supposed that she would so meddle in business matters and take such an obstinate stand. Fancy the old man's writing to me that he was quite willing to accept everything from her, but that he would take nothing from me!"

Lothar shook his head. He was wavering between feelings of old-comradeship and the involuntary disgust with which Hugo's conduct and talk inspired him.

"Well, let's have done with these cursed matters!" cried Hohenstein. "I am so glad to see you that I must crack a bottle of champagne with you. Have you one here?"

"No, not here; but let us go to the Casino: our dinner will be served in half an hour."

"True, we are in the provinces; my Berlin stomach can hardly accommodate itself to these mid-day meals. But to-day, if you will have me, I'll dine with you, and drive from here to the station. I must go back to Berlin by the night-train."

"I shall be glad to introduce you as my guest to our mess," Lothar said, more courteously than cordially. "Let us wait here, then, for the half-hour."

"Agreed. And now tell me all about the people hereabouts, and in especial how your sister-in-law fares at Eichhof. You go there a good deal, eh?" This question was accompanied by an odd sidelong glance.

Lothar gave various particulars with regard to his comrades and the county gentry.

"Of course I am frequently at Eichhof," he concluded, without further mention of Thea.

"Hm! And what are you doing at Eichhof?" Hohenstein asked.

"I go to see my brother's wife," Lothar answered, with an air of cold reserve.

"And to make love to her?" Hohenstein said, with a laugh.

The colour mounted to Lothar's forehead; his blue eyes gleamed almost black for a moment.

"I beg you to refrain from expressions which I regard as insulting," he said, angrily.

"Oh! ah!" said the other. "I had no idea that you would fire up so at an innocent jest. For the matter of that, your brother Bernhard's views on such matters are not so provincial; he is making furious love to a certain blonde lady from these parts."

"Bah! such stuff as is called 'making love' in Berlin society," Lothar said, depreciatingly.

Hohenstein looked at him in his half-sneering, half-malicious way. "Ah, you fancy you understand it better here in the country. Well, well, in spite of that, I can assure you that Bernhard understands it too, and that Frau Julutta Wronsky is an admirable teacher."

"You would not suggest that he is actually making love to that woman?" Lothar said, with a shrug, and a struggle to preserve an appearance of indifference.

"I suggest nothing; I only mention what I have seen and heard."

"And that is?"

"That is, that friend Bernhard is daily seen riding with Frau von Wronsky in the Thiergarten; that he is her inseparable cavalier at every ball and party; and that, last though not least, he very nearly fought a duel upon her account,—would have fought it undoubtedly had not his opponent preferred to make his escape----"

"Nonsense, Hugo! Bernhard is much too sensible."

"Ha! ha! Why, what a country bumpkin you are become, Lothar! Well, it is really of no consequence whether you believe it or not. The duel I know all about from a perfectly trustworthy source. The occupant of the next room to that belonging to the gentleman in question, who was no other, in fact, than the lady's first husband, is a business friend of my father-in-law's, and knows Bernhard quite well. He could not help hearing a part of the conversation in the next room, for Bernhard must have roared like a lion."

Lothar rummaged among his belongings and tossed everything into confusion. He looked for his gloves, which he had just thrust into his pocket, and locked up his cap, to begin to search for it immediately afterwards. Evidently his hands were as hurriedly and uncertainly employed as were his thoughts. Hohenstein watched him narrowly, while a smile of scornful superiority played about the corners of his mouth.

"Do you remember my prophecies with regard to the Wronsky?" he asked. "I tell you they have been most brilliantly fulfilled. She is making a *furor*, and Bernhard has enviers enough to satisfy the vainest of men. A handsomer couple cannot be imagined."

Lothar tore one of his bills into minute fragments; Hohenstein leaned back in his chair and contemplated him with the same sensation with which a heartless boy watches the flutterings of the butterfly that he has just impaled on a pin.

"You know that woman was never to my taste," said Lothar, "and I hope that Bernhard's taste also is sufficiently good to see that Thea is a hundred times the more beautiful of the two. There cannot be a moment's doubt upon that score."

Hohenstein observed that taste was a matter which it was useless to discuss. As meanwhile the time had arrived for the Casino, they left the room together, Lothar's irritated mood giving Hohenstein further opportunity for the play of his sarcastic humour.

They found a larger party than usual assembled at the Casino, for some comrades from the next garrison and several officers from the border posts were present. After dinner there was a bowl of punch, around which they sat until dark; and then, since they had begun the evening together, they resolved to finish it in the same way. A second bowl was brewed, tables were arranged for play, and the entire company took their places at these.

Hohenstein was still present, since his train did not leave until after midnight. Whist and ombre not being to his taste, however, he proposed a game of faro. "Just a quiet little game," he said, "to make matters rather more lively."

Werner, who had just finished a rubber at whist, came up to Lothar, and said, "Will you not

take my place at that table? I see you are not yet engaged, and I want to go home early to-night."

"No," said Lothar, who had taken more punch than was good for him, and whose irritable mood had gradually given place to one of noisy merriment. "No, I couldn't think of it. If you are tired of whist, come and play faro with us."

"You know I never play faro," Werner replied, and then added, in a low tone, "and neither ought you to play it. You never have any luck, my dear Eichhof, and----"

"Nevertheless, I shall do as I please," Lothar rejoined haughtily.

Werner bit his lips to suppress an angry retort. He saw that Lothar was hardly responsible for his words or manner, and he therefore only looked him steadily in the face, and said, "I have *warned* you, my dear Eichhof."

He then left the window-recess, whither he had withdrawn Lothar, and rejoined his whist-party, but without losing sight of his friend. Lothar, however, seemed to have a run of luck, and won repeatedly.

At last the game of whist was over, and Werner, who was weary, tried once more to induce Lothar to leave with him. But he soon saw that he must be given up to his fate, and accordingly left the Casino without him.

"I knew I should have no influence over him," he thought; "and this fresh proof of it that I have had to-night makes my departure from this place easier. Easier?" He smiled sadly. "Was there any choice left me? I owed it to myself, and---- It is by a fortunate dispensation of Providence that I am enabled to go so soon."

He walked slowly along the moonlit street; his footsteps echoed firmly and regularly through the silence of the night, and straight and clear before his mind lay the path that duty required him to tread.

## **CHAPTER XVIII.**

### **AN EVENTFUL DAY.**

The next day was Sunday.

Werner stood at the church door, looking down the road from Eichhof, along which Thea's carriage was wont to come at this hour.

To-day it did not appear. The tones of the organ, heard through the open door, died away at last, and Werner entered.

There were none of his comrades there except a young lieutenant, who had been absent from the garrison the day before, and who could, of course, know nothing of the events of the previous evening. Werner hesitated whether or not to look up Lothar after church, but, seeing the curtains before his windows still closed, he decided not to disturb him. As he left the church and walked out into the clear winter sunshine, his mood was very grave, almost solemn.

"I will ride to Eichhof and take leave of Countess Thea," he thought. "I can do so calmly now, without betraying myself; and the sooner it is over the better." A quarter of an hour later he was riding along the broad Eichhof road.

Thea, sitting in the bow-window, saw him coming. Her cheeks did not flush, her heart beat no faster, as she recognized him. In her pure unconsciousness of self she had not a shadow of a suspicion of this man's sentiments towards her. Her first thought was, "How strange that he should know that Alma is coming here again at noon!" And then she took up the letter which she had just received and read before recognizing Werner riding along the road. Was there really nothing more in it than the few hasty words she had just read? was this all the answer from Bernhard to the two long letters, filled with every detail that could interest him, that she had written to her husband? Of course he must be very busy, his thoughts entirely occupied with the proceedings of the Reichstag, and his time with his social duties. But she had so longed for some heartsome words from him; she missed him so terribly, and she would so gladly have had some little share in his present life, even although she were so far away from him. She would so much have liked to know whom he saw most, and what chiefly occupied him. She had asked him a hundred questions, but for all he had but a brief indifferent answer. She had often pressed

Bernhard's letters to her lips, but to-day she could not,—something cold and strange seemed breathing upon her from these few lines: she was chilled. Yes, she had, she knew, perceived the same thing in all of Bernhard's letters lately, but what it was she could not tell, she could not explain.

For a moment she had forgotten the approaching guest, and her sad eyes, half veiled in tears, saw only the leafless branches outside her window, now glittering with snow. Not until her glance fell upon the road did she remember Werner, and she blushed, for she feared that if he found her sad, and with a letter from her husband in her hand, he might suspect the cause of her melancholy mood. Therefore she hurriedly thrust the letter into her work-table. When Lieutenant von Werner entered, she arose and calmly and kindly offered him her hand.

"I am come to take my leave of you," he said, and there was a slight tremor in the voice usually so firm and clear. "I am ordered to the military school at S----; and, as I shall be excessively busy during the next few days, I thought I would employ my Sunday leisure in paying a farewell visit to Eichhof."

Thea looked at him surprised, and almost alarmed. "Good heavens, so suddenly!" she exclaimed. "I had no idea that you expected to be transferred----"

"I did not expect it, although I had asked for it. A happy combination of circumstances has favoured me."

"You wish to go away, then?"

"I think this transfer is best for me," he replied, passing his hand across his brow. Never in his life had he felt the atmosphere so insufferably sultry and close as at this moment.

"Oh, then I will not be sorry that you are transferred, grieved as I must be for ourselves and for Lothar. Ah, if Bernhard were only at home again! When you go Lothar will be left entirely to himself."

The introduction of this subject restored Werner's self-possession. He told Thea that he had become convinced of the impossibility of his exercising any influence over Lothar, and that this certainty had added to his desire to be ordered elsewhere. They were still discussing Lothar, when the noise of carriage-wheels was heard, and Thea arose with the words, "Ah, there comes my sister!" Werner, too, arose. His broad forehead flushed crimson, for the moment had come in which he must say farewell, and he knew that perhaps—yes, most probably—he was alone with Thea for the last time in his life. He was not in a condition to carry on an indifferent conversation with her any longer.

"Let me say farewell to you now, madame," he said. "I have several other visits to pay, and anything so painful as leave-taking should not be unnecessarily prolonged."

Thea looked up at him in startled wonder, and there was some embarrassment in her voice as she asked him if he would not stay and dine.

But she knew as she spoke that he would not accept her invitation. Yes, she saw it all; she knew now that he loved Alma, and that he wished to avoid meeting her, since he saw plainly that his affection was not returned. Filled with compassion and sympathy for him, she held out to him both her hands, and said, in the firm conviction that his heart lay open before her, "Go; you are right to go now. God bless you! and believe that I shall always think of you with warm, genuine friendship."

He made no reply, but for one short moment pressed her hand to his trembling lips, and then left the room. On the stairs he met Alma, and briefly bade her good-by, leaving her as much astonished at his sudden departure as Thea had been.

Then he flung himself upon his horse, and gave him the spur. He avoided the roads leading to the town, and turned towards the forest. The swift gallop cooled his heart and brain, and when he had reached a low hill whence there was a last view of the castle and park of Eichhof, he slackened rein and turned for one more look. Then, with a murmured "Farewell! farewell!" he plunged into the forest, to reach by a circuitous route a neighbouring estate, where his leave-taking would be a far easier matter.

He was fleeing, it is true, but his flight was a victory; he had come off conqueror in the hardest battle in which the human soul can ever engage,—the strife between passion and duty.

Meanwhile Lothar had awakened from his prolonged morning slumbers, and endeavoured in vain to recall how he had got home and to bed on the previous evening. It cost him a considerable amount of resolution to get up, and when he did so he felt wretched and depressed. Gradually certain vague memories of last night occurred to his mind. He put his hand into one of his coat-pockets, then into the other; both were empty. He shook his head, and finally recollected that he had worn another coat yesterday. It was hanging over an arm-chair. He proceeded to search the pockets, and produced a crumpled roll of paper. He opened it, and sank upon a lounge with an exclamation of despair.

The paper contained an acknowledgment for the round sum of ten thousand marks, which he had lost in the course of the night at play, and which he had pledged his honour should be paid within a week. Lothar stared at the characters on the crumpled sheet. Ten thousand marks! Payable within a week! Here was an overwhelming disaster! How had it happened? He racked his brain to remember; the events of the evening were mere formless shadows in his dulled remembrance. He had first won, then lost, and there had been a good deal of champagne drunk; all that was perfectly simple and commonplace. But this debt! How was it to be paid? If Bernhard had been at home, he would have gone to him again in spite of everything that he had said to him. He had always been wont to rectify in this manner the unjust family traditions that endowed one son with everything in the way of the goods of this world and left the others destitute. But Bernhard was away, and must either be sought out in Berlin or informed by letter of this last terrible debt. And what if Bernhard refused this time, as he had so often threatened to do, to pay the debts? Lothar buried his face in his hands, and the moisture stood in beads upon his forehead. There was but a week before him in which to adopt any plan of payment; he must decide immediately, and, in common with all men lacking independence, he was incapable of decision without consultation with some friend. It is true that he now remembered that Werner had warned him and that he had rejected his advice; he knew, too, that of late there had been a certain diminution of the cordial friendship that had existed between them. But nevertheless it was to Werner that his thoughts turned in this dire extremity.

"He is the best of fellows, and has proved that he is really my friend," he thought. "I could not, of course, accept a loan from him again, aside from the fact that this sum is far beyond his means; but I will, at all events, ask his advice. One's own perceptions become clearer when one has talked matters over with a sensible man."

He rose, arranged his dress, and went to Werner's apartments. He found them closed; but, as the key was hanging up beside the door, Lothar determined to go in and await the return of his friend or of his friend's servant, who was also absent. He knew that Werner frequently went to church, and if he had gone there this morning, and had been detained, he might come in at any moment. Lothar paced the room to and fro several times, then went to the window, and finally decided that this waiting was intolerable. He threw himself upon the small leathern sofa, and spent some moments lost in gloomy revery; then he sprang suddenly to his feet again, and as he did so accidentally twitched off the cover of a small table, so that several books and some papers that had lain upon it fell upon the ground. With an exclamation of impatience he stooped to gather them up. A small portfolio had opened in falling, and several sheets of paper fluttered out of it on to the floor.

"Cursed scribblings!" muttered Lothar, picking them up. Suddenly his attention was arrested by one of these, and he looked at it more closely.

"Why, that is Eichhof," he thought; "there is the fountain, with the old oaks in the background, the chapel by the pond, and the avenue on the right. When did he draw this, and what induced him to select exactly this view?" Suddenly the thought flashed upon him, "This is the view from Thea's bow-window. How did Werner come by it?"

He stooped for the other sheets, firmly resolved not to look at them.

"Good heavens, 'tis Thea herself!" he exclaimed involuntarily, as he held the last of them in his hand. "The resemblance is so striking that it can be seen at a glance. Well, there's surely no reason why I should not look closely at the picture of my sister-in-law. I did not know that Werner was such an artist, and still less was I aware that Thea had been sitting to him. A charming study of a head. I really should like to know when and where it was drawn. I thought he never went to Eichhof without me; but he always vexed me with his want of frankness. Who knows what he has been about while he has been pretending to study--- Ah!" As he threw the sheet upon the table it turned upon its face, and upon the other side was written the refrain of a song, "Fair Marjory," that Thea often sung: "Be still, my heart, be still."

Lothar, who had meant to see and to read nothing, had seen and read enough to make him stride to and fro in the room like a madman, muttering in broken sentences, "He loves her,--she has been sitting to him! Bernhard has neglected her, and Werner has consoled her, while I, fool, double-dyed fool that I am, suspected nothing! Night and day I have thought of her, and never dared, not even to myself, to call what I felt for her by its right name! And now I know that Bernhard is faithless to her, that Werner is false, and that she, indeed, is no saint! Was I not half mad for her sake yesterday when Hohenstein went on telling such fine stories of Bernhard, my worthy brother? Did I not try to drive away with wine and cards the thoughts that would haunt me? and at that very time perhaps Werner was with her. Oh, if it were not so horrible it would be ridiculous,--a silly, ridiculous farce----"

"Has the Herr Lieutenant any orders?" the voice of Werner's servant suddenly asked just behind him.

"Where is your master?" Lothar asked, roughly.

"The Herr Lieutenant has ridden over to Eichhof. He left word that he should be gone some time, as he meant to go farther still."

Lothar was gone before the man had finished his sentence.

For a moment he had forgotten his gambling debt: he thought only of Werner and Thea. His brain seemed on fire; his temples throbbed violently. Without one distinct idea formed in his mind, he threw himself upon his horse and rode furiously to Eichhof.

As he dismounted in the court-yard his first question was with regard to Werner.

"The Herr Lieutenant rode away more than two hours ago," the footman replied.

Lothar ran up the staircase, and entered Thea's bow-windowed room almost at the same moment in which the servant announced him. As he did so an opposite door was hastily closed, and he thought he could hear the sound of retreating footsteps.

Agitated as he was, no longer master of himself, he took no notice of Thea, who was sitting at her writing-table and who rose to greet him, but rushed to the closed door and tore it open, to discover Alma, who quickened her pace almost to a run as she perceived him. He turned about, went to Thea, seized her by the wrist, and said, with flashing eyes, "Has Alma been here all day long?"

Thea tried to free her hand from his grasp.

"What is the matter, Lothar?" she asked, alarmed by his expression and his strange conduct. "What do you want with Alma?"

"Why did she hurry away as though there was some mystery to conceal?"

"Good heavens! she went to lay aside her wraps. I had detained her here to read a letter."

"A letter? What letter?"

Thea shook her head and tried to smile.

"It was nothing," she said; "nothing worth mentioning," but her lip quivered.

Lothar still gazed at her with eyes that were menacing and yet unutterably sad.

"But that is not what I would ask," he said, retreating a step or two without turning his eyes from her face. "I pray you tell me,--how long have you been receiving Werner's visits,--how long have you known that he loves you?"

"Lothar!" she almost screamed, involuntarily steadying herself by the table as if she needed a support; every trace of colour faded from her face, and she muttered beneath her breath, "He is mad!"

Hitherto Lothar had been convinced of the truth of his suspicions. But now that he had hurled the base inquiry in Thea's face, as it were, now that she had made him no reply save by an indignant and terrified exclamation, he suddenly doubted, and as he looked at her the conviction of her perfect innocence overwhelmed him with irresistible force.

"Answer me, Thea! for God's sake answer me!" he implored her. "Tell me it was all a phantom of my disordered fancy. I know that Werner was here alone to-day,--that he has taken your picture, that he loves you; but tell me that you are innocent, and I will believe it. Only speak, speak! I implore you!"

Thea looked fixedly at him; she saw the entreaty in his eyes and the agony expressed in all his features.

"You are ill, Lothar," she said, "and therefore I will answer your wild questions. Werner came to Eichhof for the first time without you to-day. He came to take leave of me, since he is ordered to the military school of S----. What you say about a picture is as unintelligible to me as all the rest of your words."

"Werner going away! I knew nothing of it."

"His orders arrived only last evening. You were still sleeping this morning when he called for you. And now go to your room and lie down: your eyes show that you have fever. I will send a servant to you."

She put her hand upon the bell, but Lothar stayed her as she was about to ring.

"Forgive me, Thea," he begged. "I have suffered so much!"

"You are still suffering, for you are ill."

"No, no! I am well enough, only--but I will not speak of myself. Thea, tell me one thing, are you happy? Does Bernhard write often, and are his letters what they should be?"

Thea's cheeks flushed and grew pale; her hands trembled as she collected, with nervous haste,

the various letters lying upon her table, and which Lothar, who watched her narrowly, could see were postmarked 'Berlin.'

For a moment she could not reply in words, but Lothar, believing that he read an answer in her face to his words, cried, "Oh, I see,--you know it all! They have written you all about it from Berlin, have they not?"

"Hush!" she said, imperatively, her face dyed with a burning blush. "How dare you touch upon that subject?"

"Oh, it is just that which drove me mad,--which made me dream what I said of Werner possible," Lothar exclaimed, passionately. "I knew how unhappy you must be. I hate Bernhard for it, but I hated Werner still more, because I thought that in your misery you----"

Thea had turned away, and in silent indignation would have left the room, but Lothar interposed between her and the door, and, throwing himself at her feet, cried, "Forgive me! forgive me! My sin is my excuse; for I love you, Thea, I love you! more--far more--than all the rest!"

Suddenly he sprang to his feet. A servant entered with some commonplace message.

Lothar stood for a moment as though paralyzed. He heard the man's voice and then Thea's as though from some vast distance, and when he looked around Thea had vanished, and the servant was asking whether the Herr Lieutenant would drive home in the open wagon or the covered carriage.

For an instant Lothar stared at him in bewilderment. Then he passed his hand across his brow. "No; the Countess's kindness is unnecessary," he said, when the explanation of the scene dawned upon him. "I am no longer giddy, and I can ride home."

He left the room, and in the hall he encountered Alma, who had dried her tears and bathed her eyes.

"Farewell, my dear Alma," he said, with a deliberate gravity, almost a solemnity of manner, quite foreign to him.

"Are you going away?" the girl asked, all unconsciously, and impressed by this strange mood of his.

"Going away? No--that is--yes--perhaps so. At all events, I bid you farewell."

She heard him go down the stairs slowly and heavily. A sudden inexplicable foreboding weighed upon her like lead. She felt as though some evil threatened him, and she longed to avert it, to call him back. She started to do so, when she heard the voices of the servants in the hall below, and reflected that she did not know what to say to him. She ran into the bow-windowed room, and looked down the avenue. A flock of crows hovered above it; they were the only living things in sight. Alma waited. One of the crows that had alighted in the road flew into the air, and instantly afterward a lonely horseman rode along between the snow-clad trees. Alma pressed her forehead against the window-panes, but the rider never turned to look towards the castle. His head was bent forward on his breast, and he seemed to pay no heed to his horse. Like some shadow horse and rider appeared and disappeared at regular intervals among the poplars lining the avenue. Alma gazed after them until the last glimpse of Lothar had vanished in the wintry mist that had begun to veil the landscape.

"Farewell," she whispered, and her heart was as heavy as if she had parted from him forever.

Suddenly she roused herself from her reverie. "How selfish I am!" she thought. "I stand dreaming here, thinking of all kinds of impossible misfortunes, while Thea is alone. Ah, we have enough real sorrow to bear! There is no need to invent fancied woes." She went to look for her sister, whom she had some difficulty in finding.

Thea had retained sufficient self-possession to tell the servant that her brother-in-law was ill, and to order a carriage for him; and then, like some scared bird, she had flown through the castle, and taken refuge in the conservatory adjoining the drawing-room. Here she sank upon a seat,--the same seat where she had so often sat with Bernhard before their marriage. She pressed her hands upon her throbbing heart, and then upon her eyes, which were dry, hot, and tearless. Could all that had happened in the last hour be real? The wild, insane words in which Lothar had told her of Werner's love and of his own still rang in her ears. Could such things be? Had she in her utter unconsciousness so deceived herself? Or had Lothar actually spoken in the delirium of fever? She sighed heavily. These questions, press upon her as they might, vanished before that other: Was it possible that she had lost Bernhard's heart,--nay, that perhaps she had never possessed it,--that he had deceived her from the first? "No," her own heart answered, "that cannot be! And yet----" She selected a letter from among those she had gathered up from her table and brought hither with her, and read it once more. It was from Adela Hohenstein, and addressed to Alma, who had taken it from the post on her way to Eichhof that morning, and had read it in the carriage. She had been unable to conceal from her sister the agitation its contents had produced. Thea had questioned her, suspecting that she had heard some news of Bernhard,

and Alma had finally been induced to show her the letter. Adela wrote in her usual thoughtless harum-scarum way all that she had heard and seen of Bernhard. She had frequently, at the house of one of her relatives, met Bernhard and Julutta Wronsky together, and her letter was evidently written in the first flush of her anger after one of these occasions.

"Let me tell Thea that for at least a year she ought never even to condescend to look at that husband of hers," she wrote upon the last page, "and then perhaps he may come to learn that she is a thousand times prettier and better and lovelier than this detestable Frau von Wronsky. For I have learned thus much of the world, that men like to be ill-treated; they make all the good women unhappy, but they will lay down their lives for the worthless ones. Papa is the only exception; it does not spoil him to be loved and petted. He is kinder and dearer than words can tell; but all other men are monsters, your Bernhard as well as the rest." Then there was a postscript:

"Dearest Alma, for heaven's sake don't give Thea my message. I have reflected that it can only do mischief. She is married to him, and they must get along together as they best can. It can do no kind of good for other people to meddle and talk. I would tear up this letter, but it is well that you at least should know what men are worth, and every word that I have written is true. So I send my letter just as it is, and only beg you to say nothing to Thea about it.

"P. S. the second. *À propos*, yesterday I met Walter in the street, and I stopped him and asked him to come and see us. Do you know what his reply was? 'I am very sorry, Fräulein von Hohenstein' (that is what he called me), 'that my studies leave me no time for visiting.' What do you think of that? Just like men in general, and the Eichhofs in particular."

At another time this letter of Adela's might not have made such an impression upon Thea as it had produced to-day, when her heart was filled with doubts and fears with regard to Bernhard. Had she not foreboded all that Adela had written?

Still, after she had re-read the letter, it might perhaps not have affected her so deeply as at first had not the tidings it contained been confirmed by Lothar's wild words. Bernhard's conduct was then striking enough to be a theme for Berlin gossip! Oh, if only his devotion had been shown towards any other woman! But that he should turn to this Frau von Wronsky, with whom he had at first denied all acquaintance, and afterwards confessed to it under such strange circumstances; that it should be she, the woman with whom Bernhard had desired that his wife might have as little intercourse as possible! Thea's thoughts were in a whirl,—an abyss seemed yawning between Bernhard and herself which all her love could not bridge over. She raised her eyes. Above her trembled the mysterious fantastic blossom of the orchid to which Bernhard had once compared the Countess Wronsky. Ah, whither had they gone, those bright summer days when he had called Thea his rose of May and had promised to surround her with perpetual sunshine?

"If this is all true, he does not deserve that I should weep for him," she said, aloud. "No, he does not deserve it," she repeated, firmly, closing her quivering lips. But then she thought of her child, of her lost happiness, of her lonely youth, and she wept bitterly.

Thus Alma found her at length, and led her back to the bow-windowed room, where a lamp was now lighted.

"Do not speak," Thea entreated, and Alma only put her arms about her and held her in a tender embrace. But Thea was restless. She sprang up and went to her child. Even there she could not stay long, but returned to the bow-windowed room, and paced it hurriedly to and fro. She could not talk to her young sister of what was agitating her. Why, she seemed to herself almost guilty when she remembered Lothar's passionate words. Lothar,—there was another dark spot in her thoughts! Ah! from all sides black clouds were gathering above her, and she could do nothing save wait quietly until the tempest broke. She was condemned to quiet, and what could be more horrible in her present agitation?

Alma felt that the struggle in Thea's soul must be fought out alone. She went silently hither and thither, looked after the child, presided at the tea-table, and only now and then approached her sister to press her hand or to imprint a kiss upon her forehead. She went to the window and looked out into the night, now illumined by the rising moon. Her heart was filled with a yearning melancholy, and, reproach herself for it as she might at such a time, she could not restrain her thoughts from deserting Thea and centring about Lothar. He had looked so strange, so disturbed, when he had spoken that last 'farewell.'

Suddenly her attention was attracted towards the avenue, which lay like burnished silver beneath the moon. Was there not a shadow stirring there? And could she not distinguish the sound of horses' hoofs? She peered eagerly out, but the moonlight was deceptive,—she might be mistaken. Then she heard doors closing below and steps coming through the antechamber. Thea had sunk into the arm-chair at her writing-table, and with pen in hand was pondering upon a letter which she believed it her duty to write, and for which she could find not only no words but not even one clear idea. Alma hastened to the door.

"Who is there?" she asked, so quickly that Thea looked up startled.



"Herr Lieutenant von Werner begs----" the entering servant began.

"Lieutenant Werner,--how, so late?" Alma repeated, and her slight figure trembled as she added, beneath her breath, "That means misfortune."

Thea had risen. "What, what is coming now?" she thought. "Show Herr von Werner up!" she said, in a sharp tone of command very unlike her. But Herr von Werner had followed close upon the footman's heels, and stood at the door. Alma could not utter a word; she only gazed anxiously into his pale face, and steadied herself by an arm-chair as though she were afraid of falling. Thea went firmly to meet him. She had never borne herself so proudly, her dark eyes had never been so haughty and cold, as, without seeming to notice Werner's agitation, she asked, calmly, "What brings you to us so late, Herr von Werner? It must be something very unusual."

"Yes, madame, it is so, and very sad."

Alma could hardly stand. Thea still looked at Werner with an unnaturally calm expression, and with not the faintest suspicion of what was to come.

"Lothar!" came breathed like a sigh from Alma's pale lips.

Thea's thoughts were not of him. "Tell me. I need no preparation; I am prepared," she said.

"Your brother-in-law met with an accident in riding home from Eichhof, and is severely injured."

Now Thea too grew pale.

"Was he thrown? Is his life in danger?" she asked, in low, uncertain tones, while Alma's eyes never for one moment left Werner's face.

"His condition leaves little room for hope. He was not thrown,--an accident, probably the result of carelessness----"

"He is dead! he has shot himself!" Alma suddenly gasped. Her gloomy forebodings had at last found distinct expression.

Thea looked at Werner. He was very pale, but he uttered no contradiction.

Alma sank on her knees and buried her face in her hands. Thea slowly passed her hand across her forehead. "Dead,--shot," she repeated softly, as if hardly able to apprehend the meaning of the words. The erect figure tottered, and before Werner could spring forward to support her she fell fainting on the floor.

Alma raised her head at Werner's exclamation of terror, and saw her sister's unconscious form. She called the servants and did all that was necessary to restore Thea, while she herself felt hardly aware of what had happened.

She, the younger and weaker of the two sisters, had not fainted, while to Thea the thought that she might have had some share in Lothar's death had been like a destroying flash of lightning. Alma did not succumb, but deep darkness seemed to envelop her, in which she was aware only of the present moment and its duties; all else was a blank. She felt a dull pain in her head and heart, and would fain have cast herself on the earth and have wept passionately. But shame lest she should betray feelings that only the closest and dearest ties with Lothar could justify, restrained her, and Thea's helpless condition gave her a power of self-control of which she never could have believed herself capable.

"I instantly telegraphed to your brother-in-law," Werner said to Alma, "and then hurried hither, because I knew that, with the garrison so near, you must hear the fatal news before to-morrow."

Alma bent her head in silent assent, and in her eyes alone could be read the entreaty that he would tell her all he knew of this terrible calamity. He went on, in a low tone: "I only reached home at dusk, and I saw a light in Eichhof's room. It therefore surprised me to find it locked, and to receive no answer to my call when I had knocked at the door in vain. I was about to descend the staircase, when I met Eichhof's servant, who, in reply to my questions with regard to his master, told me that the Herr Lieutenant had returned from Eichhof half an hour previously, and had seemed very unwell; that he had sent him ten minutes before to the apothecary's for some soothing draught, which he was just taking to him. Why the door should be locked he could not possibly comprehend. We tried again to open it, and finally broke it open. He sat upon the sofa, his head lying on the table before him. As I raised him up, the revolver fell on the floor. Death must have been instantaneous."

Alma covered her face with her hands and burst at last into a flood of tears, weeping so passionately, so uncontrollably, that Werner could not but comprehend what this death was to this girl. In his agitation he had said more than he meant to, and he reproached himself for so doing. Almost in a whisper he began again: "He probably intended to clean the revolver. I feel convinced the pistol was discharged through carelessness, for--for--there were materials for

cleaning it lying upon the table." Werner was so unaccustomed to say what was not true that he succeeded but ill in this attempt.

Suddenly Thea entered the room; her eyes glowed with an unnatural feverish brilliancy. She hastily approached Werner and held out her hand as if to clasp his, then instantly withdrew it, and asked, standing close to him, as if to prevent him from evading her question, "Do you know why he shot himself?"

"It is not impossible that it was an accident, madame."

Thea shook her head. "That you do not believe," she said. "You know of no reason for this deed?"

"He was ill, and perhaps a momentary insanity----"

"Yes, a momentary insanity. And you think my husband will come to-morrow?"

"I am sure of it."

She cast down her eyes and was silent for a moment, while a shudder seemed to pass through her delicate frame.

"Can anything be done to-night?" she asked.

"Nothing by you, madame."

"Well, then farewell, Herr von Werner. It is best you should return to town."

"In fact, I still have much to arrange there."

Agitated as Werner was, he could not but observe the strange alteration in Thea's manner towards him.

"Lothar was really like an own brother to her; the shock and her great suffering have thus changed her," he thought, without dreaming of the real state of her mind.

## **CHAPTER XIX.**

### **THE SHADOWS GATHER.**

In a first-class carriage of an express-train from Berlin sat Bernhard Eichhof. Upon his return quite late from a ball, he had received the despatch informing him of Lothar's sudden death. He had spent the rest of the night in writing a letter to Julutta Wronsky and several others to political associates, and was now hastening to his home by the early train. He had scarcely found it possible to believe the sad tidings brought by the despatch. Lothar dead!--Lothar, whom but a few weeks previously he had left in the pride of youth and strength, a picture of blooming health. And yet the despatch left no room for doubt. He thought of every possible accident that could have befallen Lothar. He saw before him his brother's smiling merry face, and the thought that he was to look upon it cold and stiff in death seemed to him inconceivable. In Berlin the hurried preparations for his departure had scarcely left him time to appreciate his loss.

But now, during his lonely ride, with Lothar's image constantly before him, now he first comprehended how near this brother had been to him, and how terribly he should miss him. In the consciousness of his position as the future head of the family, upon whom the others must more or less depend, Bernhard had developed, when quite young, a certain liking for the part of a protector,--a part that became him excellently well, because he was naturally warm-hearted and good-natured. And precisely because Lothar had so constantly appealed to him for aid, and, in his lack of self-dependence, had always turned to his brother in his troubles, he had grown very, very dear to Bernhard. Lost in melancholy reflection, he leaned back in a corner of his coupé, without bestowing the faintest notice upon two ladies who had entered the coupé just after him. He had closed his eyes in his reverie, and had entirely forgotten his travelling companions.

Suddenly the name of 'Eichhof,' uttered by one of the ladies, aroused his attention.

"Is the member of the Reichstag your son-in-law's neighbour?" the other lady asked.

"Yes; Rollin is in the midst of a very aristocratic neighbourhood," was the reply. "Good

heavens, the Barons von Hohenstein have lived upon the estate for hundreds of years, and all the neighbours are old noble families,--my daughter's surroundings will be really 'feudal.' It is well to give one's children an education that fits them for any rank in life. Only a few days ago Count Dornat said to me, 'Your daughter, the Baroness von Hohenstein, is a charming woman.' And my son-in-law is delightful. Indeed, my dear, it is really a model marriage. Between ourselves, many an aristocratic family might take example by it,--these Eichhofs, for instance."

Bernhard, who had ceased to pay any heed to the speakers, now listened again.

"Is it possible, Frau Kohnheim, that the Eichhofs----" Thus the conversation continued.

Frau Kohnheim said in a low voice a few words that Bernhard could not understand, and then went on, in a louder tone, "Yes; I was at Rollin a couple of weeks ago with a Berlin upholsterer to see to the furnishing there, and the housekeeper from Eichhof was paying a visit to our housekeeper,--I mean to my son-in-law's housekeeper,--and I learned all about it from her. The young Countess at the castle was an innocent young creature at first, but she has grown to be very different, especially since her husband has been away. Only fancy such a young woman's giving entertainments to which the young men for miles around are invited, while a young unmarried brother-in-law of the Countess plays the part of host! And he is in garrison only half a mile from Eichhof, and of course is there constantly. So there you have a young man and a young woman alone together in the country in a big castle, and you may imagine what it must lead to!"

"Good heavens! how can the Count be so thoughtless as to allow it?"

"How indeed? Of course the young brother-in-law is over head and ears in love. The housekeeper, who seems to be a very sensible person, has often watched him. He never takes his eyes off the Countess, and, naturally enough, she is not blind to the attractions of a handsome young officer. There they sit in the conservatory talking together, or they take long walks arm-in-arm, and the housekeeper----" Here the voice sank to a whisper.

Bernhard could no longer sit quietly in his corner. He stirred and altered his position, so that the conversation was carried on in still lower tones.

"Infernal old women's gossip!" he thought, flushing angrily. "Contemptible lies!--Lothar to----" Anger and pain possessed him. How dared any one assail his wife's reputation? How could the innocent relations between Thea and Lothar give rise to such calumnies? Was he not false to the memory of the dead even to listen to such talk? He arose and opened the window, only to close it again noisily; then dragged out his portmanteau, and so bestirred himself that the ladies involuntarily ceased to speak. But when he leaned back in his corner again, all the 'old women's gossip,' all the 'contemptible lies,' recurred to his mind word for word. Thea was young and beautiful, and Lothar was thoughtless and susceptible, therein lay the justification of the 'old women's gossip.' But Thea was his wife, and Lothar was his brother. Nonsense, nonsense! why dwell upon such thoughts for an instant? And yet they would intrude; they even came between Bernhard and his sorrow for the loss of his brother; they suggested wild images that showed some connection between what he had just heard and Lothar's sudden death; they sent the blood seething through his veins, and kept him awake, when weariness from sorrow and want of repose would have bidden him to sleep.

After a while the two ladies left the train, and Bernhard was alone with his torturing doubts and suggestions.

At the station he was met by Werner, who had meanwhile been informed of the result of Lothar's gambling on the previous evening. As gently as possible, but without withholding a single detail, he told Bernhard the truth: Lothar had contracted gambling-debts, and had, in consequence, shot himself. Fearful as the calamity was, it was by no means without parallel,--the same cause had often led to the same desperate resolve. Still, to Bernhard, it did not seem to explain Lothar's act. The amount of this last debt did most certainly exceed the amount of Lothar's usual deficits, but yet it did not seem to Bernhard large enough to have been paid by a life, unless there had been other motives in Lothar's mind to prompt him to self-destruction. Why had he not applied to his brother, as he had so often done before? Had he despaired of himself and of his capacity for improvement? That was so unlike Lothar that Bernhard could not believe it to be so. What, then, had prevented him this time from appealing to his brother for aid?

"He had been to Eichhof just before?" Bernhard, arousing himself from gloomy reflections, asked of Werner, who was driving from the station with him. Werner assented.

"And you never spoke with him afterward?"

"No; none of his comrades saw him. His servant was the only one who did so, and he says that Eichhof was very unwell. The calamity occurred almost immediately after his return."

"Immediately after his return----" Bernhard bit his lip; he would ask no more questions. Arrived in garrison, he made all the necessary arrangements, promised to return in a few hours, for Lothar's body was to be taken to Eichhof in the evening, and then drove on alone.

He had had some hope that Thea would come to meet him, but she did not do so; she did not even receive him as usual at the hall door.

"The Frau Countess is not well," the servant said.

Bernhard hurried up the stairs to Thea's room. At the door he met the family physician.

"Is my wife ill?" he asked, hastily.

"Nothing serious at present," the old man replied. "Countess Eichhof cannot for the moment sustain the terrible nervous shock. I have ordered perfect rest,--her best medicine next to your arrival, my dear Count. A sad time, indeed. Your brother was never ill in his life, and now----"

Bernhard pressed the good doctor's hand, and, leaving him, entered Thea's room. In the first moment of reunion he forgot all his doubts. He clasped his pale, distressed Thea in his arms. At sight of her he felt something like remorse for having left her alone so long.

"This is a sad meeting, dear heart," he said with emotion, as he laid her head upon his breast. Thea shook as with a fever-fit, her lips quivered, but she could not speak.

Bernhard looked in her face in alarm. "My poor, poor Thea!" he whispered.

She extricated herself from his clasp, and withdrew her hand from his. "It will pass," she said, turning from him to draw a shawl over her shoulders. "Never mind me. Have you seen him,--I mean Lothar?"

"Yes; he looks perfectly unchanged. I shall have him brought here to-day."

Again Thea shuddered, and for a moment her look was fixed and wild. Bernhard tried again to draw her to him, but she pushed him away. "Leave me! leave me!" she cried. "Oh, my God!" And she burst into a passionate fit of sobbing.

Bernhard turned away and walked to the window. He felt that all his doubts would have vanished like morning mists if Thea had met him as usual and wept out her pain and grief upon his breast. Now they arose again before him, and took firmer, clearer shape. For a few moments he stood motionless at the window, then suddenly he approached Thea again.

"You know why Lothar shot himself?" he asked, in a voice that sounded hoarse and unlike his own.

She bent her head lower upon her hands and made no reply.

"He lost a large sum at play last night," Bernhard continued. "But----"

Then Thea looked up. For an instant her face looked transfigured with hope, like that of a criminal reprieved when under sentence of death. Involuntarily she seized Bernhard's hand, and asked, with a passionate excitement such as Bernhard had never before known her to express, "Do you believe that that was why he shot himself? Do you believe it? Can it be?"

Her eyes as she looked up at him were full of imploring anguish, and he, in his turn, thrust away her hand, and said, in a cold, hard voice, "No! I see you do not believe it, and I--neither do I believe it!"

At this moment Alma entered with Herr von Rosen, who had come over immediately upon hearing the sad news. This put an end to Bernhard's and Thea's *tête-à-tête*, and neither of them at this time could have wished it prolonged.

Nor was there any opportunity for renewing it during the next few days. The dowager Countess had hastened to Eichhof upon hearing of her son's sudden death, and her grief and suffering were of so exacting a nature as to employ the time and energies of at least one member of the family, and sometimes several of them, all the time. She called herself the unhappiest, the most sorely tried of women; but when Bernhard proposed that she should remain at Eichhof with Thea, she thought it but right to inform him that she had been offered the position of abbess in the aristocratic institution of B----, and that she intended to accept it and retire thither as soon as possible, since it seemed to offer her the advantages to which her birth and rank entitled her.

Thea suffered terribly, but she was cold and repellent towards Bernhard, who was very much occupied and rather avoided her than otherwise. The physician shook his head; he was far from satisfied with his patient's condition, although he still maintained that she was only suffering from prolonged nervous agitation.

On the day after Lothar's funeral Thea was lying back on her lounge, not sleeping, but with closed eyes. She could not sleep either by night or by day, for so soon as she began to dream she saw either Lothar or Bernhard before her, and the thought of them banished repose. Was she not guilty of Lothar's death? Ought she not, instead of turning angrily away, to have tried gently to lead him back to the right path? If there had been no shadow between Bernhard and herself, this torturing self-reproach would not have taken shape; her conscience would not have been so morbidly sensitive, inclining her to the gloomiest reflections. But the shadow was there, and it was therefore impossible for her to seek refuge with her husband, and be consoled and soothed in his arms. Agitated as she was, she saw Bernhard's relations with Frau von Wronsky in the darkest light. She attributed his altered demeanour entirely to these, and never for an instant

suspected that he too was tormented by doubts and suspicions with regard to herself. And Bernhard? All through these days he scarcely thought of Julutta; he never suspected that his friendship for her could have given rise to remarks and comments which Thea had overheard, and if he had suspected this he would have been indignant that Thea should give ear to such scandal. In all that concerned that 'poor persecuted woman' his conscience felt perfectly pure, and the struggle between his love for Thea and his dead brother, and the hate which now threatened to arise within him for both of them, left no space for thoughts of aught else.

And now the time for his return to Berlin was at hand. He resolved that certainty should at least be his. Thea, apparently calmly passive, and yet wretchedly restless, had just adopted a resolve to entreat Bernhard to tell her frankly of his sentiments for Frau von Wronsky. She would make no claim upon his affection, since she had never possessed it, but she would be his true and honest friend, asking nothing from him save confidence and truth. For their child's sake they must remain friends,--friends, but nothing more! Yes, she would say all this to him to-day--this very hour. Suddenly she started: a cold, heavy hand was laid upon her shoulder. She raised her head. Bernhard had entered softly, and had only been aware when he stood close beside her that she was not sleeping. His hand was upon her shoulder, and he said, gazing at her the while with eyes so changed, so darkly stern, "I must speak with you, Thea, before I leave for Berlin. I have a question to put to you."

She looked up at him startled. She had just been thinking of him, but the face she saw before her in no wise resembled the image of him in her mind, and there was an unusual imperious tone in his voice that offended her.

"Go on," she said, looking away from him.

"What occurred between yourself and Lothar?"

Thea started up. All her lately-formed resolutions were forgotten. He, against whom she believed herself to have such just cause for complaint, dared to take her to task thus!

She could not and would not lie; it was just as impossible for her at this moment to answer his question frankly. She stood erect before him. Her pale cheeks glowed, and her eyes gleamed angrily.

"You certainly have no right to ask that question. You less than all others."

The words passed her lips quick as thought. The next instant she repented of them, but they were spoken, and they had their effect. A terrible alteration took place in Bernhard's face. For an instant he looked as though about to crush to the earth the woman before him; then he suddenly turned away, without a word, and left the room.

"Bernhard!" Thea called after him; but the door was shut and he did not return.

"Past and gone!" echoed in Thea's soul.

"Past and gone!" a voice muttered in Bernhard's heart. Of what avail was it that she wrung her hands, and that he, in his room, hid his face and wished himself dead in Lothar's place rather than live through all this? The doors between the husband and wife were closed, and neither could overcome self so far as to open them and cry out to the other, "I love you,--I love you in spite of everything!"

The reconciling words remained unspoken.

Thus they parted. Bernhard returned to Berlin to await the close of the Reichstag, and Thea was alone again,--really alone now, since she knew that there was no union between Bernhard and herself even in thought.

Werner had departed immediately after Lothar's funeral, and Thea shortly afterwards sent Alma home. Their mother was quite ill; there were fears of her becoming blind, and Alma was much more needed there than at Eichhof. Thea exacted from her a solemn promise that she would never mention the contents of Adela's letter. What the future had in store for her she could not tell, only one thing she was resolved upon, that the unhappy state of affairs existing between Bernhard and herself should be concealed from the world as long as possible. While he had been in Eichhof her illness had made such concealment entirely feasible, and in future--yes, what was to be done in future she could ponder upon in her solitude at her leisure.

But upon this Bernhard had also pondered, and a few days after his departure Thea received a letter from him.

Her heart beat so strongly when this letter arrived that she held it for a moment in her hand without being able to open it. And when at last she did so, the characters of the familiar handwriting danced so before her eyes that at first she could scarcely decipher them. Bernhard wrote:

"From what you said to me on the day before I left Eichhof, I conclude that you find it impossible to bestow your confidence and affection upon me any longer. I do not ask why this is

so; you know the reason for it, and it is better that it should not be discussed between us. To what is inevitable we must resign ourselves as best we may. After what has passed you probably desire to return to your parents, as life with me would be only a constant pain to you. I should not oppose your wish in this regard were it not for the existence of one for whose sake it seems to me best that we should maintain at least the appearance of union before the world,--I mean our child. For his sake we must avoid a public separation. Therefore it is that I pray you to remain in Eichhof, even although I should return thither. My sphere of action must enlarge with time. I shall travel much, and thus the brief duration of our meetings in Eichhof will seem not unnatural. You can shorten them still further by visits to watering-places, if it so pleases you. Before the world due regard must be paid to *les convenances*; of course the cause of our separation must never be mentioned between ourselves. In this wise our relations to each other may be duly arranged, and I pray you to inform me as soon as possible if your views in this respect coincide with mine.

"BERNHARD EICHHOF."

This was the letter which Thea read over and over again amid floods of tears, the letter the composition of which had cost Bernhard a sleepless night. What a night it had been! Anger and pain strove within him for the mastery, and pain at length conquered. He thought of Thea's youth, of her solitude and inexperience, and he thought of Lothar's thoughtless gayety, of his susceptible nature, and of all his winning qualities. And he, Bernhard, had been fool enough to leave these two children dependent upon each other for society! Through his own fault his happiness was destroyed, and he had lost the woman whom he loved,--lost her forever!

He was overcome with compassion for himself, for Lothar, who had sought by his death to expiate his fault, for Thea! While writing that letter to her his heart was filled with sympathy for her. He pitied the poor young creature whom he had delivered over to her destruction; she could be nothing more to him, but his roof should shelter her at least from further harm.

These were Bernhard's reflections; but Thea thought she could read between the lines, and that it was not his insulting suspicions of her fidelity, but his own sentiments for Julutta Wronsky that made it easy indeed for him to give up his wife, if only appearances were kept up before the world. She accepted what he proposed with a dull resignation. In the tormenting self-accusations in which she so often indulged in her solitude, she seemed to have a crime to expiate. She repeatedly recalled every conversation, every interview, she had ever had with Lothar. She thought now that she had often been too cordial and friendly to him, she reproached herself for the ease and carelessness of her manner towards him, and she regarded Bernhard's estrangement from her as a punishment from heaven, which she must patiently endure. She grew paler and more silent, so that the old family physician often shook his head anxiously when he visited her, although he could not pronounce her really ill. Once he wrote to Bernhard about her, and Bernhard thought 'of course she cannot recover from Lothar's loss,' and, in spite of his pity for her, he crushed the innocent letter in his hand and flung it from him as if it contained some poison that he feared to touch. And then he carried his gloom, his pain, and his sore heart to Julutta Wronsky, not for consolation, as he said to himself,--who could console him?--but for some distraction of mind, to listen to her glorious contralto as she sang his favorite songs, and to discuss the events of the day. Meanwhile he could not but be conscious of the influence that he exerted upon this woman, and of how entirely she looked at the world through his eyes.

## CHAPTER XX.

### DR. NORDSTEDT.

Spring had come, and life in Eichhof had developed into just what Bernhard had foreseen. He had taken an active part in a new railway enterprise which was to bring his secluded estates more into contact with the world and to connect a great Russian branch-line with a German trunk-line. By degrees he had become a prime mover in this scheme, and when he returned to Eichhof every moment of his time and every thought of his mind were put under requisition. He had to go to Russia, and backwards and forwards to and from Berlin; guests of every social rank came to Eichhof in the interests of the new railway, a prominent banking-house had to be induced to join in the scheme, and there were all kinds of foreseen and unforeseen obstacles to be overcome. And Bernhard was wanted everywhere. A great work was to be undertaken, one that would be of immense benefit to his section of the country, and the less satisfaction Bernhard took in his home-life the more did he devote himself to these outside interests, that were to be, as

he thought, so productive of good. It was natural that Julutta Wronsky should understand and sympathize with him in these interests more than Thea possibly could. The time was past when Thea, for love of him, would interest herself in subjects that else would never have occupied her thoughts. And, besides, she was so very far from well that she no longer refused to heed the advice of the physician, who urged her to try change of air and scene at one of the well-known baths.

So she made ready for the journey, upon which her little son was to be her only companion and consolation. Yes, her only consolation, for except in her boy's laughing eyes she could see no brightness anywhere. At Schönthal, Frau von Rosen had been seriously ill, and when she began to recover her disease settled in her eyes, so that at the end of a few weeks her sight was almost entirely gone. It was a sad picture, that of one who had been so active now so entirely helpless, and Herr von Rosen and Alma vied with each other in devotion to the invalid. Care for her mother helped Alma to conceal and to overcome her grief for Lothar far more easily than would otherwise have been the case. She had no time to think of it,--the present claimed all her powers of mind and body, and the past retreated into a dim distance. While Thea was preparing for her journey, her mother was about to travel also; but while Thea's goal was a mountain watering-place, Frau von Rosen was going to Berlin to consult Walter's friend, Dr. Nordstedt. He advised her to place herself entirely under his care for a while, and accordingly Frau von Rosen and Alma were soon established in two quiet rooms in a wing of the Nordstedt mansion, the windows of which looked out upon the blossoming fruit-trees and green grass-plats of the pleasant garden. Soon this prospect was shut out from one of the rooms by blue curtains, for Frau von Rosen was to undergo an operation which would decide whether she should henceforth dwell in perpetual night or once more look upon the light of day and the faces of those whom she loved. They were weary days that Alma now passed beside her mother's couch, hovering between fear and hope. Herr von Rosen left them immediately after the operation, for pressing business at home prevented him from awaiting the final decision, and Walter Eichhof and Adela Hohenstein were the only friends from home who came now and then to ask after Frau von Rosen and to chat awhile with Alma. Oddly enough, the two had never met upon any of their visits; 'fortunately,' Walter said, 'unfortunately,' Adela thought, although not for worlds would she have uttered the word aloud. At last after days of prolonged anxiety the bandage could be removed from the invalid's eyes, and Dr. Nordstedt pronounced the operation entirely successful. That was the first happy day that Alma had known since Lothar's death. A smile transfigured for a moment Dr. Nordstedt's grave face as he announced the glad tidings to Alma, and tears glittered in the girl's eyes as she held out both hands to him, and, forgetting all her shyness, cried, "Ah, how I thank you, Dr. Nordstedt! If I only had some way in which to show you how grateful I am!"

He held her little white hands in a firm clasp for an instant, and replied, "Such moments are the bright spots in a physician's life, Fräulein von Rosen, and they atone for many a gloomy day."

On the evening of that day Alma stood at the open window of her room, looking out into the starry June night. The leaves of the trees whispered gently in the evening breeze, and the garden lay silent and dark below her, while beyond the gardens and court-yard that surrounded the Nordstedt mansion there was the glimmer of distant gas-lights, and the street-noises fell upon her ear like a muffled hum. Alma was so grateful that she longed to be happy and glad, and yet precisely at this time, when she was relieved from her weight of care and could breathe freely, she felt doubly lonely in the strange great city. She seemed to herself to be upon a lonely island in the midst of a roaring ocean. As she stood thus looking out, she thought of that winter night in Eichhof when she had stood at the window gazing thus. Lothar's image, which her recent care had banished to the background of her thoughts, arose vividly before her, and she was conscious of a painful yearning for her home. She clasped her hands against the window-frame, and leaned her head upon them. The air was sultry; she had loosened her fair hair, and it fell down about her shoulders, as she remained thus lost in thoughts of the past. Suddenly the door was opened, and a woman with a lighted candle entered the room. It was the nurse to whose care Frau von Rosen was specially intrusted.

"Good gracious, Fräulein dear, you are in pitch darkness!" she exclaimed, putting the candle on the table, "and with the window open too! Have you closed the door, that your mother may not feel the draught?"

"Indeed I have, Marianne," Alma replied, half turning round. "My mother is asleep, and I came here to get a little fresh air."

"Yes, yes, you ought to have more fresh air, Fräulein dear; the Herr Doctor always says you ought to walk in the garden every day. The Herr Doctor is not at all pleased to see you grow so pale here. He looks at you,--yes, just as he always does at people with whom he is not satisfied, and for whom he would like to prescribe. No offence, Fräulein, but he does; such a sad look, and yet so kind. Good gracious! I know the look well enough. And he has, perhaps, a particular reason for it in your case."

Alma was only lending half an ear to the woman's chatter, and it was more out of kindness than from interest that she asked, "Indeed? How so?"

Marianne put on an air of mystery. "Ah, you see, 'tis a long story. You look like somebody," she replied.

"Indeed?"

"Somebody who is dead; of course it was a woman," Marianne chattered on. "She had braids just like yours. Now your hair is down, I can see that she had the very same. And she had blue eyes, too, and was so like you in some way, I cannot exactly tell how; but as soon as you came you reminded me of her, and our doctor saw it too,--I knew that in a moment, for I know him well."

"Well, and who was this other?" Alma asked, with more interest.

Marianne sighed, and then told Alma of the unfortunate young woman whom her doctor had once entrusted to her care. "And only think, Fräulein dear, the woman had once been so rich that she did not know what to do with her money, and--but this is a secret; I only happen to know it because my husband, who is dead, was once a footman in her house. Only since you look so like her I'll tell it to you. Well, our doctor loved this woman dearly when she was a girl. But he was very young, and the girl's parents, and the girl herself, perhaps, thought he was not rich enough for her. At all events, she wouldn't marry him, and that's the only reason why he has never married, although now he might choose a wife where he would and thank you, too. But he cannot forget his Hedwig. And when he found her so sick and miserable, and got me to nurse her, and then at last when she died, any one could see how fond he was of her. Our doctor is an angel to all sick people, but then--then he was something more."

Alma listened now with keen interest, and was almost sorry when Marianne had finished arranging her room for the night and was obliged to attend to some other patients.

"Yes, yes, Fräulein dear, the best of men must have trials. Well, good-night."

And the nurse left the room, and Alma was again alone at the window. And so this calm, grave Dr. Nordstedt had also lived through his romance. He had lost his love, and lost her so cruelly! "Poor man!" Alma whispered, thinking of what she had just heard. Then she heard footsteps on the garden gravel path below her window. She leaned out, and saw a tall, manly figure slowly walking towards the house. She hurriedly withdrew, as though fearing that the doctor might suspect that she was thinking of him and that she knew his secret. Still, she no longer felt lonely as before; it was a certain consolation to her to reflect that in the heart of the man walking alone beneath the trees on this sultry evening there might perhaps be thoughts similar to her own.

From this day it was not gratitude solely that prompted her to observe the doctor with greater interest than hitherto. There seemed a certain resemblance between his fate and her own. She thought she could understand him; and when he paced the garden to and fro alone in the evening, and she stood alone at her window, she thought that surely there was some mysterious sympathy between them.

Thus some time passed, and at last Frau von Rosen was allowed to leave her room. When she spent an hour for the first time in an arbour in the garden, Herr von Hohenstein and his daughter came to wish their old friend joy in her restoration to health, and to inform her at the same time that Herr von Hohenstein had purchased a country-house with a little land, and that they were to occupy it the ensuing week. The house was in the vicinity of one of the larger cities of their native province, and Adela was enthusiastic in her praises of its lovely situation, while her head was filled with plans for gardens of roses, asparagus-beds, dove-cotes, and chicken-yards. Herr von Hohenstein, who had entirely recovered his health, although he was greatly changed and found his memory often defective, so that he was obliged to turn to Adela for aid, agreed to everything, and spoke of employing his leisure in the quiet of the country, if his strength admitted of it, in collecting his varied experience on the subject of the breeding of horses, and in publishing it for the use and enlightenment of posterity. Adela had taken a pencil out of her pocket, and was just about to draw a ground-plan of her future home on a leaf of her note-book for Alma, when a shadow fell upon her paper, and a familiar voice that had not fallen upon her ears for a long time bade 'good-morning' to the little circle in the arbour. Adela started up and confronted Walter Eichhof. Perhaps each was at first inclined, so unexpected was this meeting, to run away; but Adela was imprisoned in the arbour, and Dr. Nordstedt's broad shoulders appeared just behind Walter. As there was no way of avoiding each other, they each had recourse to the same line of conduct; Walter devoted himself to the Rosens, and Adela found inexhaustible matter for conversation with Dr. Nordstedt in his establishment and his methods of treatment, in which she expressed the greatest interest. Both Walter and Adela, however, took occasion to scan each other furtively, and at times replied rather vaguely to remarks addressed to them, from an anxiety on the part of each to hear what the other was saying. At last Dr. Nordstedt expressed a fear lest so much conversation around her might fatigue Frau von Rosen, and proposed that she should be left for a while with the Baron von Hohenstein, while he conducted Walter and the young ladies through the garden, and the establishment in which Fräulein von Hohenstein expressed such an interest.

Adela immediately declared herself ready to go, and, as Walter was standing by Alma's side, it fell to Dr. Nordstedt to conduct Fräulein von Hohenstein. He showed them through various rooms in the house, and told them how they had been enlarged to their present size from small beginnings, until he had ended by adding the present spacious wings to the original mansion. The waiting-rooms were filled with all kinds of costly *objets d'art*, mementos from grateful patients from near and far. Adela, who had chattered fast enough at first, gradually became silent, and looked up with a kind of awe at the tall, serious man who had made himself what he was. Then



she cast a stolen glance at Walter. He was right to be proud of this friend, she thought, and then she wondered whether Walter possessed sufficient energy and industry to be like him. She could not but observe meanwhile that in the course of the last year Walter had grown far more manly, and at last she arrived at the conclusion that she never should suspect either Walter or Dr. Nordstedt of being doctors if she had not known about them. The image of a 'doctor' in her mind was inseparably connected with a large pair of spectacles and a strong odour of ether,--both attributes of the family physician at Rollin, and of a certain professor who had been called in at the time of her father's illness. They had hitherto been the only representatives of the medical profession known to her.

"Fräulein Alma would like to see your study," Walter suddenly said to Nordstedt, who turned to the girl with a smile, and said,--

"You have seen it already, Fräulein von Rosen. It is the little room I showed you where I performed my first successful operation. When one wishes to work, any decoration around one has a disturbing influence, I think; and then, too, I like old places, and so I stayed there with my books."

"For the first time I cannot agree with you," cried Adela. "Whoever has any taste for the beautiful must like to see it around him."

Nordstedt laughed. "You are right," he rejoined; "but beauty incites me either to enjoyment or to dreamy revery, and neither is any assistance to hard work."

"But, lest the ladies should think you a scorner of the beautiful, you must open your music-room for us," said Walter.

This Nordstedt did with pleasure. He certainly was much more talkative and less reserved than usual to-day. Walter wondered whether Adela's gay humour had wrought this change. Although he was firmly convinced that he himself had entirely ceased to think of Adela, he found this suspicion far from agreeable.

As they entered the music-room both the girls uttered an exclamation of delight. The furniture, the hangings, the pictures on the walls, all gave evidence of genuine taste and a fine artistic perception.

"Yes, the requirements of art differ from those of labour," said Nordstedt. "Art gives beauty and must have beauty."

And everything in this room was beautiful. From the grand piano to the smallest footstool, all was perfect of its kind. Adela's admiration was loudly expressed, Alma's was silent. But whenever she lifted her eyes they were sure to encounter Nordstedt's glance seeking hers. "Do you love music?" he asked, suddenly stepping to her side.

"Dearly!" she replied.

He went to the piano, and played one of Mendelssohn's Songs without Words. Walter stood at a window, looking very grave. Nordstedt never played before strangers. What had come over him to-day? And how devoutly Adela was listening! Walter wished he had not come here to-day, and the brighter his friend's face grew the gloomier he felt.

The song that Nordstedt had chosen was one of those brief melancholy strains that suggest a lament. When he had finished, Alma said, "That song is one of my favourites. It is so fervent, and yet so sad. It sounds as if one were thinking of some one loved and lost----"

Nordstedt turned upon her one brief questioning glance of surprise. Alma blushed, fearing that she had said too much. But Adela, who generally said whatever came into her head without reflecting, exclaimed, as she looked admiringly at Nordstedt, "Why, you can do everything! You give me an entirely different idea of doctors from any I have ever had before!"

Scarcely had the words left her lips when she, too, blushed crimson to the roots of her hair, for she remembered that Walter heard what she said. She was glad that Nordstedt proposed returning to Frau von Rosen, who ought now to be taken to her room. Without waiting for the escort of the two gentlemen, she took Alma's arm, and ran, rather than walked, along the corridor into the garden, while the young men silently followed them. Nordstedt's face was bright with a smile, but Walter was annoyed and discontented with himself, with Adela, with everybody. He was more startled than pleased when Adela offered him her hand at parting and said, softly, "It has given me great pleasure to see you again." He replied only by a low, formal bow. He wandered about the loneliest streets on this evening until ten o'clock, and at last closed his door behind him and threw himself upon his lounge, saying, "And yet I wish I had not seen her again!"

## CHAPTER XXI.

### SUMMER DAYS.

Broad sunlight lay upon the comfortable mansion of Schönthal. Frau von Rosen was better than she had been for years, but she was still obliged to spare her eyes, and so Alma had undertaken to advise Dr. Nordstedt from time to time of the condition of his patient. The less there was to tell of her, however, the more there always seemed to be to say. Nordstedt was now looked upon by the whole family more as a friend than as a physician, and, busy as he might be, he always found time to answer Alma's letters. As Walter was to spend his summer holidays at Schönthal, Herr von Rosen invited Dr. Nordstedt to pay them a visit at the same time.

"But, papa, what are you thinking of? He never will come," said Alma.

Nevertheless he came.

"What a pity it is that Thea has not yet come home!" said Alma. "She would be so much pleased with Dr. Nordstedt, and he would like her so much."

Frau von Rosen gazed thoughtfully at her daughter. How did she know so well whom Dr. Nordstedt would like? She began to shake her head, but not for long, for Nordstedt had grown dear to her, and she only glanced shyly now and then at her husband, wondering if the same thoughts that had occurred to her had been suggested to him also, and what he would say. But it really was all his fault. Why had he invited the doctor to the house?

One evening Herr von Rosen said to her, "We are thought to be people of very advanced ideas, mamma. Do you not think we should justify the opinion entertained of us if we chanced some day to marry our daughter to a man of the people?"

"It seems to me," she replied, "that everything would depend upon who the man was, and what confidence we could repose in him."

"Aha! Then, in principle, you would not be opposed to such a match? Of course, I am only discussing such things in general."

"In general, then, I have no objection to the bourgeoisie, although I once thought I could favour none save sons-in-law of rank. But what is the use of growing older if one grows no wiser?"

Then there was a pause, which was ended by Herr von Rosen's saying, "Alma certainly never would have been happy with Lothar Eichhof."

Frau von Rosen sighed. She laid her hand on her husband's shoulder, and said, softly, "Do you think Thea is happy?"

"Ah! her letters have struck you too?"

"Not only that, but she has now been three months away from Eichhof. It was all very well for her to go to the baths, but to visit my sister afterward and stay there so long,—I cannot understand it. Mountain air is good for the child, she says. Possibly; but Eichhof air would be equally good for him. And we so seldom see anything of Bernhard----"

"Bernhard has a great deal to do at present."

"Ah, my dear, I can easily see that you do not believe that to be the only reason. I often lie awake thinking of it all. I cannot comprehend it."

"Wait until Thea comes home. She is a clever woman, and she loves Bernhard; she will make matters all right again. You remember how she behaved about his agricultural interests. At all events, we must know nothing until we are told. Not even a parent should interfere between man and wife."

Frau von Rosen assented. "But yet it is hard," she rejoined; "and if anything has estranged them from each other, be sure it is the result of the grand state in which they are obliged to live. Love is more likely to flourish amid simple, comfortable surroundings."

The next day the family and their guests were taking their coffee when the post-bag was brought in. There was a general distribution of letters and newspapers, and among the former was a thick envelope for Alma from Adela Hohenstein.

There had been a brisk correspondence carried on of late between the two girls, and Alma was as familiar with Adela's quiet life in her country home as was Adela with Alma's walks and rides with her guests, and even with the conversations carried on among them.

"It is very charming here," Adela wrote. "My plants and my animals flourish finely. Papa is contented, and we love each other dearly. But--you see there is a but--it is very quiet. The people about us are strangers to us, and those whom we know are far away. I go to walk just when you do, but I am quite alone. Since my Fidèle died I have not even a dog, for the one I have now is too stupid to care to go with me. While I walk, papa writes his book, which, however, between ourselves, will not come to anything, because poor papa has forgotten so much. But it gives him pleasure, and so I let him believe that it will be good, and go to walk alone. And sometimes I am quite low in my mind and could envy you your guests. Not Walter, of course, but Dr. Nordstedt is so nice; and even Walter is a human being, and an old acquaintance besides. Papa, too, thinks--but then he had better write you himself what he thinks. I only want to tell you that I am no longer so seriously angry with Walter as I told you I was in Berlin. I have been thinking about it since I have been so much alone, and I have reflected that it is folly to be angry with any one for as long as I have been vexed with Walter. To be sure, you do not know the cause I had for anger, and I certainly had good cause; but nevertheless I am angry with him no longer, and he need not refuse papa's invitation on my account. You may tell him so."

Alma read this strange letter twice, and just as she finished it Herr von Rosen said, "Baron Hohenstein has written to me, Dr. Nordstedt, asking whether you and Walter will not stop and pay him a little visit on your way home. He says he has received so much hospitality in your house that he should like to requite it. You will go directly past his retreat, and---"

"Don't decide against this plan; I have something to tell you from Adela," Alma whispered to Walter, who was just opening his lips to declare that the visit would be impossible.

Dr. Nordstedt read the Freiherr's kind invitation, and then declared, with a glance at Walter, the state of whose mind he guessed, although he knew nothing of it positively, that he felt inclined to go. After breakfast Alma took occasion to deliver Adela's message to Walter. The young man hesitated at first whether to rejoice or be vexed. Adela was no longer angry with him! As if she had ever had any cause to be so. He had laid his heart at her feet, and she had thrust it from her. The bitterest moments of his life he had experienced upon her account. No human being had ever so grieved and wounded him as she had done. And now she sent him word that she was no longer angry with him. What a confusion of ideas there must be in that fair curly head! But in spite of his vexation his heart beat faster, and there was a joyous light in his eyes. Was not a desire to see him again at the bottom of her message? Did she not say "I am no longer angry with you" only because pride and mortification kept her from saying, "Do not be angry with me any longer"? Of what avail was it that he had so often convinced himself that he would forget her,--nay, that he had forgotten her? Her image was more vividly distinct than ever in his mind, and in spite of all his self-remonstrances he was delighted at the thought of this visit, and counted the days that must elapse before it could begin.

One day Herr von Rosen invited him to drive with him to Rollin, where he and Alma had long owed a visit. Dr. Nordstedt stayed with Frau von Rosen, and the three others set out upon a lovely afternoon. How strange were Walter's sensations upon seeing the fine old pile once more! The memories connected with it took more vivid shape in his mind. There were the two old lindens beside the court-yard gate stretching their leafy arms above the tall old wooden crucifix, and upon the other side was the ancient oak, in which the storks were wont to build. But between these unchanged trees two brand-new gothic gate-posts had lately been erected, and as the carriage rolled along the avenue Walter saw that the old house had been decorated with all kinds of turrets and bow-windows. The arbour of clematis had been replaced by a sloping terrace; the elder-bushes in front of the house had been exchanged for closely-trimmed acacias, and instead of the climbing roses, which had been killed by the various renovations, the shield and baronial crest of the Hohensteins were conspicuous between the windows of the upper story. A footman in elegant livery received the guests. The hall was redolent of fresh paint and new carpets, and the doors creaked upon their hinges, as though discontented with the new order of affairs, but no footstep could be heard upon the luxurious rugs and carpets. Hugo Hohenstein received them in the hall in his customary *blasé* but not inelegant manner. He conducted Alma to the drawing-room, and presented the party to his wife, who greeted them with a curtsy that was needlessly low, but maintained towards them generally an air of cool reserve, which finally had a paralyzing effect upon them all. The young hostess had perhaps not received a satisfactory amount of attention from her husband's acquaintances, and was fearful of compromising herself; at all events, she was evidently embarrassed, perfectly courteous but perfectly cold, so that when the gentlemen retired to smoke a cigar, Alma found it very difficult to carry on a conversation. She admired several treasures of art that were displayed on shelves and brackets, as well as the entire arrangement of the drawing-room. Frau von Hohenstein replied that it was all very simple, and that she was sure that Fräulein von Rosen was accustomed to a far greater degree of elegance. But something in her expression gave the lie to her words, and Alma's heart grew heavy, for she could not but remember, as these conventional phrases were being exchanged, the many delightful talks she had had with Adela in this very room.

"Walter's sensations were very similar to Alma's, while Hugo Hohenstein conducted the gentlemen through the gardens, where stiff flower-beds but poorly replaced the rose-hedges. The trees in the park, too, were much thinned, and part of the pond had been drained to give place to more trim flower-beds.

"When the pond was drained a ring was found," said Hugo,--"a golden ring, set with a blue or green stone. I have it now; and I should like to know how it came in the pond."

The blood mounted to Walter's cheeks, but he said nothing, until shortly afterwards, when he was shown the ring in the smoking-room. Then he could not refrain from remarking, "I think your sister, Fräulein Adela, used to wear that ring. If I am not mistaken, there is a date engraved upon it,--the date of your parents' betrothal----Ah! there it is: 'August 28, 1830.' Does that coincide with your knowledge on the subject?"

"To be sure! I never thought of that. Really, it is remarkable how stupid everything is when one comes to investigate it. Some interest attached to the ring so long as no one knew how it came in the pond. But now that we know all about it, it turns out to be perfectly commonplace."

"Would you like to see my collection of weapons?" he asked, after a while. "I have some rare pieces." He opened a cabinet and displayed its contents to his guests. "They really are fine, are they not?" he said. "I am thinking now of making an Egyptian collection. I intend going to Egypt; it is a fearful bore to stay at home forever."

"Ah!" said Herr von Rosen. "What does your lady wife say to that?"

Hugo von Hohenstein looked at his neighbour with undisguised astonishment, then he smiled with an air of superiority. "*Mon Dieu!*" he said, "we did not marry to be bored. My wife will probably visit a French watering-place, or something of the sort." He suppressed a slight yawn, and thought how impossible it was to be entertained by these *gentilshommes campagnards*, who, with their old-fashioned ideas, were really quite out of place in the modern world.

Herr von Rosen ordered his carriage.

"*À propos*, since you are shortly to pay my governor a visit, my dear Eichhof, why not take the ring with you?" said Hugo.

"Walter had already thought of doing so, but had not made up his mind how to propose it. He took the ring, and his heart beat fast. Fate willed that the ring he had cast away in anger should now be returned to him; he would accept the omen,--it was the talisman of his good fortune that he had thus regained. Therefore on the drive home to Schönthal he was in the gayest humour, while Herr von Rosen and Alma could not recover from the impression the visit had made upon them. They had had a fleeting glimpse of a modern fashionable marriage, and both were prompted to make a comparison which pained them.

"He is going to Egypt and she to France," Herr von Rosen thought, "and this they call not being 'bored.' And my daughter and my son-in-law, too, have put miles between them. Are they afraid of being 'bored'? Good heavens! have home-life and home-happiness lost all charm for the young people of the present day?"

Alma on her part thought of the cool courtesy with which Hugo Hohenstein and his wife treated each other, and then her thoughts travelled to Thea and Bernhard. Would they at some future day treat each other thus, or even more coldly and stiffly? She longed to see Thea again; now when her first sharp pang for Lothar's death was past, and when her mother was so nearly well, the secret in which she was a sharer weighed heavily upon her youthful soul. The world was so fair and sunny, and people were so kind, and Dr. Nordstedt--no, he had nothing to do with it; but she felt so calmly happy that her heart was full of gratitude to God for this lovely world. But then, when she remembered Thea and Lothar, she felt that she was wrong to be happy and to enjoy. Oh, there was so much sorrow in the world after all!

And to-day, after the visit to Rollin, she felt in a particularly melancholy mood. Rollin had impressed her as so sadly changed, she missed Adela everywhere; she thought of how changed too Eichhof would be when Thea finally returned thither, and she remembered that their guests were to leave Schönthal on the morrow.

Occupied with these thoughts, she went out alone in the evening into the park, while the rest were sitting on the veranda. Frau von Rosen soon reentered the house, and asked her husband to come with her, as she wished to speak with him. Nordstedt and Walter were left alone. Nordstedt drummed with his fingers upon the garden-table, near which he sat, in a nervous way quite unlike him. He arose once or twice, then seated himself and drummed again, saying, at last, "I will go find Fräulein Alma; the evening is damp, she may take cold."

"Well, then, come," said Walter, evidently regarding his companionship as indispensable.

Nordstedt stood one moment in silence, then put both hands upon his young friend's shoulders, and said, gently, "Let me go alone; I have something to say to Fräulein Alma."

"Nordstedt, is it possible?" Walter ejaculated, having already during his visit at Schönthal made up his mind that it was not Adela who had wrought the change in Nordstedt which had so surprised and annoyed him in Berlin.

Nordstedt looked abroad into the moonlight. "Much is possible, my dear fellow; nothing is certain!" he said. And without another word he descended the steps of the veranda and walked alone: the moonlit path towards the park.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### A CRISIS.

It was very lonely at Castle Eichhof. On lovely summer afternoons the servants would sit in the pleasantest nooks in the garden discussing old times and new ones, and the windows of the second story were closely curtained, and looked as if they had all kinds of secrets to keep. Thea had not yet returned, and Bernhard's visits to his home were very short, and when he did come he occupied his bachelor apartments. His railway scheme gave him a great deal to do, and even if this had not been the case he could not have borne to stay long in his lonely castle.

It was fortunate that the Wronskys were at home this summer! Although their estate, Paniënka, was more than two miles distant from Eichhof, Bernhard was their frequent guest.

Wronsky, who was much too undecided a character to insist upon his own way when it was not agreeable to his wife, was extremely glad that she had chosen to spend this summer at home, for he dearly loved his ease and good eating. He looked up to his wife much as he did to his old schoolfellow Bernhard, and if he thought it the great blessing of his life that he had won the hand of his beautiful, clever, and proud Julutta, none the less did he feel himself greatly honoured by Bernhard's frequent presence in his house. In his unpretending *bonhommie* he thought it but natural that his friend should prefer his wife's society to his own. Bernhard's influence over his good-natured friend dated from their school-days; he had always been first in his classes, while Wronsky had contentedly remained at their foot. And Julutta? She smiled when she perceived Bernhard approaching, but it was a strange, contemptuous smile, very different from the one with which she greeted him when he stood before her. Latterly she had not smiled when he appeared, but had bidden him welcome with eyes that were large and serious, and with a certain shy confusion in her manner. The more embarrassed she seemed, the warmer and the firmer was his clasp of her hand, the more frank and cordial did he become, until she, too, adopted his tone, and they talked together like good friends and comrades. At least so Bernhard would have said, and he forced himself to believe that so it was. Yes, Julutta's blush when he touched her hand, the liquid brilliancy of her eyes, the pathetic tone of her voice when she talked with him, all this was only friendship. True it was, however, that Julutta could not only talk and blush with a grace all her own, but could also observe and combine with a cleverness beyond that of other women.

Bernhard took a certain credit to himself for never mentioning Thea in his conversations with Julutta, for concealing the ruined sanctuary of his home from the eyes of his friend.

But Julutta heard and saw what he never told her. Why it was she did not indeed know, but she did know that he was not happy in his marriage, and from the moment when she first became aware of this she smiled no more upon Bernhard as formerly, but her earnest gaze told him, "I know that you suffer, and I suffer with you." And in spite of himself he understood this language, and the longer Thea remained away, and the wider the breach became that separated them, the better did he learn to comprehend what Frau Julutta's eyes said to him.

When he returned to his lonely home was it any wonder that Julutta's image pursued him thither? At first he had pitied her, then he had admired her intellect, and now he could no longer banish from his mind the expression of her eyes, the strange, bewildering charm of her beauty. He saw her before him as he rode slowly home on moonlit summer nights through the fragrant meadows; he saw her still when he entered his lonely house. He had felt so secure, so superior, with regard to this woman, and now? Bernhard would not analyze, would not even reflect upon, his present sentiments towards her. Why should he? Has not many a one, seeing his every hope in life wrecked, sought forgetfulness in the intoxicating bowl? And Bernhard sought to forget; and if he suspected that his senses were bewildered, he never dreamed of throwing aside the goblet. This bewilderment should never reach the point of intoxication; Bernhard never could forget that Julutta was the wife of the friend of his youth; no, beyond a certain point Bernhard was still sure of himself.

In this sense of security he drove over to Paniënka one sultry afternoon. The sun was near its setting as he reached the pine forest bordering on the park, but the air was still oppressively hot, and not a breath stirred the ferns that grew on the roadside. Not a bird twittered, not a squirrel was seen climbing the gray trunks, not a human being encountered the vehicle, and the crunching of its wheels on the road was the only sound that disturbed the breathless silence. The air was filled with the strong fragrance of the pines, and across the blue strips of sky visible among the tree-tops stretched isolated gray clouds like menacing fingers foreboding a storm. Bernhard did not see them. He leaned back in the carriage, gazing into the gray-green forest

twilight without really seeing that either. The dreamy quiet of nature seemed to have infected him. Suddenly he sat upright. There was more light between the trunks of the trees, a gray wall draped with trailing hop-vines appeared, and then two red gateposts--that was the little side-entrance to the park at Paniënka. The carriage was just about to turn into a broad avenue of chestnuts, which led to the castle court-yard, when he told the coachman to stop. He thought he heard himself called by name. He stood up, and thus could see over the wall. Across the green lawn stretching between the wall and a little pond came the slender figure of a woman, who beckoned to him. In her white trailing dress and her gold-gleaming hair she looked like the nymph of the cool forest pool whose waters glistened behind her.

"Where are you going, Count Eichhof?" exclaimed Julutta. "My husband is at R---, and it is so insufferably warm in-doors that I have taken refuge here by the pond. If you will come and drive away the gnats with a cigar I shall be grateful to you."

Bernhard sprang from the carriage and approached the little gate. Julutta leaned upon the wall, which just there was low and crumbling. "Tell them to bring us some fruit and wine from the castle," she called out to the coachman. Then she went to the gate and opened it to admit Bernhard. So soon as she was alone with him her self-possession vanished. She offered him her hand without looking at him, she spoke of the heat of the weather, of Bernhard's long drive, excused herself for thus detaining him, perhaps against his will, and then congratulated herself upon his visit--all this so hastily spoken, and in such bewitching confusion, that Bernhard could not but see that she was embarrassed, and that she wished to conceal or overcome her embarrassment by talking quickly. They had reached a charming spot, a seat half surrounded by low rocks, and looking upon the little forest lake. A small waterfall plashed close by and diffused a refreshing coolness, so that Bernhard after his warm drive involuntarily drew a deep breath.

"It is charming here," he said; "and you come to me like a kind fairy who lives in an enchanted forest and who conducts weary wanderers into her fairy home, where it is always cool and delightful."

Julutta laughed. "Only favoured wanderers," she said.

"I thank you, gentle fairy," Bernhard said, earnestly. She blushed and looked away from him towards the water. For an instant he gazed at her admiringly, and then, as if forcing himself to look at something else, he took up a little book lying on a rustic table. He read the title-page--"Pages from the Life of a Good-for-Nothing," by Eichendorff. "Ah, have you been reading this midsummer night's dream of Eichendorff's on this sultry summer day?" he asked.

With a smile she turned to him. "And why not?" she said, with a gentle dreamy expression in her eyes. "Do you think, because I have known more than most women of the stern realities of life, that I must have lost all sense of its poetry?"

"No, assuredly not; but I thought you too much of a critic to enjoy the story, which, charming as it is, is so absolutely impossible that you must admit that it is thoroughly unreal and unnatural."

"But, good heavens! there are moods in which one longs for just that. A day like this in a lonely forest--for this park is really only a forest--makes one dream; and why should one not indulge in this charming midsummer dream, and for an hour believe that, even in this mortal life, everything may be delightful? Reality will teach us soon enough that it is not so."

Bernhard turned over the leaves of the book. Julutta seated herself upon the gnarled roots of a beech beside the waterfall, and gazed at the green lily-pads floating on the little lake, and at the dragon-flies hovering on gauzy wings above it.

"You have been dreaming, then, to-day?" Bernhard asked, seating himself beside her.

"Yes; shall you laugh at me for doing so?"

"On the contrary, I envy you. I have had to write such dreadfully long and tiresome letters at home."

"Do you never dream?"

"They say a man should never dream."

"Ah, 'they say' so much, 'they' are so wise; but folly is not to be easily banished from the world. I even maintain that every man of sensibility and imagination has often found himself dreaming of some foolish happiness."

"Why of a foolish happiness?"

"Because happiness can hardly ever stand the test of critical reason, but depends upon imagination, which is often folly. And what is happiness, after all? A moment, an intoxication, a dream--and yet we all long for it."

A year before--a few months before--Bernhard would perhaps have contradicted her. Now he

nodded a mute assent. She was right. Happiness was an intoxication, a dream.

"I sometimes think," Julutta continued, eagerly, "that mortals would be better and happier if there were somewhere an island where all could be happy in their own way for at least three weeks of every year."

Bernhard laughed. "There is method in your dreaming at least," he said.

"Laugh if you will," she said; "but do you not believe that many a one would bear his burden more easily and willingly if each year brought him so happy a memory and so glad a hope?"

"Possibly; but many would be miserably unhappy in longing for this blessed island all through the rest of the year."

"Oh, no. Children at school are not made unhappy by thoughts of their holidays; they are refreshed and strengthened for their studies by them."

Bernhard sat drawing hieroglyphics in the gravel with his cane. A clink of glasses was heard approaching, and Julutta arose.

"Here comes our 'Little table spread thee,'" she said, going to the rustic table, upon which the servant arranged decanters, wine-glasses, and fragrant fruit. "Come," said Julutta. "There are those who maintain that wine can conduct to the Island of the Blest." She handed him a sparkling glass and laughed. "Which only means that we are too sensible to be happy; for common sense must be thrown overboard before we can land upon my Island of the Blest."

Bernhard took the glass. "To the Island of the Blest!" he said, emptying it at a draught.

Julutta divided a fragrant peach with her snowy fingers, and offered half of it to Bernhard.

A dragon-fly hovered above the table, and settled for a moment upon the basket of fruit. "A greeting from the Island of the Blest!" Bernhard exclaimed.

But Julutta had suddenly grown grave and thoughtful. She brushed the dragon-fly away with her handkerchief, leaned her head upon her hand, and gazed at the little lake, that now looked gray and leaden.

"Of what are you thinking?" Bernhard asked.

"What folly I have been talking!" she said, hastily arising. "Come, let us go to the house. My husband will soon return, and we can receive him."

"Your husband? Oh, if Wronsky has gone to the circuit court at R---, he cannot be back again for two or three hours at least. It is so lovely here, why not stay?"

She looked at him almost angrily. "Why?" she repeated, and her eyes grew tender and yearning again. "Well, then let us stay," she added, in a low tone, and walked down to the water's edge.

Bernhard followed her. "You are strangely agitated to-day," he said, standing close beside her. "May I not, as your friend, know---?"

She seemed scarcely to hear him, but pointed towards the black canopy of clouds that hung above the forest on the other side of the water, and through which just then there shone a zigzag flash of flame.

"It is lightning!" she said.

He looked in her face; one might almost see the blood pulsing beneath the delicate transparent skin, and there was a gleam in her eyes akin to the lightning-flash in the clouds.

They stood thus silently side by side for some moments, until the servant had removed the fruit and wine and gone to the house.

"What is the matter?" Bernhard gently asked.

She shook her head, and a forced smile played about her mouth. "Nothing," she said; "nothing at all." But her eyes suddenly filled with tears.

"What, tears!" he exclaimed, in alarm. "You have a sorrow that you are hiding from me! Am I no longer worthy of your confidence? What have I done?"

"Nothing, nothing!" she said again. "You are the best, the noblest of men, and I--but I pray you, I entreat you, ask me nothing further!"

Bernhard's eyes fell before her, and he was silent. Every moment it grew darker around them; the evening shadows made the water show almost black, except that now and then the lurid glare of the lightning was reflected in its calm surface. The sultry breath of the storm, heavy with the fragrance of the pines and the perfume of roses, was wafted across forest and water. To

Bernhard it seemed stifling. He sighed heavily.

"I wish I had *never* returned from the ocean that night at Trouville," Julutta whispered; "then all suffering would be over, and I should be at peace!"

"Julutta!"

Again she shook her head sadly. "The waters have closed over our Island of the Blest forever," she whispered, scarce audibly.

But Bernhard heard and understood. He clasped her white hand in both his own, and she made no resistance. "Bernhard!" she breathed, as if carried away by the spell of the moment. And he, too, yielded to the spell.

"Julutta!" he cried, involuntarily opening his arms to her. But lithe and swift as some smooth serpent she glided past him. At the same instant a blast of wind ruffled the surface of the pond, and a few large drops of rain began to fall.

Through the rising tempest Julutta's laughing voice fell upon his ear: "The thunder-storm is upon us!" she called, and the next instant had vanished behind the rocks. At such a moment she could laugh and remember the storm! To him it seemed a matter of course that the tempest should come: the wind and storm suited his mood. He did not think of seeking shelter, but through the increasing hurly-burly the conviction flashed upon him, vivid as the glare of the lightning, "Your conduct and your love are alike disgraceful!"

He shuddered. Before him, among the tossing boughs and wind-swept bushes, fluttered a white robe,—Julutta was fleeing from the tempest. In an instant the flashing rain hid all around and before him in a gray twilight. He slowly took his way towards the house. Julutta had reached it long before he entered the hall, from the walls of which the portraits of Marzell's parents looked down upon him, strangely endowed with a ghostly life by the repeated flashes of lightning. The memory of his childhood was suddenly present as in a vision to Bernhard. He saw Marzell and himself on the knees of that kindly old man, he seemed to hear the gentle voice of Marzell's mother, and he passed his hand across his forehead with a sigh.

"I am a guest in Marzell Wronsky's house, and Julutta is his wife," he murmured, and again he shuddered. "Julutta is his wife," he repeated, and with sudden decision he turned and would have gone to order his carriage. What mattered the wind and storm? He must leave this house, and the sooner the better.

But at the door he encountered Marzell Wronsky himself, who had but just arrived, and whom the storm had overtaken at a short distance from his home. He shook himself like some wet dog, scolded at the weather, and would not hear of Bernhard's leaving Paniënka. He declared it to be simply impossible, and Bernhard himself could not now see why he should refuse to spend an hour with his friend and await the abating of the wind and rain. With a sigh of resignation, and feeling like some penitent who suffers patiently a just punishment, he consented to remain.

"I am delighted to have come just in time to catch you," said Wronsky. "Now we shall have a charming evening together. But where in the world is my wife?" Bernhard said that they had been overtaken in the garden by the rain, and that he supposed Frau von Wronsky had gone to change her dress.

"Then you must be wet, too!" exclaimed Marzell, feeling the sleeve of his friend's coat. "Of course, drenched to the skin! And you were going to drive home in this condition, as if there were no dry things to be had here! I am, to be sure, rather stouter than you, and not quite so tall, but that's no matter. Come with me to my dressing-room. What were you about, to think of driving two miles to Eichhof in your wet clothes! You ought to have known that my entire wardrobe is at your service."

Wronsky's self-importance was vastly increased by his belief that he had surprised his admired friend in a small piece of stupidity, and by the certainty that he could save him, if not from any great misfortune, at least from a cold in his head. He was so innocently officious, so indescribably amiable, that Bernhard endured torments at the remembrance of the scene at the pond in the park. He felt thoroughly ashamed of himself, and he hoped and believed that Julutta would find some pretext for refusing to join the gentlemen. Instead of which she soon made her appearance in a kind of *négligé*, which was both elegant and bewitching, and her air and manner were not at all what Bernhard had supposed they would be. Her eyes sparkled, her cheeks glowed, and she was evidently under the influence of a joyous excitement, which annoyed Bernhard, and which he could not comprehend. She was brilliant in her conversation, and while talking with her husband frequently looked towards Bernhard. In much that she said there was a double meaning which could be perceived by Bernhard alone, and this secret understanding which she seemed thus to establish between herself and Bernhard in the presence of her unconscious husband became each moment more and more painful to Count Eichhof.

At last the storm had passed, and he could order his carriage.

"I am glad you happened to come to-day," said Marzell, "for to-morrow I must go to my sister's again. You know that since her husband's death affairs are in terrible confusion over there, and I



have my hands full in settling matters. I shall have to be away for some time; perhaps you will find time to come over and see my wife. She will be very lonely. Eh, Julutta?"

"If it would not bore you, Count Eichhof." Her eyes had an arch sparkle in them, and there was a bewitching smile upon her lips, as, with one hand on her husband's shoulder, she extended the other to her guest, and said, with significant emphasis, "*Au revoir*."

Bernhard turned hurriedly away and got into his carriage. Wronsky had something to say to his inspector, and Julutta retired to her own room.

Here she walked to and fro for a few minutes in great agitation of mind. Then she seated herself at her writing-table, and drew forth the mute confidante of her thoughts and her life,—her diary. Her pen travelled swiftly over the paper. She wrote: "At last—at last my haughty Count is as wax in my hands, for I know now that he loves me. I could have trodden him in the dust at my feet to-day; but no, my triumph, my revenge, shall be prolonged! I will exult for a while longer in the consciousness that he loves me and suffers on my account. My heart throbs fast at the thought. I scarcely know sometimes whether it is hate or love with which he inspires me. Love? Can I love? No; the tempest of my life has left me no heart that can love. And yet I find a strange discord in my mind. There is no need to put a force upon myself to treat him with gentleness and affection. If this means love, I have used it to minister to my hatred, for it has helped me to acquire a mastery over him. Yes, I have gained this mastery, and I shall know how to use it. I will listen to the confession of his love from his own proud lips that I may spurn him from me with contempt. And have I not just cause to hate him thus? Did he not trample beneath his feet the last remnant of my better self,—my pride? My pride was still mine. It drove me to leave Herr von Möhâzy when I learned his treachery; it caused me to accept the hand of a country squire, but a man of honour, and thus to prove to myself and the world that I was not the outcast I was inclined to believe myself. And he—he, when I was more unfortunate than guilty, condemned me as utterly base, without even hearing me! Oh, I have suffered too deeply from this man's scorn ever to forget it! I resolved to requite him for this scorn. I would compel him to love me,—me, upon whom he looked down so proudly from the heights of his virtue; me, the wife of his friend. It was a bold scheme, but it has been successful. My meeting Möhâzy and the Count's interference was a tie established between us. Then, when Möhâzy left Berlin, I told my husband the story of my youth. I knew I could do it with safety, that his affection would find excuses for me. He did so, and I thus destroyed the only weapon which Bernhard Eichhof could turn against me. But will Wronsky find excuses for this man,—this model of a haughty, virtuous aristocrat, who, in spite of his virtue, loves the wife of his friend? All his pride, all his virtue, I now hold like some toy in my hand. If I choose, I can toss it at his feet; and I will so choose. He will come and help me to complete my retribution. I know what men are."

Meanwhile Bernhard's thoughts, like restless night-moths, hovered about the woman whose hatred he never suspected, and whose love had, perhaps unconsciously to himself, inspired some of his dreams. Now the veil had dropped from his eyes, and at his feet yawned an abyss that threatened to bury in its depths honour, self-respect, and friendship. And this woman's white hand would have beckoned him on!

He thought of her coquettish glances, of the double meaning in her words, and this after that one supreme moment which had betrayed to both that they were not indifferent to each other. If she had been a true woman and wife would she not have recoiled in horror from the memory of that moment? Instead of which there was an inconceivable gleam of triumph in her eyes; and even when her husband, in unsuspecting cordiality, was inviting his friend to his house, she had known no shame, but had whispered significantly, "*Au revoir*."

Bernhard's brow contracted, and a cold hand seemed to clutch his heart. "Oh, women, women!" he thought, and something akin to hatred stirred in his soul for Thea. Had she so looked, so smiled? He, to be sure, had made it all easier for her. He had not been by while she was coquetting with Lothar. His thoughts were unutterably bitter.

"I will not dwell upon the reason for those false smiles and glances to-day," he said to himself. "I will act the part of an honest man, and put an end to the whole affair. I did not know myself, and I will be upon my guard. Never talk to me again of friendship between man and woman."

Arrived at home, he looked over the letters that were awaiting him. Among them was one from Thea. He knew that it could bring him nothing for which his heart longed, but nevertheless he opened it instantly. She wrote briefly, almost in a business-like way, as was now her wont. She should be at Eichhof at the end of a week, to arrange some affairs that needed her presence there. The boy, she wrote, would certainly be quite well by that time. He had been often ailing of late, but the physician had assured her that there was nothing serious the matter.

Bernhard tossed the letter impatiently aside. "She writes as if her coming to Eichhof needed an excuse!" he exclaimed, irritably, and took up a large letter postmarked 'Berlin.'

He opened it hurriedly, as one opens a business letter, in haste to be done with a disagreeable task. He first merely glanced at it, but his attention was soon arrested. He stared at the paper as though he could not appreciate its contents. But there, plainly to be seen, were the inexorable characters that announced to him the failure of the great banking-house upon whose support the

railway scheme had chiefly depended. The prosecution of this scheme was simply an impossibility without the aid of this house; all the time and money hitherto expended upon it were of no avail, and Bernhard was personally a considerable loser by the failure. He saw the work of which he had thought to be so proud fall to pieces at one blow. Gone--gone; and yet perhaps something might still be done, some new plan adopted. At all events, his presence in Berlin was absolutely necessary. He had great influence there. He might effect something.

His self-respect, his confidence in his own strength of mind, had suffered a terrible blow with regard to Julutta. Could not something be done to restore these? If he could succeed in spite of all obstacles in putting new life into the ruined scheme, in securing the benefits it had promised to his part of the country, this would indeed be an achievement worthy of a struggle. And any struggle was welcome to him at present. He would cast aside all doubts and self-analysis and concentrate his thoughts upon one point. Yes, he would leave Eichhof by the earliest train on the morrow, and do his best to reanimate the lost enterprise.

In a short, courteous note he informed Frau von Wronsky that important business affairs called him for an indefinite time to Berlin, and that he must therefore ask her and her husband to excuse him if he did not appear at Paniënka during the next few weeks. "That is ended and done with," he said, as he sealed the envelope, before ordering every arrangement to be made for Thea's reception and his own departure.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### A SHORT CHAPTER, WITH A FAR GLANCE INTO THE FUTURE.

The Freiherr von Hohenstein sat on the veranda of his villa, puffing forth clouds of cigar-smoke, and looking down at his daughter, who stood at the bottom of the veranda steps surrounded by all sorts of animals. She had apparently just returned from riding, for a long dark-blue riding-habit clung closely to her pretty figure, and a high black hat, with a blue veil, sat jauntily upon her curling hair, which, loosened by her ride, was tumbling picturesquely over her shoulders. With one hand she was feeding her horse, that still stood beside her, with sugar, and with the other she was stroking a tame fawn that nestled close to her. A young Newfoundland, Fidèle's successor, was making clumsy efforts to attract her attention, and the sound of a shrill whistle, hardly permissible from such rosy lips, and yet not much out of keeping with Adela's general manner, brought the doves flying to her from all sides. Suddenly they fluttered away in terror: the dog began to bark angrily. Adela looked towards the garden-gate, and then, with a deep blush, ran up the veranda steps to say, "Papa, papa, it is Walter Eichhof!"

Yes, it was he; and as he offered Adela his hand, and she, still blushing crimson, cast down her eyes, both knew that neither was angry.

The Freiherr bade his guests welcome. He was now so convinced of his daughter's infallibility that he had not made the least objection when Adela had proposed to him to invite her old comrade to visit them, suggesting that Walter might conduct negotiations for the Freiherr with some Berlin publisher. Herr von Hohenstein was delighted with this idea, and, besides, he contemplated reading his work aloud to his guests; for although they knew nothing of the breeding of horses, yet they were two human beings who could sit still and listen, and more the author did not desire.

"I have a letter for you," Dr. Nordstedt said to Adela, after the first greetings were over. As soon as the girl received it she made it a pretext for slipping into the house, since, to her surprise, she seemed suddenly to have lost all her self-possession, and to be unable to take the satisfaction she had looked for in the visit she had so happily arranged.

She gave orders for the reception and comfort of her guests, and then retired to her own room, whence she could overlook the terrace in front of the house, and could hear Walter's voice through the open window. There she stood, looking out and listening, with her hands clasped over her beating heart.

"He has come! he has come!" she thought, exultantly. Then she opened Alma's letter to glance through it, but the first lines arrested her attention. What was it? These were strange tidings indeed! This grave Dr. Nordstedt, for whom Adela entertained an immense respect, loved Alma Rosen, and had asked her to be his wife. Alma wrote, "Can you believe, dearest Adela, that he loves me? I seem to myself so little and silly that it is incredible to me; but it must be true, for he says so, and it makes me so proud and happy that I could shout for joy. But, when I think of one who is gone, I no longer rejoice. And so I have begged Friedrich--you know his name is Friedrich--

-to be only my friend for the present, and I have told him why I ask this. And he--oh, he is the best and noblest man living!--he says he loves me the more for it, and will wait until I summon him. I have told him that you are my dearest friend, and that I should write all this to you, that you may not treat him like a stranger."

Adela stared at the sheet before her in absolute bewilderment. She was entirely unprepared for its contents, for she had been far too much occupied with Walter and herself when in Berlin to have had any time for observation of Dr. Nordstedt and Alma. "Alma Nordstedt, Frau Dr. Nordstedt," she whispered, shaking her head; "it sounds very odd!" She looked very thoughtful, but in an instant her face broke into smiles, and, alone as she was, she covered her face with her hands to hide her blushes.

When some hours later she was walking with her guests through the garden, she broke off an opening rosebud and offered it to Nordstedt. "Imagine it a greeting from Alma," she whispered, with a smile.

"I thank you," he replied, simply, pressing her offered hand.

Walter stood by. Adela looked up at him, half shyly, half archly, but there was no rose for him.

Later in the evening, while Nordstedt and the Freiherr were playing a game of chess, the other two were walking along the same garden-path and by the same rose-bush.

"You gave me no rose to-day," Walter said, pausing in their stroll.

"From whom did you desire a greeting?" she asked him, mockingly.

"No one sends me any, and I expect none. But I have brought you something that looks like a greeting from the past. Will you not receive it as such?"

He held out the ring to her, and told her how it had been found.

"My ring! How strange!" exclaimed Adela. But she did not take it. She dropped the hand she had extended towards it, and said, half turning away her head, "The ring does not belong to me. I gave it away."

"You know I cannot keep it?"

"But I wish you to keep it."

Walter was silent for a moment, and then said, gently, "Adela, do you remember all I told you then?"

She silently assented, and he went on: "My plans and views are nowise altered; on the contrary, I am more than ever devoted to the profession I have chosen."

She gave him a sidelong glance. "Yes, I know it," she said; "and in two years you are to pass your examination."

"Adela, can you tell me that and yet wish me to keep this ring?"

He took her hand, but she withdrew it from his clasp.

"Stay, Herr Doctor *in spe*; if I *do* refuse to take back the ring, there is no need for such conduct on your part as we remember on a former occasion."

"Dearest Adela, I entreat you not to trifle with me. This moment must decide our future, and if you deceive me now----"

"Good heavens, Walter! I am not deceiving you; I have grown older, and perhaps a little wiser, but for all that I am only sixteen years old, and you are still a student, and papa cannot spare me, and you must work very hard, and--no, stay where you are, please--what I wanted to say to you was that I thought it terrible that we should both go through the world so angry with each other, and I could not bear it, and so I begged papa to ask you here."

Whilst she spoke she had retreated step for step around the rose-bush as Walter advanced, so that both had now made its entire circuit. Again he tried to take her hand, but, lithe and swift as a fawn, she placed the entire bush between herself and her lover, and from her place of vantage went on: "Stand still there, and I will tell you something. There was a young officer in Berlin who wanted me to marry him----"

"Adela!"

"Hush! Yes, he wanted me to marry him, and I refused point-blank."

"Adela!"

"Stand still, Walter, or I will leave you. I told him that at present I would betroth myself to no one, but that when I was eighteen, if any one should woo me, I never would marry an officer or a

lawyer, for that I had decided if I ever married that it should be a doctor!"

And away she sped to the house, which she was entering just as Walter reached the foot of the veranda steps.

"Adela! dearest Adela!" he cried.

As he spoke, a fresh dewy rose was tossed into his face, and Adela vanished, with a laugh, inside the house.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### PER CRUCEM AD LUCEM.

Bernhard's exertions in Berlin were fruitless. The failure of the large banking firm had involved many other business firms. There had been heavy losses, and those who had not suffered shook their heads and kept their money safe in their pockets. The word 'railway' provoked a perfect panic, and confidence everywhere was greatly shaken. Upon a closer examination Bernhard's losses were found to be much greater than had been at first supposed. After conscientious consideration he could not but admit to himself that it was time for him to look after his own interests and relinquish, for the present at least, his efforts for the benefit of the country at large. So he returned to his home very much cast down, his confidence in his own ability greatly shaken, discontented with himself and with destiny.

At the station, which was about three miles from Eichhof, his carriage was awaiting him. He got into it with a sigh, and as it rolled through the monotonous pine forest he sat thinking how refreshing it would be to him to be affectionately welcomed to his home. He saw before him Thea as she had been a year before, when she had studied so hard for his sake, and the past lay before his mental vision like a lost Paradise. Why was it all so different now? why was there this shadow between himself and his wife, the shadow of a dead man, and yet palpable enough to separate them forever?

"She was pure as a lily when she came to me," he said to himself. "Could I not have shielded her from every possible danger? Did I not know Lothar? Did I not know that he was as thoughtless as he was susceptible? Why did I look so far abroad and shut my eyes to what was nearest me? I built castles in the air for the future, and lost the ground beneath my feet. But then--Thea was my wife, Lothar was my brother,--how could I think--- Oh, it is hard, fearfully hard!"

Monotonous as the road along which he was driving, his future life now lay before him, without one sunny, peaceful spot that promised repose. Suddenly he thought of his child, his son, of whom he had as yet seen so little. From his fair rosy boy a light seemed to issue and illumine the future pathway of the lonely man. He could devote himself to the care of his child, he could prepare for him a golden future. To be sure, he was himself still too young not to rebel against his fate, but nevertheless the thought of his boy consoled him. He roused himself from his gloomy reverie, and asked the coachman whether the Countess Thea and his child were at Eichhof. The old servant turned towards him, and his eyes seemed mutely to reproach his master as he replied, "Yes, Herr Count; Madame the Countess arrived at Eichhof yesterday."

"And the child is well?" Bernhard inquired.

The old man's face grew sad, but his eyes were not so reproachful; his master had not quite forgotten his wife and child. "Beg pardon, Herr Count," he said, "but the child is not well. They were both well when they arrived, but in the night----"

"Not well; what do you mean? The child is not seriously ill?"

"Beg pardon, Herr Count, but the child is very ill. Just before the despatch came from Berlin ordering the carriage, Madame the Countess telegraphed to the Herr Count----"

"And you have never told me until now?" Bernhard exclaimed.

The old man began once more with his "Beg pardon, Herr Count;" and added, "Madame the Countess thought that the Herr Count would have left Berlin before her despatch could reach him, and she was afraid that the Herr Count might be anxious, and so she told me to say nothing unless the Herr Count inquired. And I did just as Madame the Countess ordered."

"Drive on!" Bernhard cried, wrapping himself in his cloak. He looked at his watch; they were just crossing the forest near Paniënka; he could not reach home in less than an hour. And his child, for whom he had just been planning in his mind, was ill, dangerously ill, or Thea would not have telegraphed him.

"What are you about, Hadasch?" he suddenly exclaimed to the coachman. "Drive as fast as you possibly can----"

Instead of which the carriage stood still, and with his usual "Beg pardon, Herr Count," the coachman pointed to a very dashing and graceful horsewoman who had just appeared from a side-road, and who was the cause of the delay.

She reined in her steed beside the carriage, and Bernhard replied to the enchanting smile of the fair Amazon by a formal lifting of his hat.

"What a delightful encounter!" cried Frau von Wronsky, and her eyes were more eloquent than any words. "I hope your business matters are concluded, or rather I know they are, and that you have had much that was most annoying to endure."

"You know----" He was now standing in his barouche, with his hand upon the back of the seat, and her brilliant eyes were on a level with his own.

"Yes; I have heard it all in my letters from Berlin, and naturally I have sympathized with you from my heart. Your home must indemnify you, my dear Count, for all that you have suffered abroad." She leaned forward and looked him full in the face as she spoke. "I trust you will soon come to Paniënka, that we may discuss it all together."

"You are very kind, but I have just heard that my boy is very ill, and----"

"Oh, has your wife returned? Happy man! I am still alone; my husband is away for an indefinite time----"

Bernhard looked not at her, but at his horses pawing the ground impatiently, as he rejoined, "I am extremely anxious with regard to my boy; he seems to be dangerously ill."

She struck her glove impatiently with the silver butt of her riding-whip, and her dark brows lowered, but she controlled herself, and said, "If the sick-room should be too confining for you, I pray you to remember the rocks about the lake in the park at Paniënka. My remembrances to your charming wife. I hope soon to hear from you."

She inclined her head and reined in her horse for an instant longer, as though awaiting an answer.

"I certainly will send you word with regard to the child's condition," Bernhard said, gravely.

She galloped off, and he again ordered the coachman to drive as fast as possible.

The old man, however, who had listened with an impassive face to the conversation between his master and the charming Julutta, took the liberty of begging pardon once more, that he might inform Bernhard that Madame von Wronsky's groom had met him to-day, and had questioned him as to the exact hour of the Herr Count's arrival.

Bernhard's brow grew dark. His people then were aware, it seemed, of his 'friendship,' and watched him. And she, Julutta, had not disdained to learn what she wished concerning him through her groom. And she seemed also to have made inquiries about him in Berlin. And yet, in spite of all this interest, she had no comprehension of his anxiety concerning his child! The sentiment with which he now regarded this woman, for whose sake he had for an instant done violence to all that was best in him, was more like hate than love. When at last he reached Eichhof he sprang impatiently from the carriage.

"How is the child?" he asked of the footman who instantly appeared. The man shook his head. "The doctor is up-stairs, Herr Count; I am afraid he is no better."

Bernhard hurried to the sick-room and entered noiselessly. He saw Thea leaning back in an armchair, deadly pale, and the physician occupied with her. Beside the child's cradle two women knelt weeping. One glance at the little form lying there told Bernhard that he was too late, that all was over. For an instant he stood as though turned to stone. Then the doctor perceived him. The old friend of the family could scarcely speak to the young Count for a moment, but pressed his hand in silence.

"Is it all over?" Bernhard asked in a scarcely audible whisper, pointing to the child.

The physician assented. "Human means were of no avail. He died of convulsions."

"And my wife?"

"It is only a fainting-fit; but Countess Thea is terribly distressed."

Just then Thea opened her eyes, and, obeying his first impulse, Bernhard hurried to her side and clasped her in his arms. For an instant she allowed her head to rest upon his shoulder. Her whole frame was shaken by convulsive sobs. Then she gently disengaged herself, and sank on her knees beside the cradle, laying her head down upon the pillow.

Bernhard stood beside her, profoundly agitated. Perfect silence reigned in the room, which was broken at last by the physician's entreaty to Thea to remember how much she needed care, and how overwrought she was.

She shook her head, and begged to be left alone with the child.

"It is best to let her have her way," the doctor said.

Bernhard once more stooped over her. "Thea!" he whispered. She waved him off, and he left the room silently with the others. He saw that she was determined to allow him no share in her grief. "And yet this grief is the only, the last bond between us," he thought.

Through all these days Thea was so touching and yet so dignified in her sorrow, that Bernhard knew, as he had never known before, how truly she, and she alone, was the only woman whom he could ever love. In spite of her suffering she found time to attend to his lightest wish. He felt himself surrounded by her love, and yet he met with the same gentle but firm repulse whenever he sought to approach her. His sorrow for his child was scarcely more keen than his sorrow for the loss of his wife. For that he had lost her was now clearer to him than ever; and yet, strangely enough, he doubted more strongly every day whether the cause of this loss was what he had hitherto supposed it to be. When he saw her performing her duties so quietly, bearing her pain so proudly and yet with such true womanliness, it seemed to him impossible that she could ever have been other than proud and womanly. He began to scrutinize himself and his conduct towards her, and to have doubts whether the fault were not, after all, his own. But then he thought of Lothar's death, of her refusal to answer his question, and of the total change in her manner towards him from that time. Would she have agreed to the letter he had written her then, if she were not guilty? Would she not have eagerly sought an explanation with him had she been innocent, instead of mutely avoiding it as she had done?

This was the state of affairs when, a few days after the child's funeral, Thea entered his room. Since Lothar's death she had never done so, and Bernhard, therefore, received her with surprise, and almost with alarm; for he instantly saw by her face that the coming hour would be decisive for them both. She seated herself in the armchair he placed for her, and looked down at her hands, which were clasped in her lap. There was no ring upon them.

It went to Bernhard's heart to observe that she had laid aside her betrothal-ring, and yet he knew that so it must be.

He had not the courage to begin the conversation, and, after a pause, she said, in a low tone, "I am come to remind you of that letter,--of the letter in which you expressed your views of our relation to each other. Our child is dead----" Her voice was choked for an instant, but she went on: "There is nothing now to unite us. I propose going to Schönthal to-morrow."

He sat opposite her, his head leaning on his hand. "Can you not stay, then?" he asked, gently.

She rose proudly, her self-possession entirely recovered. "No," she cried, "I will not be endured out of pity!"

Bernhard rose in his turn, and looked her full in the face. "Pity?" he repeated. "What do you mean, Thea?"

"I mean that you are sorry for me, that you think it will be hard for me to leave the place where my child lies in his grave, the house in which he was born. But I have borne heavier griefs, and I can bear that too; and, although I know that your happiness does not depend alone upon *your* freedom, I am too proud to remain where I am only endured!"

He stared at her as if she were some phantom. "For God's sake, Thea, tell me what you mean," he cried.

The expression of his face bewildered her. She paused again for a moment.

Then he took her hand, and said, in a voice vibrating with emotion, "This is perhaps the last time that we shall stand thus face to face,--our last conversation. Thea, will you not answer truly and frankly one question?"

"I have always been true," she replied, gazing past him as into space.

"Tell me, then, do you believe the cause that separates us to exist in me? Do you believe that I desire our separation? and is there no reason *known only to yourself*, no memory in *your* soul, to keep us asunder?"

She covered her eyes with her hand, as if dazzled by a sudden light. A slight tremor passed through her frame, and a delicate flush coloured the pale, resigned face. Bernhard gazed at her

in breathless eagerness; but, even before she spoke, he was overpowered by the conviction that this woman could not be false; that he had been the victim of an illusion.

"I have no such memory," said Thea, helplessly dropping her clasped hands before her. "Nothing in this world except yourself could ever separate me from you. I thought----"

Before she could utter another word she was clasped in his arms. "Thea! my own Thea! what useless misery we have caused each other!"

She extricated herself in utter bewilderment from his embrace.

"And do you still love me, then?" she asked.

"More deeply and truly than on our marriage-day," he said, fervently.

"And Julutta Wronsky----"

"Ah, dearest child, let me tell you all. I will confess everything to you,--all the doubts that have so tortured me."

She looked at him in amazement. "Doubts?" she repeated.

"Yes, my darling; foolish doubts. I know them to be so now, but they were terrible. Do you remember refusing me any explanation with regard to Lothar? Then I----"

"Ah, poor Lothar! I, too, have something to tell you, Bernhard."

She nestled close to him, and he told her of his adventures with Julutta Wronsky. He did not even suppress the account of the fleeting emotion of that moment when he thought he loved her; he told her all; and she listened to him, without doubt, without reproach, with the entire confidence of a woman who loves.

"We have both been blind," she said; "but only when we doubted of each other's love did we learn how valueless life was to us without it. Oh, Bernhard, how wretched we have been!"

"And how blest we are once more,--each living in the other's heart!"

"Oh, why is our child not with us?" Thea cried.

He kissed the tears from her eyes. "He has been our guardian angel, my darling," he said. "He has reunited us; for who can say how long we should have been estranged from each other without this sorrow?"

Late in the afternoon of this day Thea carried a bunch of white roses to the little chapel; Bernhard was with her, and as they entered he took one of the fragrant rosebuds from her hand and laid it on Lothar's coffin.

"*Requiescat in pace*," he whispered softly.

Hand in hand they stood before their child's coffin, one in their sorrow, one in their love. The last rays of the setting sun streamed through the stained glass of the window and played upon the wreaths and palm branches, and when Bernhard and Thea left the chapel, forest and field lay before them bathed in the red gold of sunset, and they walked hand in hand through the nodding grasses and bright flowers of the little grave-yard towards a new life in the old home.

## **CONCLUSION.**

Years have flown by. A stock company has taken in hand the railway in which Bernhard was so much interested, and there is a station at R---, where the express-train from Warschau is just arriving.

A man with a dark sunburned face is leaning out of a coupé window, looking eagerly across the platform towards the town and the poplar avenue leading to Eichhof. Then he scans those who are leaving and those who are entering the train, and a shadow of melancholy clouds his brow.

"Strangers, all strangers!" he murmurs. "How changed it is! The same place, and yet so different; and no one here to recognize me."

Just then a gentleman with a full gray beard came hurriedly from the waiting-room. The signal for departure sounded, and the porter opened the coupé door in great haste, and the gray-bearded individual took his seat beside our traveller. The two men scanned each other for an instant, and then he of the sunburned face said, "If I am not mistaken, chance has led two old acquaintances into the same railway-carriage. Are you not Herr Superintendent Bergmann from Eichhof?"

"Most certainly; and I think I call to mind----"

"Ah!" laughed the stranger, "I see you do not know who I am. The sun on the Bulgarian battlefields has tanned me past recognition. Do you not remember Lieutenant Werner, Lothar Eichhof's comrade?"

"Ah! Lieutenant Werner, forgive me. But you are Colonel Werner now, I hear, with a breast covered with orders. The newspapers have kept us advised with regard to you. How much my Count will be interested to hear of this meeting! We have all rejoiced in your advancement."

Werner shook his head. "Advancements are for the most part the work of chance," he said; "but, in spite of some terrible experiences, these last years have been the most interesting of my life. I could write books, let me tell you; indeed, I will not promise not to write them. But let us leave the Turks and Russians, of whom I have latterly seen quite enough, and let me hear something of my old friends and acquaintances. First, how goes everything at Eichhof?"

The old man smiled. "Admirably; as it must, I think, where an honest man does his duty, and Count Bernhard is a fine fellow and does his duty well,--sometimes, we think, rather exceeds it. I always said, when people used to shake their heads at him, 'He is young; only wait, and you'll see he'll come all right.' And now he has come all right. Since he ceased to look abroad for a sphere of action, and made up his mind to do what lay nearest to him, he has enjoyed his work. You ought to pay us a visit and see how well everything goes on. His people would go through fire and water to serve him."

"And his wife? How is the Countess?"

"Oh, you ought to see her! She grows younger and prettier every year. One need only look in her eyes to see how happy she is, when she walks through fields and gardens on her husband's arm, with their two fine boys playing about them. And our youngest--the little Countess Thea--is a perfect rosebud. Yes, laugh,--I confess to a weakness for these children; they are like grandchildren to me. Have I not had Count Bernhard in my arms when he was no older than they?"

Werner gazed thoughtfully from the window. "Three children, have they? It is really strange to hear of such a happy household, with the thunder of trumpets and cannon scarcely out of one's ears. Well, perhaps I will come to Eichhof in the autumn. I should have liked to stop there to-day, but I have urgent business in Berlin."

"Why, then, you can hunt up the Count. He is there now."

"Ah! I had forgotten the Reichstag."

"No, he is no longer a member of the Reichstag. He has so much practical work to attend to that he has no time for theorizing, even politically; but he is there to attend a family festival,--the christening of the first boy of Walter Eichhof, our youngest."

"Ah! is he married?"

"Yes; to the love of his boyhood, the daughter of the old Freiherr von Hohenstein."

"Had he not some idea formerly of becoming a physician?"

"He is a physician, and a fine one, I can tell you. Our Count was in a terrible way about it at first, but Countess Thea insisted that the boy was right, and the brothers were reconciled when Walter was betrothed. He undertook the management of Dr. Nordstedt's large infirmary when Nordstedt was called to a professor's chair in Strasburg. You know, I suppose, that Fräulein Alma, our Countess's sister, is married to Professor Nordstedt?"

"I think I heard of that before I left Germany. I certainly must look up my old acquaintances. This vagabond life makes one a terrible stranger in his home."

The locomotive whistles, the next station is reached, and the superintendent takes his leave of Werner, who leans back in a corner of the coupé and falls into a reverie. The past rises before him like a dream. He sees Thea in memory the same, and yet so different. He can think of her now as of some lovely picture, which one admires and enjoys without coveting, and he can ponder upon the past without remorse.

"What a wonder life is!" he muses, as the train speeds on. "But it all amounts to the fact that if you would be happy--and who would not?--you must do what is right."



**THE END.**

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