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"O THOU, MY AUSTRIA!"

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

OF

OSSIP SCHUBIN

BY

MRS. A. L. WISTER

PHILADELPHIA
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"O THOU, MY AUSTRIA!"

CHAPTER I.

A MANUSCRIPT MISAPPROPRIATED.

"Krupitschka, is it going to rain?" Major von Leskjewitsch asked his servant, who had formerly been his corporal. The major was leaning out of a window of his pretty vine-wreathed country-seat, smoking a chibouque; Krupitschka, in the garden below, protected by a white apron, and provided with a dark-green champagne-bottle, was picking the Spanish flies from off the hawthorn-bushes. At his master's question, he looked up, gazed at a few clouds on the horizon, replied, "Don't know--maybe, and then again maybe not," and deftly entrapped three victims at once in the long neck of his bottle. A few days previous he had made a very satisfactory bargain with the apothecary of the neighbouring little town for Spanish flies.

"Ass! Have you just got back from the Delphic oracle?" the major exclaimed, angrily, turning away from the window.

At the words "Delphic oracle," Krupitschka pricked up his ears. It annoyed him to have his master and the other gentlemen make use of words that he did not understand, and he determined to buy a foreign dictionary with the proceeds of the sale of his cantharides. Meanwhile, he noted down, in a dilapidated memorandum-book, "delphin wrackle," muttering the while, "What sort of team is that, I wonder?"

Unable to extort any prognosis of the weather from Krupitschka, the major turned to the barometer; but that stood, as it had done uninterruptedly for the past fortnight, at 'Changeable.'

"Blockhead!" growled the major, shaking the barometer a little to rouse it from its lethargy; and then, seating himself at the grand piano, he thundered away at a piece of music familiar to all the country round as "The Major's Triumphal March." All the country round was likewise familiar with the date of the origin of this effective work,--the spring of 1866.

At that time the major had composed this march with the patriotic intention of dedicating it to the victorious General Benedek, but the melancholy events of the brief summer campaign left him no desire to do so, and the march was never published; nevertheless, the major played it himself now and then, to his own immense satisfaction and to the horror of his really musical wife.

This wife, a Northern German by birth, fair and dignified in appearance, sat rocking

comfortably in an American chair, reading the latest number of the *German Illustrated News*, while her husband amused himself at the piano.

The major banged away at the keys in a fury of enthusiasm, until a black poodle, which had crept under the piano in despair, howled piteously.

"Ah, Paul," sighed Frau von Leskjewitsch, letting her paper drop in her lap, "are you determined to make my piano atone for the loss of the battle of Königgratz?"

"Why do you have a foreign piano, then?" was the patriotic reply; and the major went on strumming.

"You make Mori wretched," his wife remarked; "that dog is really musical."

"A nervous mongrel--a genuine lapdog," the major muttered, contemptuously, without ceasing his performance.

"Your march is absolutely intolerable," Frau von Leskjewitsch said at last.

"But if it were only by Richard Wagner--" the major remarked, significantly: "of course you Wagnerites do not admit even the existence of any composer except your idol."

With this he left the piano, and, with his thumbs stuck into the armholes of his vest, began to pace the apartment to and fro.

There was quite space enough for him to do so, for the room was large and its furniture scanty. Nowhere was he in any danger of stumbling over a plush table loaded with bric-à-brac, or a dwarf arm-chair, or any other of the ornaments of a modern drawing-room.

The stock of curios in the house--and it was by no means inconsiderable, consisting of exquisite figures and groups of Louisburg, Meissen, and old Viennese porcelain, of seventeenth-century fans, and of thoroughly useless articles of ivory and silver--was all arranged in two antique glass cabinets, standing in such extremely dark corners that their contents could not be seen even at mid-day without a candle.

Baroness Leskjewitsch hated everything, as she was wont to express herself, that was useless, that gathered dust, and that was in the way.

In accordance with the severe style of the furniture, perfect order reigned everywhere, except that in an arm-chair lay an object in striking contrast to the rest of the apartment--a brown work-basket about as large as a common-sized portmanteau. It lay quite forlornly upon one side, like a sailing-vessel capsized by the wind.

The major paused, looked at the basket with an odd smile, and then could not resist the temptation to rummage in it a little.

His wife always maintained that he was something of a Paul Pry; and perhaps she was right.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, dragging to light a piece of embroidery upon Japanese canvas. "The first design for a cushion--the 17th is my birthday. What little red book is this?--'Maximes de La Rochefoucauld'--don't know him. And here--why, only look!" He pulled out a package tied with blue ribbon. "A manuscript! It seems that Zdena has leanings to authorship! H'm--h'm! When a girl like our Zdena takes to such ways, it is usually a sign that she feels impelled to confide in a roundabout way, to paper, something which nothing could induce her to confess frankly to any living being. H'm! I really am curious to know what goes on in that whimsical, childish brain.

"'My Memoirs!'" The major pulled aside the blue ribbon that held the package together. "A motto! Two mottoes!--a perfect *luxe* of mottoes!" he murmured, and then read out aloud,--

'Whether you marry or not, you will always repent it.'

PLATO.

Then comes,--

'Should you marry, then be sure
Life's sorest ills you must endure.'

LERMONTOW.

'L'amour, c'est le grand moteur de toutes les bêtises humaines.'

G. SAND.

I really should not have supposed that our Zdena had already pondered the marriage problem so deeply," he said, gleefully; then, contemplating with a smile the mass of wisdom scribbled in a bold, dashing handwriting, he added, "there seems to be more going on in that small brain than we had suspected. "What do you think, Rosel? may not Zdena possibly have a weakness for Harry?"

"Nonsense!" replied the Baroness. She was evidently somewhat annoyed,--first, because her husband had roused her from a pleasant nap, or, rather, disturbed her in the perusal of an article upon Grecian excavations, and secondly, because he had called her Rosel. Her real name was Rosamunda, a name of which she was very proud; she really could not, even after almost twenty years of married life, reconcile herself to her husband's thus robbing it of all its poetry. "Nonsense!" she exclaimed, with some temper. "I have a very different match in view for her."

"I did not ask you what you had in view for Zdena," the major observed, contemptuously. "I know that without asking. I only wish to know whether during your stay in Vienna you did not notice that Zdena had taken a liking to----"

"Oh, Zdena is far too sensible, and, if I am not greatly mistaken, also too ambitious, to dream of marrying Harry. She knows that Harry would ruin his prospects by a marriage with her," Frau von Leskjewitsch continued. "There's no living upon love and air alone."

"Nevertheless there are always some people who insist upon trying it, although the impossibility has long been demonstrated, both theoretically and practically," growled the major.

"And, aside from all that, Harry is not at all the husband for your niece," Frau Rosamunda went on, didactically. "She is wonderfully well developed intellectually, for her age. And he--well, he is a very good fellow, I have nothing to say against him, but----"

"A very good fellow! I should like to know where you could find me a better," cried the major. "In the first place, he is as handsome as a man can be----"

"As if beauty in a man were of any importance!" Frau von Leskjewitsch remarked, loftily.

Paying no attention to this interruption, the major went on reckoning up his favourite's advantages, in an angry crescendo. "He rides like a centaur!" he declared, loudly, and the comparison pleased him so much that he repeated it twice,--"yes, like a centaur; he passed his military examinations as if they had been mere play, and he is considered one of the most brilliant and talented officers in the army. He is a little quick-tempered, but he has the best heart in the world, and he has been in love with Zdena since he was a small boy; while she----"

"Let me advise you to lower your voice a little," said Frau Rosamunda, going to the window, which she partly closed.

"Stuff!" muttered her husband.

"As you please. If you like to make Zdena a subject for gossip, you are quite free to do so, only I would counsel you in that case to consult your crony Krupitschka. He has apparently not lost a single word of your harangue. I saw him from the window just now, staring up here, his mouth wide open, and the Spanish flies crawling out of his bottle and up his sleeves."

With which words and a glance of dignified displeasure, Frau Rosamunda left the room.

"H'm! perhaps I was wrong," thought the major: "women are keener in such matters than we men. 'Tis desirable I should be mistaken, but--I'd wager my gelding's forefoot,--no--" He shook his head, and contemplated the manuscript tied up with blue ribbon. "Let's see," he murmured, as he picked it up and carried it off to his smoking-room.

CHAPTER II.

THE CONTENTS OF THE MANUSCRIPT.

Major Paul Von Leskjewitsch, proprietor of the estates of Lausnitz and Zirkow in southwestern Bohemia, had been for twenty years on the retired list, and was a prosperous agriculturist. He had formerly been a very well-to-do officer, the most steady and trustworthy in the whole regiment, always in funds, and very seldom in scrapes.

In his youth he had often been a target for Cupid's arrows, a fact of which he himself was hardly aware.

"What an ass I was!" he was wont to exclaim to his cousin, Captain Jack Leskjewitsch, when on occasion the pair became confidential at midnight over a glass of good Bordeaux. The thought of his lost opportunities as a lover rather weighed upon the worthy dragoon.

In his regiment he had been very popular and had made many friends, but with none of them had he been so intimate as with his corporal Krupitschka. There was a rumour that before the major's wooing of his present wife, a Fräulein von Bösedow, from Pomerania, he had asked this famulus of his, "Eh, Krupitschka, what do you think? Shall we marry or not?"

Fortunately, this rumour had never reached the ears of the young lady, else she might have felt it her duty to reject the major, which would have been a pity.

In blissful ignorance, therefore, she accepted his proposal, after eight days of prudent reflection, and three months later Baron Leskjewitsch led her to the altar.

Of course he was utterly wretched during the prolonged wedding festivities, and at least very uncomfortable during the honey-moon, which, in accordance with the fashion of the day, he spent with his bride in railway-carriages, inns, churches, picture-galleries, and so forth. In truth, he was terribly bored, tided himself over the pauses which frequently occurred in his conversations with his bride by reading aloud from the guide-book, took cold in the Colosseum, and--breathed a sigh of relief when, after all the instructive experiences of their wedding-tour, he found himself comfortably established in his charming country-seat at Zirkow.

At present the Paul Leskjewitsches had long been known for a model couple in all the country round. Countess Zelenitz stoutly maintained that they were the least unhappy couple of her acquaintance,--that they were past-masters of their art; she meant the most difficult of all arts,--that of getting along with each other.

As every piece of music runs on in its own peculiar measure, one to a joyous three crotchets to the bar, another to a lyrically languishing and anon archly provocative six-quaver time, and so on, the married life of the Leskjewitsches was certainly set to a slow four crotchets to the bar,--or "common time," as it is called.

The husband, besides agriculture, and his deplorable piano performances, cultivated a certain hypochondriac habit of mind, scrutinized the colour of his tongue very frequently, and, although in spite of his utmost efforts he was quite unable to discover a flaw in his health, tried a new patent tonic every year.

The wife cultivated belles-lettres, devoted some time and attention to music, and regulated her domestic affairs with punctilious order and neatness.

The only fault Leskjewitsch had to find with her was that she was an ardent admirer of Wagner, and hence quite unable to appreciate his own talent as a composer; while she, for her part, objected to his intimacy with Krupitschka and with the stag-hounds. These, however, were mere bagatelles. The only real sore spot in this marriage was the luck of children.

The manner in which fate indemnified these two people by bestowing upon them a delightful companion in the person of a niece of the major's can best be learned from the young lady herself, in whose memoirs, with an utter disregard of the baseness of such conduct, the major has meanwhile become absorbed.

MY MEMOIRS.

I.

It rains--ah, how it rains! great drops following one another, and drenching the garden paths, splash--plash in all the puddles! Never a sunbeam to call forth a rainbow against the dark sky, never a gleam of light in the dull slaty gray. It seems as if the skies could never have done weeping over the monotony of existence--still the same--still the same!

I have tried everything by way of amusement. I curled Morl's hair with the curling-tongs. I played Chopin's mazurkas until my brain reeled. I even went up to the garret, where I knew no one could hear me, and, in the presence of an old wardrobe, where uncle's last uniform as a lieutenant was hanging, and of two rusty stove-pipes, I declaimed the famous monologue from the "Maid of Orleans."

"Oh, I could tear my hair with vexation!" as Valentine says. I read Faust a while ago,--since last spring I have been allowed to read all our classics,--and Faust interested me extremely,

especially the prologue in heaven, and the first monologue, and then the walk. Ah, what a wonderful thing that walk is! But the love-scenes did not please me. Gretchen is far too meek and humble to Faust. "Dear God! How ever is it such a man can think and know so much?"

My voice is very strong and full, and I think I have a remarkable talent for the stage. I have often thought of becoming an actress, for a change; to--yes, it must out--to have an opportunity at last to show myself to the world,--to be admired. Miss O'Donnel is always telling me I was made to be admired, and I believe she is right. But what good does that do me? I think out all kinds of things, but no one will listen to them, especially now that Miss O'Donnel has gone. She seemed to listen, at all events, and every now and then would declare, "Child, you are a wonder!" That pleased me. But she departed last Saturday, to pay a visit to her relatives in Italy. Her niece is being educated there for an opera-singer. Since she went there is no one in whom I can confide. To be sure, I love Uncle Paul and Aunt Rosamunda dearly,--much more dearly than Miss O'Donnel; but I cannot tell them whatever happens to come into my head. They would not understand, any more than they understand how a girl of my age can demand more of life than if she were fifty--but indeed---

Rain--rain still! Since I've nothing else to do, I'll begin to-day to write my memoirs!

That sounds presumptuous--the memoirs of a girl whose existence flows on between Zirkow and Komaritz. But, after all,--

"Where'er you grasp this human life of ours
In its full force, be sure 'twill interest;"

which means, so far as I can understand, that, if one has the courage to write down one's personal observations and recollections simply and truthfully, it is sure to be worth the trouble.

I will be perfectly frank; and why not?--since I write for myself alone.

But that's false reasoning; for how many men there are who feign to themselves for their own satisfaction, bribing their consciences with sophistry! My conscience, however, sleeps soundly without morphine; I really believe there is nothing for it to do at present. I can be frank because I have nothing to confess.

Every Easter, before confession, I rack my brains to scrape together a few sins of some consequence, and I can find nothing but unpunctuality at prayers, pertness, and too much desire for worldly frivolities.

Well! Now, to begin without further circumlocution. Most people begin their memoirs with the history of their grandparents, some with that of their great-grandparents, seeming to suppose that the higher they can climb in their genealogical tree the more it adds to their importance. I begin simply with the history of my parents.

My father and mother married for love; they never repented their marriage, and yet it was the ruin of both of them.

My father was well born; not so my mother. Born in Paris, the daughter of a needy petty official, she was glad to accept a position as saleswoman in one of the fashionable Paris shops. Poor, dear mamma! It makes me wretched to think of her, condemned to make up parcels and tie up bundles, to mount on stepladders, exposed to the impertinence of capricious customers, who always want just what is not to be had,--all in the stifling atmosphere of a shop, and for a mere daily pittance.

Nothing in the world vexes me so much as to have people begin to whisper before me, glancing at me compassionately as they nod their heads. My ears are very acute, and I know perfectly well that they are talking of my poor mother and pitying me because my father married a shop-girl. I feel actually boiling with rage. Young as I was when I lost her, she still lives in my memory as the loveliest creature I have ever met in my life.

Tall and very slender, but always graceful, perfectly natural in manner, with tiny hands and feet, and large, melancholy, startled eyes, in a delicate, old-world face, she looked like an elf who could not quite comprehend why she was condemned to carry in her breast so large a human heart, well-nigh breaking with tenderness and melancholy. I know I look like her, and I am proud of it. Whenever I am presented to one of my couple of hundred aunts whose acquaintance I am condemned to make, she is sure to exclaim, "How very like Fritz she is!--all Fritz!" And I never fail to rejoin, "Oh, no, I am like my mother; every one who knew her says I am like mamma."

And then my aunts' faces grow long, and they think me pert.

Although I was scarcely six years old when Uncle Paul took us away from Paris, I can remember distinctly my home there. It was in a steep street in Montmartre, very high up on the fourth or fifth floor of a huge lodging-house. The sunlight shone in long broad streaks into our

rooms through the high windows, outside of which extended an iron balcony. Our rooms were very pretty, very neat,--but very plain. Papa did not seem to belong to them; I don't know how I discovered this, but I found it out, little as I was. The ceilings looked low, when he rose from the rocking-chair, where he loved to sit, and stood at his full height. He always held his head gaily, high in the air, never bowing it humbly to suit his modest lodgings.

His circumstances, cramped for the time, as I learned later, by his imprudent marriage, contracted in spite of his father's disapproval, apparently struck him as a good joke, or, at the worst, as a passing annoyance. He always maintained the gay humour of a man of rank who, finding himself overtaken by a storm upon some party of pleasure, is obliged to take refuge in a wretched village inn.

Now and then he would stretch out his arms as if to measure the smallness of his house, and laugh. But mamma would cast down her large eyes sadly; then he would clasp her to his breast, kiss her, and call her the delight of his life; and I would creep out of the corner where I had been playing with my dolls, and pluck him by the sleeve, jealously desirous of my share of caresses.

In my recollection of my earliest childhood--a recollection without distinct outlines, and like some sweet, vague dream lingering in the most secret, cherished corner of my heart--everything is warm and bright; it is all light and love!

Papa is almost always with us in our sunny little nest. I see him still,--ah, how plainly!--leaning back in his rocking-chair, fair, with a rather haughty but yet kindly smile, his eyes sparkling with good-humoured raillery. He is smoking a cigarette, and reading the paper, apparently with nothing in the world to do but to enjoy life; all the light in the little room seems to come from him.

The first four years of my life blend together in my memory like one long summer day, without the smallest cloud in the blue skies above it.

I perfectly remember the moment in which my childish happiness was interrupted by the first disagreeable sensation. It was an emotion of dread. Until then I must have slept through all the hours of darkness, for, when once I suddenly awakened and found the light all gone, I was terrified at the blackness above and around me, and I screamed aloud. Then I noticed that mamma was kneeling, sobbing, beside my bed. Her sobs must have awakened me. She lighted a candle to soothe me, and told me a story. In the midst of my eager listening, I asked her, "Where is papa?"

She turned her head away, and said, "Out in the world!"

"Out in the world----" Whether or not it was the tone in which she pronounced the word "world," I cannot tell, but it has ever since had a strange sound for me,--a sound betokening something grand yet terrible.

Thus I made the discovery that there were nights, and that grown-up people could cry.

Soon afterwards it was winter; the nights grew longer, the days shorter, and it was never really bright in our home again,--the sunshine had vanished.

It was cold, and the trees in the gardens high up in Montmartre, where they took me to walk, grew bare and ugly.

Once, I remember, I asked my mother, "Mamma, will the trees never be green again?"

"Oh, yes, when the spring comes," she made answer.

"And then will it be bright here again?" I asked, anxiously.

To this she made no reply, but her eyes suddenly grew so sad that I climbed into her lap and kissed her upon both eyelids.

Papa was rarely with us now, and I was convinced that he had taken the sunshine away from our home.

When at long intervals he came to dine with us, there was as much preparation as if a stranger had been expected. Mamma busied herself in the kitchen, helping the cook, who was also my nurse-maid, to prepare the dinner. She laid the cloth herself, and decorated the table with flowers. To me everything looked magnificent: I was quite awe-stricken by the unwonted splendour.

One day a very beautiful lady paid us a visit, dressed in a velvet cloak trimmed with ermine--I did not know until some time afterwards the name of the fur--and a gray hat. I remember the hat distinctly, I was so delighted with the bird sitting on it. She expressed herself as charmed with everything in our home, stared about her through her eye-glass, overturned a small table and two footstools with her train, kissed me repeatedly, and begged mamma to come soon to see her. She was a cousin of papa's, a Countess Gatinsky,--the very one for whom, when she was a young girl and papa an elegant young attaché, he had been doing the honours of Paris on that eventful afternoon when, while she and her mother were busy and absorbed, shopping in the *Bon Marché*,

he had fallen desperately in love with my pale, beautiful mother.

When the Countess left us, mamma cried bitterly. I do not know whether she ever returned the visit, but it was never repeated, and I never saw the Countess again, save once in the Bois de Boulogne, where I was walking with my mother. She was sitting in an open barouche, and my father was beside her. Opposite them an old man sat crouched up, looking very discontented, and very cold, although the day was quite mild and he was wrapped up in furs.

They saw us in the distance; the Countess smiled and waved her hand; papa grew very red, and lifted his hat in a stiff, embarrassed way.

I remember wondering at his manner: what made him bow to us as if we were two strangers?

Mamma hurried me on, and we got into the first omnibus she could find. I stroked her hand or smoothed the folds of her gown all the way home, for I felt that she had been hurt, although I could not tell how.

The days grow sadder and darker, and yet the spring has come. Was there really no sunshine in that April and May, or is it so only in my memory?

Meanwhile, the trees have burst into leaf, and the first early cherries have decked our modest table. We have not seen papa for a long time. He is staying at a castle in the neighbourhood of Paris, but only for a few days.

It is a sultry afternoon in the beginning of June,--I learned the date of that wretched day later. The flowers in the balcony before our windows, scarlet carnations and fragrant mignonette, are drooping, because mamma has forgotten to water them, and mamma herself looks as weary as the flowers. Pale and miserable, she moves about the room with the air of one whom the first approach of some severe illness half paralyzes. Her pretty gown, a dark-blue silk with white spots, seems to hang upon her slender figure. She arranges the articles in the room here and there restlessly, and, noticing a soft silken scarf which papa sometimes wore knotted carelessly about his throat in the mornings, and which has been left hanging on the knob of a curtain, she picks it up, passes it slowly between her hands, and holds it against her cheek.

There!--is not that a carriage stopping before our door? I run out upon the balcony, but can see nothing of what is going on in the street below; our rooms are too high up. I can see, however, that the people who live opposite are hurrying to their windows, and that the passers-by stop in the street, and stand and talk together, gathering in a little knot. A strange bustling noise ascends the staircase; it comes up to our landing,--the heavy tread of men supporting some weighty burden.

Mamma stands spellbound for a moment, and then flings the door open and cries out. It is papa whom they are bringing up, deadly pale, covered with blankets, helpless as a child.

There had been an accident in an avenue not far from Bellefontaine, the castle which the Countess Gatinsky had hired for the summer. Papa had been riding with her,--riding a skittish, vicious horse, against which he had been warned. He had only laughed, however, declaring that he knew how to manage the brute. But he could not manage him. As I learned afterwards, the horse, after vainly trying to throw his rider, had reared, and rolled over backwards upon him. He was taken up senseless. When he recovered consciousness in Bellefontaine, whither they carried him, and the physician told him frankly that he was mortally hurt, he desired to be taken home,--to those whom he loved best in the world.

At first they would not accede to his wishes; Countess Gatinsky wanted to send for mamma and me,--to bring us to Bellefontaine. But he would not hear of it. He was told that to take him to Paris would be an injury to him in his present condition. Injury!--he laughed at the word. He wanted to die in the dear little nest in Paris, and it was a dying man's right to have his way.

I have never talked of this to any one, but I have thought very often of our sorrow, of the shadow that suddenly fell upon my childhood and extinguished all its sunshine.

And I have often heard people whispering together about it when they thought I was not listening. But I listened, listened involuntarily, as one does to words which one would afterwards give one's life not to have heard. And when the evil words stabbed me like a knife, it was a comfort to be able to say to myself, "It was merely the caprice of a moment,--his heart had no share in it;" it was a comfort to be able to say that mamma sat at his bedside and that he died with his hand in hers.

I do not remember how long the struggle lasted before death came, but I never can forget the moment when I was taken in to see him.

I can see the room now perfectly,--the bucket of ice upon which the afternoon sun glittered, the bloody bandages on the floor, the furniture in disorder, and, lying here and there, articles of dress which had not yet been put away. There, in the large bed, where the gay flowered curtains had been drawn back as far as possible to let in the air, lay papa. His cheeks were flushed and his

blue eyes sparkled, and when I went up to him he laughed. I could not believe that he was ill. Mamma sat at the head of the bed, dressed in her very prettiest gown, her wonderful hair loosened and hanging in all its silken softness about her shoulders. She, too, smiled; but her smile made me shiver.

Papa looked long and lovingly at me, and, taking my small hand in his, put it to his lips. Then he made the sign of the cross upon my forehead. I stood on tiptoe to kiss him, and I embraced him with all the fervour of my five years. Mamma drew me back. "You hurt him," she said. He laughed,--laughed as a brave man laughs at pain. He always laughed: I never saw him grave but once,--only once. Mamma burst into tears.

"Minette, Minette, do not be a coward. I want you to be beautiful always," said he. Those words I perfectly remember.

Yes, he wanted her to be beautiful to the last!

They sent me out of the room. As I turned at the door, I saw how papa stroked mamma's wonderful hair--slowly--lingeringly--with his slender white hand.

I sat in the kitchen all the long summer afternoon. At first our servant told me stories. Then she had to go out upon an errand; I stayed in the kitchen alone, sitting upon a wooden bench, staring before me, my doll, with which I did not care to play, lying upon the brick floor beside me. The copper saucepans on the wall gleam and glitter in the rays of the declining sun, and the bluebottle flies crawl and buzz about their shining surfaces.

A moaning monotonous sound, now low, then loud, comes from my father's room. I feel afraid, but I cannot stir: I am, as it were, rooted to my wooden bench. The hoarse noise grows more and more terrible.

Gradually twilight seems to fall from the ceiling and to rise from the floor; the copper vessels on the wall grow vague and indistinct; here and there a gleam of brilliancy pierces the gray gloom, then all is dissolved in darkness. In the distance a street-organ drones out Malbrough; I have hated the tune ever since. The moans grow louder. I lean my head forward upon my knees and stop my ears. What is that? One brief, piercing cry,--and all is still!

I creep on tiptoe to papa's room. The door is open. I can see mamma bending over him, kissing him, and lavishing caresses upon him: she is no longer afraid of hurting him.

That night a neighbour took me home with her, and when I came back, the next day, papa lay in his black coffin in a darkened room, and candles were burning all around him.

He seemed to me to have grown. And what dignity there was in his face! That was the only time I ever saw him look grave.

Mamma lifted me up that I might kiss him. Something cold seemed to touch my cheek, and suddenly I felt I--cannot describe the sensation--an intense dread,--the same terror, only ten times as great, as that which overcame me when I first wakened in the night and was aware of the darkness. Screaming, I extricated myself from mamma's arms, and ran out of the room.---

(Here the major stopped to brush away the tears before reading on.)

---For a while mamma tried to remain in Paris and earn our living by the embroidery in which she was so skilful; but, despite all her trying, she could not do it. The servant-girl was sent away, our rooms grew barer and barer, and more than once I went to bed crying with hunger.

In November, Uncle Paul came to see us, and took us back with him to Bohemia. I cannot recall the journey, but our arrival I remember distinctly,--the long drive from the station, along the muddy road, between low hedges, or tall, slim poplars; then through the forest, where the wind tossed about the dry fallen leaves, and a few crimson-tipped daisies still bloomed gaily by the roadside, braving the brown desolation about them; past curious far-stretching villages, their low huts but slightly elevated above the mud about them, their black thatched roofs green in spots with moss, their narrow windows gay with flowers behind the thick, dim panes; past huge manure-heaps, upon which large numbers of gay-coloured fowls were clucking and crowing, and past stagnant ditches where amber-coloured swine were wallowing contentedly.

The dogs rush excitedly out of the huts, to run barking after our carriage, while a mob of barefooted, snub-nosed children, their breath showing like smoke in the frosty air, come bustling out of school, and shout after us "Praised be Jesus Christ!"

A turn--we have driven into the castle court-yard; Krupitschka hastens to open the carriage door. At the top of the steps stands a tall lady in mourning, very majestic in appearance, with a kind face. I see mamma turn pale, shrink--then all is a blank.

II.

At the period when I again take up my reminiscences I am entirely at home at Zirkow, and almost as familiar with Uncle Paul and Aunt Rosa as if I had known them both all my life.

Winter has set in, and, ah, such a wonderful, beautiful winter,--so bright, and glittering with such quantities of pure white snow! I go sleighing with Uncle Paul; I make a snow man with Krupitschka,--a monk in a long robe, because the legs of the soldier we tried to make would not stand straight; and I help Krupitschka's wife to make bread in a large wooden bowl with iron hoops. How delicious is the odour of the fermenting dough, and how delightful it is to run about the long brick-paved corridors and passages, to have so much space and light and air! When one day Uncle Paul asks me, "Which is best, Paris or Zirkow?" I answer, without hesitation, "Zirkow!"

Uncle Paul laughs contentedly, but mamma looks at me sadly. I feel that I have grieved her.

Now and then I think of papa, especially before I go to sleep at night. Then I sometimes wonder if the snow is deep on his grave in the churchyard at Montmartre, and if he is not cold in the ground. Poor papa!--he loved the sun so dearly! And I look over at mamma, who sits and sews at a table near my bed, and it worries me to see the tears rolling down her cheeks again.

Poor mamma! She grows paler, thinner, and sadder every day, although my uncle and aunt do everything that they can for her.

If I remember rightly, she was seldom with her hosts except at meal-times. She lived in strict retirement, in the two pretty rooms which had been assigned us, and was always trying to make herself useful with her needle to Aunt Rosa, who never tired of admiring her beautiful, delicate work.

Towards spring her hands were more than ever wont to drop idly in her lap, and when the snow had gone and everything outside was beginning to stir, she would sit for hours in the bow-window where her work-table stood, doing nothing, only gazing out towards the west,--gazing--gazing.

The soiled snow had vanished; the water was dripping from roofs and trees; everything was brown and bare. A warm breath came sweeping over the world. For a couple of days all nature sobbed and thrilled, and then spring threw over the earth her fragrant robe of blossoms.

It was my first spring in the country, and I never shall forget my joyful surprise each morning at all that had been wrought overnight. I could not tell which to admire most, buds, flowers, or butterflies. From morning till night I roamed about in the balmy air, amid the tender green of grass and shrubs. And at night I was so tired that I was asleep almost before the last words of my childish prayer had died upon my lips. Ah, how soundly I slept!

But one night I suddenly waked, with what seemed to me the touch of a soft hand upon my cheek,--papa's hand. I started up and looked about me; there was no one to be seen. The breeze of spring had caressed me,--that was all. How had it found its way in?

The moon was at the full, and in its white light everything in the room stood revealed and yet veiled. I sat up uneasily, and then noticed that mamma's bed was empty. I was frightened. "Mamma! mamma!" I called, half crying.

There was no reply. I sprang from my little bed, and ran into the next room, the door of which was open.

Mamma was standing there at the window, gazing out towards the west. The window was wide open; our rooms were at the back of the castle, and looked out upon the orchard, where nature was celebrating its resurrection with festal splendour. The huge old apple-trees were all robed in delicate pink-white blossoms, the tender grass beneath them glittered with dew, and above it and among the waving blossoms sighed the warm breeze of spring as if from human lips. Mamma stood with extended arms whispering the tenderest words out into the night,--words that sounded as if stifled among sighs and kisses. She wore the same dress in which she had sat by papa's bedside when he wished her to be beautiful at their parting. Her hair hung loose about her shoulders. I gasped for breath, and threw my arms about her, crying, "Mamma! mamma!" She turned, and seemed about to thrust me from her almost angrily, then suddenly began to weep bitterly like a child just wakened from sleep, and crept back gently and ashamed to our bedroom. Without undressing she lay down on her bed, and I covered her up as well as I could.

I could not sleep that night, and I heard her moan and move restlessly.

The next morning she could not come down to breakfast; a violent nervous fever had attacked her, and ten days afterwards she died.

They broke the sad truth to me slowly, first saying that she had gone on a journey, and then that she was with God in heaven. I knew she was dead,--and what that meant.

I can but dimly remember the days that followed her death. I dragged myself about beneath the burden of a grief far too great for my poor, childish little heart, and grew more and more

weary, until at last I was attacked by the same illness of which my mother had died.

When I recovered, the memory of all that had happened before my illness no longer gave me any pain. I looked back upon the past with what was almost indifference. Not until long, long afterwards did I comprehend the wealth of love of which my mother's death had deprived me.

III.

It really is very entertaining to write one's memoirs. I will go on, although it is not raining to-day. On the contrary, it is very warm,--so warm that I cannot stay out of doors.

Aunt Rosamunda is in the drawing-room, entertaining the colonel of the infantry regiment in garrison at X---. She sent for me, but I excused myself, through Krupitschka. When lieutenants of hussars come, she never sends for me. It really is ridiculous: does she suppose my head could be turned by any officer of hussars? The idea! Upon my word! Still, I should like for once just to try whether Miss O'Donnel is right, whether I only need wish to have--oh, how delightful it would be to be adored to my heart's content! Since, however, there is no prospect of anything of the kind, I will continue to write my memoirs.

I have taken off my gown and slipped on a thin white morning wrapper, and the cook, with whom I am a great favourite, has sent me up a pitcher of iced lemonade to strengthen me for my literary labours. My windows are open, and look out upon a wilderness of old trees with wild roses blooming among them. Ah, how sweet the roses are! The bees buzz over them monotonously, the leaves scarcely rustle, not a bird is singing. The world certainly is very beautiful, even if one has nothing entertaining to do except to write memoirs. Now that I have finished telling of my parents, I will pass on to my nearest relatives.----

("Oho!" said the major. "I am curious to see what she has to say of us.")

----Uncle Paul is the middle one of three brothers, the eldest of whom is my grandfather.

The Barons von Leskjewitsch are of Croatian descent, and are convinced of the antiquity of their family, without being able to prove it. There has never been any obstacle to their being received at court, and for many generations they have maintained a blameless propriety of demeanour and have contracted very suitable marriages.

Although all the members of this illustrious family are forever quarrelling among themselves, and no one Leskjewitsch has ever been known to get along well with another Leskjewitsch, they nevertheless have a deal of family feeling, which manifests itself especially in a touching pride in all the peculiarities of the Leskjewitsch temperament. These peculiarities are notorious throughout the kingdom,--such, at least, is the firm conviction of the Leskjewitsch family. Whatever extraordinary feats the Leskjewitsches may have performed hitherto, they have never been guilty of any important departure from an ordinary mode of life, but each member of the family has nevertheless succeeded in being endowed from the cradle with a patent of eccentricity, in virtue of which mankind are more or less constrained to accept his or her eccentricities as a matter of course.

I am shocked now by what I have here written down. Of course I am a Leskjewitsch, or I never should allow myself to pass so harsh a judgment upon my nearest of kin. I suppose I ought to erase those lines, but, after all, no one will ever see them, and there is something pleasing in my bold delineation of the family characteristics. The style seems to me quite striking. So I will let my words stand as they are,--especially since the only one of the family who has ever been kind to me--Uncle Paul--is, according to the universal family verdict, no genuine Leskjewitsch, but a degenerate scion. In the first place, his hair and complexion are fair, and, in the second place, he is sensible. Among men in general, I believe he passes for mildly eccentric; his own family find him distressingly like other people.

To which of the two other brothers the prize for special originality is due, to the oldest or to the youngest,--to my grandfather or to the father of my playmate Harry,--the world finds it impossible to decide. Both are widowers, both are given over to a craze for travel. My grandfather's love of travel, however, reminds one of the restlessness of a white mouse turning the wheel in its cage; while my uncle Karl's is like that of the Wandering Jew, for whose restless soul this globe is too narrow.

My grandfather is continually travelling from one to another of his estates, seldom varying the round; Uncle Karl by turns hunts lions in the Soudan and walruses at the North Pole; and in their other eccentricities the brothers are very different. My grandfather is a cynic; Uncle Karl is a sentimentalist. My grandfather starts from the principle that all effort which has any end in view, save the satisfying of his excellent appetite and the promotion of his sound sleep, is nonsense; Uncle Karl intends to write a work which, if rightly appreciated, will entirely reform the spirit of

the age. My grandfather is a miser; Uncle Karl is a spendthrift. Uncle Karl is beginning to see the bottom of his purse; my grandfather is enormously rich.

When I add that my grandfather is a conservative with a manner which is intentionally rude, and that Uncle Karl is a radical with the bearing of a courtier, I consider the picture of the two men tolerably complete. All that is left to say is that I know my uncle Karl only slightly, and my grandfather not at all, wherefore my descriptions must, unfortunately, lack the element of personal observation, being drawn almost entirely from hearsay.

My grandfather's cynicism could not always have been so pronounced as at present; they say he was not naturally avaricious, but that he became so in behalf of my father, his only son. He saved and pinched for him, laying by thousands upon thousands, buying estate after estate only to assure his favourite a position for which a prince might envy him.

Finally he procured him an appointment as attaché in the Austrian Legation in Paris, and when papa spent double his allowance the old man only laughed and said, "Youth must have its swing." But when my father married a poor girl of the middle class, my grandfather simply banished him from his heart, and would have nothing more to do with him.

After this papa slowly consumed the small property he had inherited from his mother, and at his death nothing of it was left.

Uncle Paul was the only one of the family who still clung to my father after his *mésalliance*,--the one eccentricity which had never been set down in the Leskjewitsch programme. When mamma in utter destitution applied to him for help, he went to my grandfather, told him of the desperate extremity to which she was reduced, and entreated him to do something for her and for me. My grandfather merely replied that he did not support vagabonds.

My cousin Heda, whose custom it is to tell every one of everything disagreeable she hears said about them,--for conscience' sake, that they may know whom to mistrust,--furnished me with these details.

The upshot of the interview was, first, that my uncle Paul quarrelled seriously with my grandfather, and, second, that he resolved to go to Paris forthwith and see that matters were set right.

Aunt Rosa maintains that at the last moment he asked Krupitschka to sanction his decision. This is a malicious invention; but when Heda declares that he brought us to Bohemia chiefly with the view of disgracing and vexing my grandfather, there may be some grain of truth in her assertion.

Many years have passed since our modest entrance here in Zirkow, but my amiable grandfather still maintains his determined hostility towards Uncle Paul and myself.

His favourite occupation seems to consist in perfecting each year, with the help of a clever lawyer, his will, by which I am deprived, so far as is possible, of the small share of his wealth which falls to me legally as my father's heir. He has chosen for his sole heir his youngest brother's eldest son, my playmate Harry, upon condition that Harry marries suitably, which means a girl with sixteen quarterings. I have no quarterings, so if Harry marries me he will not have a penny.

How could such an idea occur to him? It is too ridiculous to be thought of. But--what if he did take it into his head? Oh, I have sound sense enough for two, and I know exactly what I want,--a grand position, an opportunity to play in the world the part for which I feel myself capable,--everything, in short, that he could not offer me. Moreover, I am quite indifferent to him. I have a certain regard for him for the sake of old times, and therefore he shall have a chapter of these memoirs all to himself.

---At the end of this chapter the major shook his head disapprovingly.

IV.

MY DEAREST PLAYMATE.

The first time that I saw him he was riding upon a pig,--a wonder of a pig; it looked like a huge monster to me,--which he guided by its ears. One is not a Leskjewitsch for nothing. It was at Komaritz--- But I will describe the entire day, which I remember with extraordinary distinctness.

Uncle Paul himself took me to Komaritz in his pretty little dog-cart, drawn by a pair of spirited

ponies in gay harness and trappings. Of course I sat on the box beside my uncle, being quite aware that this was the seat of honour. I wore an embroidered white gown, long black stockings, and a black sash, and carried a parasol which I had borrowed of Aunt Rosa, not because I needed it,--my straw hat perfectly shielded my face from the sun,--but because it seemed to me required for the perfection of my toilet.

I was very well pleased with myself, and nodded with great condescension to the labourers and schoolchildren whom we met.

I have never attempted to conceal from myself or to deny the fact that I am vain.

Ah, how merrily we bowled along over the white, dusty road! The ponies' hoofs hardly touched the ground. After a while the road grew bad, and we drove more slowly. Then we turned into a rough path between high banks. What a road! Deep as a chasm; the wheels of the vehicle jolted right and left through ruts overgrown with thistles, brambles, and wild roses.

"Suppose we should meet another carriage?" I asked my uncle, anxiously.

"Just what I was asking myself," he replied, composedly; "there is really no room for passing. But why not trust in Providence?"

The road grows worse, but now, instead of passing through a chasm, it runs along the edge of a precipice. The dog-cart leans so far to one side that the groom gets out to steady it. The wheels grate against the stones, and the ponies shake their shaggy heads discontentedly, as much as to say, "We were not made for such work as this."

In after-years, when so bad a road in the midst of one of the most civilized provinces of Austria seemed to me inexplicable, Uncle Paul explained it to me. At one time in his remembrance the authorities decided to lay out a fine road there, but Uncle Karl contrived to frustrate their purpose; he did not wish to have Komaritz too accessible--for fear of guests.

A delicious pungent fragrance is wafted from the vine-leaves in the vineyards on the sides of the hills, flocks of white and yellow butterflies hover above them, the grasshoppers chirp shrilly, and from the distance comes the monotonous sound of the sweep of the mower's scythe. The sun is burning hot, and the shadows are short and coal-black.

Click-clack--click-clack--precipice and ravine lie behind us, and we are careering along a delightful road shaded by huge walnut-trees.

A brown, shapeless ruin crowning a vine-clad eminence rises before us. Click-clack--click-clack--the ponies fly past a marble St. John, around which are grouped three giant lindens, whose branches scatter fading blossoms upon us; past a smithy, from which issues a strong odour of wagon-grease and burnt hoofs; past a slaughter-house, in front of which a butchered ox is hanging from a chestnut-tree; past pretty whitewashed cottages, some of them two stories high and with flower-gardens in front,--Komaritz is a far more important and prosperous village than Zirkow; then through a lofty but perilously ruinous archway into a spacious, steeply-ascending court-yard, through the entire length of which runs a broad gutter. Yes, yes, it was there--in that court-yard--that I saw him for the first time, and he was riding upon a pig, holding fast by its ears, and the animal, galloping furiously, was doing its best to throw him off. But this was no easy matter, for he sat as if he were part of his steed, and withal maintained a loftiness of bearing that would have done honour to a Spanish grandee at a coronation. He was very handsome, very slender, very brown, and wore a white suit, the right sleeve of which was spotted with ink.

In front of the castle, at a wooden table fastened to the ground beneath an old pear-tree, sat a yellow-haired young man, with a bloated face and fat hands, watching the spectacle calmly and drinking beer from a stone mug with a leaden cover.

When the pig found that it could not throw its rider, it essayed another means to be rid of him. It lay down in the gutter and rolled over in the mud. When Harry arose, he looked like the bad boys in "Slovenly Peter" after they had been dipped in the inkstand.

"I told you how it would be," the fat young man observed, phlegmatically, and went on drinking beer. As I afterwards learned, he was Harry's tutor, Herr Pontius.

"What does it matter?" said Harry, composedly, looking down at the mud dripping from him, as if such a bath were an event of every-day occurrence; "I did what I chose to do."

"And now I shall do what I choose to do. You will go to your room and translate fifty lines of Horace."

Harry shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. I now think that he was posing a little for our sakes, for we had just driven up to the castle, but then his composure made a great impression upon me. After he had bowed respectfully to Uncle Paul from where he stood, he vanished behind a side-door of the castle, at the chief entrance of which we had drawn up. A dignified footman received us in the hall, and a crowd of little black dachshunds, with yellow feet and eyebrows, barked a loud welcome.

We were conducted into a large room on the ground-floor,--apparently reception-room, dining-room, and living-room all in one,--whence a low flight of wooden steps led out into the garden. A very sallow but otherwise quite pretty Frenchwoman, who reminded me--I cannot tell why--of the black dachshunds, and who proved to be my little cousin's governess, received us here and did the honours for us.

My cousin Heda, a yellow-haired little girl with portentously good manners, relieved me of my parasol, and asked me if I had not found the drive very warm. Whilst I made some monosyllabic and confused reply, I was wondering whether her brother would get through his punishment and make his appearance again before we left. When my uncle withdrew on the pretext of looking after some agricultural matter, Heda asked me if I would not play graces with her. She called it *jeu de grâce*, and, in fact, spoke French whenever it was possible.

I agreed, she brought the graces, and we went out into the garden.

Oh, that Komaritz garden! How clumsy and ugly, and yet what a dear, old-fashioned garden it was! Lying at the foot of the hill crowned by the ancient ruin and the small frame house built for the tutors,--who were changed about every two months,--it was divided into huge rectangular flower-beds, bordered with sage, lavender, or box, from which mighty old apricot-trees looked down upon a luxuriant wilderness of lilies, roses, blue monk's-hood, scarlet verbenas, and whatever else was in season. Back of this waste of flowers there were all sorts of shrubs,--hawthorns, laburnums, jessamines, with here and there an ancient hundred-leaved rose-bush, whose heavy blossoms, borne down by their own weight, drooped and lay upon the mossy paths that intersected this thicket. Then came a green lawn, where was a swing hung between two old chestnuts, and near by stood a queer old summerhouse, circular, with a lofty tiled roof, upon the peak of which gleamed a battered brass crescent. Everywhere in the shade were fastened in the ground comfortable garden-seats, smelling deliciously of moss and mouldering wood, and where you least expected it the ground sloped to a little bubbling spring, its banks clothed with velvet verdure and gay with marsh daisies and spiderwort, sprung from seed which the wind had wafted hither. I cannot begin to tell of the kitchen-garden and orchard; I should never be done.

And just as I have here described it as it was fourteen years ago the dear old garden stands today, with the exception of some trifling changes; but--they are talking of improvements--poor garden! What memories are evoked when I think of it!

Again I am six years old and playing with Heda,--I intent and awkward, Heda elegantly indifferent. If one of her hoops soars away over my head, or falls among the flowers in one of the beds, she shrugs her shoulders with an affected smile, and exclaims, "*Monstre!*" At first I offer to creep in among the flowers after the lost hoop, but she rejects my offer with a superior "*Quelle idée!*" and assures me that it is the gardener's business.

Consequently, we soon come to the end of our supply of hoops, and are obliged to have recourse to some other mode of amusing ourselves.

"I am quite out of breath," says Heda, fanning herself with her pocket-handkerchief. "'Tis a stupid don't you think so?"

"But if I only could do it!" I sigh.

"It is quite out of fashion; nothing is played now but croquet," she informs me. "Do you like to play croquet?"

"I do not know what croquet is," I confess, much mortified.

"Ha, ha!" she laughs. "Mademoiselle," turning to the governess, who is now seated on the garden-steps, "only think, *ma petite cousine* does not know what croquet is!--delicious! Excuse me," taking my hand, "it is very ill bred to laugh, *mais c'est plus fort que moi*. It is a delightful game, that is played with balls and iron hoops. Sometimes you strike your foot, and that hurts; but more often you only pretend that it does, and then the gentlemen all come round you and pity you: it is too delightful. But sit down," pointing with self-satisfied condescension to the steps. We both sit down, and she goes on: "Where did you pass the winter?"

"At Zirkow."

"Oh, in the country! I pity you."

Heda--I mention this in a parenthesis--was at this time scarcely ten years old. "No winter in the country for me," this pleasure-loving young person continues. "Oh, what a delightful winter I had! I was at twelve balls. It is charming if you have partners enough--oh, when three gentlemen beg for a waltz! But society in Prague is nothing to that of Vienna--I always say there is only one Vienna. Were you ever in Vienna?"

"No," I murmur. Suddenly, however, my humiliated self-consciousness rebels, and, setting my arms akimbo, I ask, "And were you ever in Paris?" The Frenchwoman behind us laughs.

Down from above us falls a hard projectile upon Heda's fair head,--a large purple bean,--and then another. She looks up angrily. Harry is leaning out of a window above us, his elbows resting

on the sill, and his head between his hands. "What an ill-bred boor you are!" she calls out.

"And do you know what you are?" he shouts; "an affected braggart--that's what you are."

With which he jumps from the window into the branches of a tree just before it, and comes scrambling down to the ground. "What is your name?" he asks me.

"Zdena."

"I am happy to make your acquaintance, Zdena. Heda bores you, doesn't she?"

I shake my head and laugh; feeling a protector near me, I am quite merry once more. "Would you like to take a little ride, Zdena?" he asks.

"Upon a pig?" I inquire, in some trepidation.

He laughs, somewhat embarrassed, and shrugs his shoulders. "You do not really suppose that I am in the habit of riding pigs!" he exclaims; "I only do it when my tutor forbids it--it is too ridiculous to suppose such a thing!" and he hurries away.

I look after him remorsefully. I am vexed to have been so foolish, and I am sorry to have frightened him away.

In a few minutes, however, he appears again, and this time on horseback. He is riding a beautiful pony, chestnut, with a rather dandified long tail and a bushy mane. Harry has a splendid seat, and is quite aware of it. Apparently he is desirous of producing an impression upon me, for he performs various astounding feats,--jumps through the swing, over a garden-seat and a wheelbarrow,--and then, patting his horse encouragingly on the neck, approaches me, his bridle over his arm.

"Will you try now?" he asks.

Of course I will. He lifts me into the saddle, where I sit sideways, buckles the stirrup shorter, quite like a grown-up admirer; and then I ride slowly and solemnly through the garden, he carefully holding me on the while. I become conscious of a wish to distinguish myself in his eyes. "I should like to try it alone," I stammer, in some confusion.

"I see you are brave; I like that," he says, resigning the bridle to me. Trot, trot goes the pony. "Faster, faster!" I cry, giving the animal a dig with my heel. The pony rears, and--I am lying on the ground, with scraped hands and a scratched chin.

"It is nothing," I cry, bravely ignoring my pain, when Harry hurries up to me with a dismayed face. "We must expect such things," I add, with dignity. "Riding is always dangerous; my father was killed by being thrown from his horse."

"Indeed? Really?" Harry says, sympathetically, as he wipes the gravel off my hands. "How long has he been dead?"

"Oh, a long time,--a year."

"My mother has been dead much longer," he says, importantly, almost boastfully. "She has been dead three years. And is yours still living?"

"N--no." And the tears, hitherto so bravely restrained, come in a torrent.

He is frightened, kneels down beside me, even then he was much taller than I,--and wipes away the tears with his pocket-handkerchief. "Poor little thing!" he murmurs, "I am so sorry for you; I did not know----" And he puts his arm round me and strokes my hair. Suddenly a delightful and strange sensation possesses me,--a feeling I have not had since my poor dear mother gave me her last kiss: my whole childish being is penetrated by it.

We have been fond of each other ever since that moment; we are so to-day.

"Come with me to the kitchen-garden now," he says, "and see my puppies." And he calls to the gardener and commits to his charge the pony, that, quite content with the success of his manœuvre, is quietly cropping the verbena-blossoms.

My tears are dried. I am crouching beside the kennel in the kitchen-garden, with four charming little puppies in my lap. There is a fragrance of cucumber-leaves, sorrel, and thyme all about. The bright sunshine gleams on the dusty glass of the hot-bed, on the pumpkins and cucumbers, on the water in the tub under the pump, beside which a weeping willow parades its proverbial melancholy. Harry's fair, fat tutor is walking past a trellis where the early peaches are hanging, smoking a long porcelain pipe. He pauses and pinches the fruit here and there, as if to discover when it will be ripe. I hold one after another of the silken, warm dog-babies to my cheek, and am happy, while Harry laughs good-humouredly at my enthusiasm and prevents the jealous mother of the puppies from snapping at me.

----"We have been fond of each other ever since." The major smiles contentedly as he reads this.

V.

KOMARITZ.

I was soon at home at Komaritz, often passed weeks there, feeling extremely comfortable amid those strange surroundings,--for the life led in the clumsy, unadorned old house upon which the mediæval castle looked down was certainly a strange one.

In fact, the modern structure was no whit superior to the castle except in the matter of ugliness and in the fact that it possessed a roof. Otherwise it was almost as ruinous as the ruin, and had to be propped up in a fresh place every year. The long passages were paved with worn tiles; the ground-floor was connected with the upper stories by a steep winding staircase. The locks on the doors were either broken or the keys were lost, and the clocks, if they went at all, all pointed to different hours.

In a large room called the drawing-room, where the plaster was crumbling down from the ceiling bit by bit, there stood, among three-legged tables and threadbare arm-chairs, many an exquisite antique. In the rooms in use, on the other hand, there was no article of mere luxury: all was plain and useful, as in some parsonage. And yet there was something strangely attractive in this curious home. The rooms were of spacious dimensions; those on the ground-floor were all vaulted. The sunbeams forced their way through leafy vines and creepers into the deep embrasures of the windows. The atmosphere was impregnated with a delicious, mysterious fragrance,--an odour of mould, old wood, and dried rose-leaves. Harry maintained that it smelled of ghosts, and that there was a white lady who "walked" in the corner room next to the private chapel.

I must confess, in spite of my love for the old barrack, that it was not a fit baronial mansion. No one had ever lived there, save a steward, before Uncle Karl, who, as the youngest Leskjewitsch, inherited it, took up his abode there. He had, when he was first married, planned a new castle, but soon relinquished his intention, first for financial reasons, and then from dread of guests, a dread that seems to have become a chronic disease with him. When his wife died, all thought of any new structure had been given up. From that time he scarcely ever stayed there himself, and the old nest was good enough for a summer residence for the children. With the exception of Heda,--besides Harry there was a good-for-nothing small boy,--the children thought so too. They had a pathetic affection for the old place where they appeared each year with the flowers, the birds, and the sunshine. They seemed to me to belong to the spring. Everything was bright and warm about me when they came.

Harry was my faithful knight from first to last; our friendship grew with our growth. He tyrannized over me a little, and liked to impress me, I think, with a sense of his superiority; but he faithfully and decidedly stood by me whenever I needed him. He drove me everywhere about the country; his two ponies could either be driven or ridden; he taught me to ride, climbed mountains with me, explored with me every corner of the old ruin on the hill, and then when we came home at night, each somewhat weary with our long tramp, he would tell me stories.

How vividly I remember it all! I can fancy myself now sitting beside him on the lowest of the steps leading from the living-room into the garden. At our feet the flowers exhale sweet, sad odours, the pale roses drenched in dew show white amid the dim foliage; above our heads there is a dreamy whisper in the boughs of an old apricot-tree, whose leaves stand out sharp and black against the deep-blue sky, sown with myriads of sparkling stars. And Harry is telling me stories. Ah, such stories! the most terrible tales of robbers and ghosts, each more shudderingly horrible than its predecessor.

Oh, how delightful it is to feel one shudder after another creeping down your back in the warm summer evening! and if it grows too fearful, and I begin to be really afraid of the pale, bloodless phantoms which he conjures up before me, I move a little closer to him, and, as if seeking protection, clasp his hand, taking refuge from my ghostly fears in the consciousness of his warm young life.

VI.

HARRY'S TUTORS.

Every Sunday the Komaritzers come to us at Zirkow, driving over in a tumble-down old coach covered with faded blue cloth, hung on spiral springs, and called Noah's ark.

The coachman wears no livery, except such as can be found in an imposing broad gold band upon a very shabby high hat.

Of course the children are always accompanied by the governess and the tutor.

The first governess whom I knew at Komaritz--Mademoiselle Duval--was bright, well-bred, and very lovable; the tutor was the opposite of all this.

He may have been a proficient in ancient languages, but he spoke very poor German. His nails were always in mourning, and he neglected his dress. Intercourse with good society made him melancholy. At our table he always took the worst place. Uncle Paul every Sunday addressed the same two questions to him, never remembering his name, but regularly calling him Herr Paulus, whereas his name was Pontius. After the tutor had answered these questions humbly, he never again, so long as dinner lasted, opened his mouth, except to put into it large mouthfuls, or his knife. Between the courses he twirled his thumbs and sniffed. He always had a cold in his head. When dinner was over he pushed his chair back against the wall, bowed awkwardly, and retired, never appearing among us during the rest of the afternoon, which he spent playing "Pinch" with Krupitschka, with a pack of dirty cards which from long usage had lost their corners and had become oval. We often surprised him at this amusement.--Harry and I.

As soon as he disappeared Aunt Rosamunda always expressed loudly and distinctly her disapproval of his bad manners. But when we children undertook to sneer at them, we were sternly repressed.--were told that such things were of no consequence, and that bad manners did not in the least detract from a human being's genuine worth.

On one occasion Harry rejoined, "I'm glad to hear it," and at the next meal sat with both elbows upon the table.

Moreover, I soon observed that Herr Pontius was by no means the meek lamb he seemed to be, and this I discovered at the harvest-home. There was a dance beneath the lindens at the farm, where Herr Pontius whirled the peasant-girls around, and capered about like a very demon. His face grew fierce, and his hair floated wildly about his head. We children nearly died of laughing at him.

Soon afterwards he was dismissed, and in a great hurry. When I asked Harry to tell me the cause of his sudden disappearance, he replied that it was love that had broken Herr Pontius's neck. But when I insisted upon a more lucid explanation, Harry touched the tip of my nose with his forefinger and said, sententiously, "Too much knowledge makes little girls ugly."

He was not the only one among Harry's tutors whose neck was broken through love: the next--a very model of a tutor--followed the example in this respect of the dance-loving Herr Pontius.

His name was Ephraim Schmied; he came from Hildesheim, and was very learned and well conducted,--in short, by long odds the best of all Harry's tutors. If he did not retain his position, it may well be imagined that it was the fault of the position.

As with every other fresh tutor, Harry set himself in opposition to him at first, and did his best to discover ridiculous traits in him. His efforts in this direction were for a time productive of no results, and Herr Schmied, thanks to his untiring patience combined with absolute firmness, was in a fair way to master his wayward pupil, when matters took an unexpected and unfortunate turn.

Harry, in fact, had finally discovered the weak place in Herr Schmied's armour, and it was in the region of the heart. Herr Schmied had fallen in love with Mademoiselle Duval. To fall in love was in Harry's eyes at that time the extreme of human stupidity (he ought to have rested in that conviction). Uncle Paul shared it. He chuckled when Harry one fine day told him of his discovery, and asked the keen-sighted young good-for-naught upon what he founded his supposition.

"He sings Schubert's 'Wanderer' to her every evening, and yesterday he brought her a vase from X---," Harry replied: "there the fright stands."

Uncle Paul took the vase in his hands, an odd smile playing about his mouth the while. It was decorated with little naked Cupids hopping about in an oval wreath of forget-me-nots.

"How sentimental!" said Uncle Paul, adding, after a while, "If the little wretches only had wings, they might pass for angels, but as they are they leave something to be desired." Then, putting down the vase, he told me to be a good girl (he had just brought me over to stay a little while at Komaritz), got into his dog-cart, and drove off.

Scarcely had the door closed behind him when Harry brought from the next room a long quill pen and a large inkstand, and went to work eagerly and mysteriously at the vase.

At about five in the afternoon all assembled for afternoon coffee. Finally Herr Schmied appeared, a book in his hand.

"What are you doing there?" he asked his pupil, unsuspectingly.

"I am giving these naughty boys swimming-breeches, Herr Schmied. Uncle Paul thought it hardly the thing for you to have presented this vase to a lady, and so----"

The sentence was never finished. There was a low laugh from the other end of the room, where Mademoiselle Duval, ensconced behind the coffee-equipage, had been an unobserved spectator of the scene. Herr Schmied flushed crimson, and, quite losing his usual self-control, he gave Harry a sounding box on the ear, and Harry--well, Harry returned it.

Herr Schmied seized him by the shoulders as if to shake and strike him, then bit his lip, drew a long breath, released the boy, and left the room. But Harry's head drooped upon his breast, and he ate no supper that night. He knew that what had occurred could not be condoned, and he was sorry.

At supper Herr Schmied informed Mademoiselle Duval that he had written to Baron Leskjewitsch that unforeseen circumstances made imperative his return to Germany. "I did not think it necessary to be more explicit as to the true cause of my sudden departure," he added.

Harry grew very pale.

After supper, as I was sitting with Heda upon the garden-steps, looking for falling stars that would not fall, we observed Herr Schmied enter the room behind us; it was quite empty, but the lamp was lighted on the table. Soon afterwards, Harry appeared. Neither of them noticed us.

Slowly, lingeringly, Harry approached his tutor, and plucked him by the sleeve.

Herr Schmied looked around.

"Must you really go away, Herr Schmied?" the boy asked, in distress.

"Yes," the tutor replied, very gravely.

Harry bit his lip, seemed undecided what to do or say, and finally, leaning his head a little on one side, asked, caressingly, "Even if I beg your pardon?"

Herr Schmied smiled, surprised and touched. He took the boy's hand in his, and said, sadly, "Even then, Harry. Yet I am sorry, for I was beginning to be very fond of you."

The tears were in Harry's eyes, but he evidently felt that no entreaty would be of any avail.

In fact, the next morning Herr Schmied took his departure. A few days afterwards, however, Harry received a letter from him with a foreign post-mark. He had written four long pages to his former pupil. Harry flushed with pride and joy as he read it, and answered it that very evening.

Herr Schmied is now Professor of Modern History in a foreign university, his name is well known, and he is held in high honour. He still corresponds with Harry, whose next tutor was a French abbé. The cause of the abbé's dismissal I have forgotten; indeed, I remember only one more among the numerous preceptors, and he was the last,--a German from Bohemia, called Ewald Finke.

His name was not really Ewald, but Michael, but he called himself Ewald because he liked it better. He had studied abroad, which always impressed us favourably, and, as Uncle Karl was told, he had already won some reputation in Leipsic by his literary efforts. He was looking for a situation as tutor merely that he might have some rest from intellectual labours that had been excessive. "Moreover," his letter of recommendation from a well-known professor went on to say, "the Herr Baron will not be slow to discover that he is here brought into contact with a rarely-gifted nature, one of those in intercourse with whom allowance must be made for certain peculiarities which at first may prove rather annoying." Uncle Karl instantly wrote, in reply, that "annoying peculiarities" were of no consequence,--that he would accord unlimited credit in the matter of allowance to the new tutor. In fact, he took such an interest in the genius thus offered him that he prolonged his stay in Komaritz to two weeks, instead of departing at the end of three days, as he had at first intended, solely in expectation of the new tutor.

By the way, those who are familiar with my uncle's morbid restlessness may imagine the joy of his household at his prolonged stay in Komaritz.

Not knowing how otherwise to kill his time, he hit upon the expedient of shooting it, and, as the hunting season had not begun, he shot countless butterflies. We found them lying in heaps among the flowers, little, shapeless, shrivelled things, mere specks of brilliant dust. When weary of this amusement, he would seat himself at the piano and play over and over again the same dreary air, grasping uncertainly at the chords, and holding them long and firmly when once he had got them.

Harry assured me that he was playing a funeral march for the dead butterflies, and I supposed

it to be his own composition. This, however, was not the case, and the piece was not a funeral march, but a polonaise,--"The Last Thought of Count Oginski," who is said to have killed himself after jotting down this music.

At last Herr Finke made his appearance. He was a tall, beardless young man, with hair cut close to his head, and a sallow face adorned with the scars of several sabre-cuts, a large mouth, a pointed nose, the nostrils quivering with critical scorn, and staring black eyes with large round spectacles, through which they saw only what they chose to see.

Uncle Karl's reception of him was grandiloquent. "Enter," he exclaimed, going to meet him with extended hands. "My house is open to you. I delight in grand natures which refuse to be cramped within the limits of conventionality."

Herr Finke replied to this high-sounding address only by a rather condescending nod, shaking the proffered hand as if bestowing a favour.

After he had been refreshed with food and drink, Uncle Karl challenged him to a fencing-match, which lasted upward of an hour, at the end of which time my uncle confessed that the new tutor was a master of fence, immediately wrote to thank the illustrious professor to whom he owed this treasure of learning, and left Komaritz that same evening.

Herr Finke remained precisely three weeks in his new situation. So far as lessons went he seemed successful enough, but his "annoying peculiarities" ended in an outbreak of positive insanity, during which he set fire to the frame house on the hill where he was lodged, and was carried off to a mad-house in a strait-waistcoat, raving wildly.

Uncle Karl was sadly disappointed, and suddenly resolved to send Harry to a public school, being convinced that no good could come of tutors.

From this time forward the young Leskjewitsches came to Komaritz only for the vacations.

VII.

We were very good friends, Harry and I,--there's no denying that. We told each other all our secrets,--at least I told him mine,--and we divided all our bon-bons with each other. Sometimes on Sunday afternoons we played at marriage, the ceremony giving occasion for a deal of delightful "dressing up." Moreover, we had long been agreed that, sooner or later, this play should become earnest, and that we would marry each other. But when the first down became perceptible on Harry's upper lip, our mutual friendship began to flag. It was just about the time that Harry went to a public school.

His indifference grieved me at first, then I became consoled, and at last I was faithless to him. A cousin of Harry's, who came to Komaritz to spend the holidays, gave occasion for this breach of faith. His name was Lato, Count Treurenberg. The name alone kindled my enthusiasm. He had scarcely been two days in Komaritz, where I too was staying at the time, when Hedwig confided to me that she was in love with him.

"So am I," I replied. I was firmly convinced that this was so.

My confession was the signal for a highly dramatic scene. Hedwig, who had frequently been to the theatre in Prague, ran about the room wringing her hands and crying, "Both with the same man! both!--it is terrible! One of us must resign him, or the consequences will be fearful."

I diffidently offered to sacrifice my passion.

She shrieked, "No, I never can accept such a sacrifice from you! Fate shall decide between us."

Whereupon we put one white and one black bean in a little, broken, handle-less coffee-pot which we found in the garret, and which Hedwig called an urn.

The decisive moment made my heart beat. We cast lots for precedence in drawing from the urn. It fell to me, and I drew out a black bean! The moment was thrilling. Heda sank upon a sofa, and fanned her joyful face with her pocket-handkerchief. She declared that if she had drawn the black bean she would have attempted her life. This declaration dispelled my despair; I shuddered at the idea of being the cause of anything so horrible.

From that day Heda never spoke to Lato von Treurenberg without drooping her head on one side and rolling her eyes languishingly,--conduct which seemed to cause the young fellow some surprise, but which he treated with great courtesy, while Harry used to exclaim, "What is the matter with you, Heda? You look like a goose in a thunder-storm!"

My behaviour towards Lato underwent no change: I had drawn the "black ball," and, in consequence, the most cordial friendship soon subsisted between us.

It would have been difficult not to like Lato, for I have never met a more amiable, agreeable young fellow.

He was about seventeen years old, very tall, and stooped slightly. His features were delicately chiselled; his smile was quite bewitching in its dreamy, all-embracing benevolence. There was decided melancholy in his large, half-veiled eyes, which caused Hedwig to liken him to Lord Byron.

His complexion was rather dark,—which was odd, as his hair was light brown touched with gold at the temples. His neck was too long, and his arms were uncommonly long. All his appointments, from his coats to his cigar-case, were extremely elegant, testifying to a degree of fastidiousness thitherto quite unknown in Komaritz. Nevertheless, he seemed very content in this primitive nest, ignoring all discomfort, and making no pretension. Heda, who was quick to seize upon every opportunity to admire him, called my attention to his amiable forbearance, or, I confess, I should not have noticed it.

From Hedwig I learned much concerning the young man; among other things, she gave me a detailed account of his family circumstances. His mother was, she informed me, a "mediatisirte." [1] She uttered the word reverently, and, when I confessed that I did not know what it meant, she nearly fainted. His father was one of the most fascinating men in Austria. He is still living, and is by no means, it seems, at the end of his fascinations, but, being a widower, hovers about from one amusing capital to another, breaking hearts for pastime. It seems to be a wonderfully entertaining occupation, and, when one once indulges in it, the habit cannot be got rid of,—like opium-eating.

While he thus paraded his brilliant fascinations in the gay world, he did not, of course, find much time to interest himself in his boy, who was left to the care of distant relatives, and who, when found to be backward in his studies, was placed, I believe by Uncle Karl's advice, under the care of a Prague professor by the name of Suwa, who kept, as Harry once told me, a kind of orthopædic institution for minds that lacked training.

Beside Lato, during that vacation there were two other guests at Komaritz, one a very distant cousin of Harry's, and the other a kind of sub-tutor whose duty it was to coach Harry in his studies.

We could not endure the sub-tutor. His name was Franz Tuschalek; he was about nineteen, with hands and feet like shovels, and a flat, unmeaning face. His manner was intensely servile, and his coat-sleeves and trousers were too short, which gave him a terribly indigent air. One could not help regarding him with a mixture of impatience and sympathy. By my radical uncle's express desire, he and Harry called each other by their Christian names. Still, obnoxious as poor Tuschalek was to us, he was more to our minds than the distant cousin.

This last was a Pole, about twenty years old, with a sallow face and long oblique eyes, which he rolled in an extraordinary way. His hair was black, and he curled it with the curling-tongs. He was redolent of musk, and affected large plaid suits of clothes. His German was not good, and his French was no better, but he assured us that he was a proficient in Chinese and Arabic. He was always playing long and difficult concertos on the table, but he never touched the piano at Komaritz, declaring that the instrument was worn out. He was always short of funds, and was perpetually boasting of the splendour of his family.

He frequently sketched, upon some stray piece of paper, a magnificent and romantic structure, which he would display to us as his Polish home,—"our ancestral castle."

Sometimes this castle appeared with two turrets, sometimes with only one, a fact to which Harry did not fail to call his attention.

His distinguished ancestry was a topic of never-failing interest to him; he was never weary of explaining his connection with various European reigning dynasties, and his visiting-cards bore the high-sounding names "Le Comte Ladislas Othon Fainacky de Chrast-Bambosch," although, as Harry confided to us, he had no right to the title of comte, being the son of a needy Polish baron.

Although Franz Tuschalek was almost as obnoxious to Harry as the "braggart Sarmatian," as Lato called the Pole, he never allowed his antipathy to be seen, but treated him with great consideration, as he did all inferiors, scarcely allowing himself to give vent to his distaste for him even in his absence. But he paraded his dislike of Fainacky, never speaking of him as a guest, but as an "invasion," and always trying to annoy him by some boyish trick.

At length, one Sunday, the crisis in Harry's first vacation occurred. We had all been to early mass, and the celebrant had accompanied us back to Komaritz, as was his custom, to breakfast. After a hasty cup of coffee he took his leave of us children, and betook himself to the bailiff's quarters, where we more than suspected him of a quiet game of cards with that official and his underlings.

The door of the dining-room leading out into the garden was wide open, and delicious odours

from the moist flower-beds floated in and mingled with the fragrance of the coffee. It had rained in the night, but the sun had emerged from the clouds and had thrown a golden veil over trees and shrubs. We were just rising from table when the "braggart Sarmatian" entered, booted and spurred, smelling of all the perfumes of Arabia, and with his hair beautifully curled. He had not been to mass, and had breakfasted in his room in the frame house on the hill, which had been rebuilt since the fire. After he had bidden us all an affected good-morning, he said, turning to Harry,--

"Has the man come with the mail?"

"Yes," Harry replied, curtly.

"Did no registered letter come for me?"

"No."

"Strange!"

"Very strange," Harry sneered. "You have been expecting that letter a long time. If I were you, I'd investigate the matter."

"There's something wrong with the post," the Pole declared, with an air of importance. "I must see about it. I think I had best apply to my uncle the cabinet-minister."

Harry made a curious grimace. "There is no need to exercise your powers of invention for me," he observed. "I know your phrase-book and the meaning of each individual sentence. 'Has no registered letter come for me?' means 'Lend me some money.' My father instructed me to supply you with money if you needed it, but never with more than ten guilders at a time. Here they are, and, if you wish to drive to X----, tell the bailiff to have the drag harnessed for you. We--in fact, we will not look for you before evening. Good-bye."

"I shall have to call you to account some day, Harry," Fainacky said, with a frown; then, relapsing into his usual languid affectation of manner, he remarked, over his shoulder, to Mademoiselle Duval, "*C'est un enfant*," put away the ten-guilder piece in a gorgeous leather pocket-book, and left the room.

Scarcely had the door closed behind him when Harry began to express in no measured terms his views with regard to the "Polish invasion." Then he set his wits to work to devise some plan of getting rid of Fainacky, but it was not until the afternoon, when we were assembled in the dining-room again, that a brilliant idea occurred to him while reading Heine's "Romancero," a book which he loved to read when Heda and I were by because it was a forbidden volume to us.

Suddenly, starting up from his half-reclining position in a large arm-chair, he snapped his fingers, waved his book in the air, and exclaimed, "Eureka!"

"What is it?" Lato asked, good-naturedly.

"I have found something to drive the Pole wild!" cried Harry, rubbing his hands with delight. Whereupon he began to spout, with immense enthusiasm and shouts of laughter, Heine's "Two Knights," a poem in which he pours out his bitterest satire upon the Poles, their cause, and their country. This precious poem Harry commanded Tuschalek to write out in his finest round hand upon a large sheet of paper, which was then to be nailed upon the door of Fainacky's sleeping-apartment. I did not like the poem. I confess my Polish sympathies were strong, and I did not approve of ridiculing the "braggart Sarmatian's" nation by way of disgusting him with Komaritz; but nothing that I could say had any effect. The poem was written out upon the largest sheet of paper that the house afforded, and was the first thing to greet the eyes of Fainacky when he retired to his room for the night. In consequence, the Sarmatian declared, the next morning, at breakfast, that the insult thus offered to his nation and himself was not to be endured by a man of honour, and that he should leave Komaritz that very day.

Nevertheless, he stayed four weeks longer, during which time, however, he never spoke to Harry except upon three occasions when he borrowed money of him.

Tuschalek departed at an earlier date. Harry's method for getting rid of him was much simpler, and consisted of a letter to his father. As well as I can recollect, it ran thus:

"MY DEAR FATHER,--

"I pray you send Tuschalek away. I assure you I will study diligently without him. To have about you a fellow hired at ten guilders a month, who calls you by your Christian name, is very deleterious to the character.

"Your affectionate son,

"HARRY.

"P.S.--Pray, if you can, help him to another situation, for I can't help pitying the poor devil."

About this time Lato sprained his ankle in leaping a ditch, and was confined for some days to a lounge in the dining-room. Heda scarcely left his side. She brought him flowers, offered to write his letters for him, and finally read aloud to him from the "*Journal des Demoiselles*." Whether he was much edified I cannot say. He left Komaritz as soon as his ankle was strong again. I was really sorry to have him go; for years we heard nothing more of him.----

"The gypsy!" exclaimed the major. "How fluently she writes! Who would have thought it of her! I remember that Fainacky perfectly well,--a genuine Polish coxcomb! Lato was a charming fellow,--pity he should have married in trade!"

At this moment a loud bell reminded the old cavalryman that the afternoon coffee was ready. He hurriedly slipped his niece's manuscript into a drawer of his writing-table, and locked it up before joining his family circle, where he appeared with the most guileless smile he could assume.

Zdena seemed restless and troubled, and confessed at last that she had lost her diary, which she was quite sure she had put into her work-basket. She had been writing in the garden, and had thrust it into the basket in a hurry. The major seemed uninterested in the loss, but, when the girl's annoyance reached its climax in a conjecture that the cook had, by mistake, used the manuscript for kindling, he comforted her, saying, "Nonsense! the thing will surely be found." He could not bring himself to resign the precious document,--he was too much interested in reading it.

The next day, after luncheon, while Frau Rosamunda was refreshing herself with an afternoon nap and Zdena was in the garden posing for the Baron von Wenkendorf as the goddess of Spring, the major retired to his room and locked himself in, that he might not be disturbed.

"Could she possibly have fallen in love with that Lato? Some girls' heads are full of sentimental nonsense. But I hardly think it--and so--" he went on muttering to himself whilst finding the place where he had left off on the previous day.

The next chapter of this literary *chef-d'œuvre* began as follows:

VIII.

I had a long letter to-day from Miss O'Donnel in Italy, full of most interesting things. One of the two nieces whom she is visiting is being trained as an opera-singer. She seems to have a brilliant career before her. In Italy they call her "*la Patti blonde*," and her singing-teacher, to whom she pays thirty-five francs a lesson, declares that she will certainly make at least a hundred thousand francs a year as a prima donna. What an enviable creature! I, too, have an admirable voice. Ah, if Uncle Paul would only let me be trained! But his opinions are so old-fashioned!

And everything that Miss O'Donnel tells me about the mode of life of the Misses Lyall interests me. They live with their mother in Italy, and receive every evening, principally gentlemen, which, it seems, is the Italian custom. The elder Miss Lyall is as good as engaged to a distinguished Milanese who lost his hair in the war of '59; while the younger, the blonde Patti, will not hear of marriage, but contents herself with turning the head of every man who comes near her.

Ah! I have arrived at the conviction that there can be no finer existence than that of a young girl in training for a prima donna, who amuses herself in the mean time by turning the head of every man who comes near her.----

("Goose!" exclaimed the major at this point.)

----To-day I proposed to Uncle Paul that he should take me to Italy for the winter, to have me educated as a singer. There was a great row. Never before, since I have known him, has he spoken so angrily to me.----

("I should think not!" growled the major at this point.)

----The worst was that he blamed Miss O'Donnel for putting such "stuff" (thus he designated my love for art) into my head, and threatened to forbid her to correspond with me. Ah, I wept for the entire afternoon amid the ruins of my shattered hopes. I am very unhappy. After a long interruption, the idea has occurred to me to-day of continuing my memoirs.

IX.

HARRY BECOMES A SOLDIER.

Uncle Karl finally yielded to Harry's entreaties, and allowed him to enter the army. That very autumn after the summer which Lato and Fainacky passed at Komaritz he was to enter a regiment of hussars.

It had been a problem for Uncle Karl, the taming of this eager young nature, and I think he was rather relieved by the military solution thus afforded.

As Harry of course had nothing to do in town before joining his regiment, he stayed longer than usual this year in Komaritz,--stayed all through September and until late in October. Komaritz was quite deserted: Lato had gone, the Pole had gone; but Harry still stayed on.

And, strange to say, now, when we confronted our first long parting, our old friendship gradually revived, stirred, and felt that it had been living all this time, although it had had one or two naps. How well I remember the day when he came to Zirkow to take leave of us--of me!

It was late in October, and the skies were blue but cold. The sun shone down upon the earth kindly, but without warmth. A thin silvery mist floated along the ground. The bright-coloured leaves shivered in the frosty air.

On the wet lawn, where the gossamers gleamed like steel, lay myriads of brown, red, and yellow leaves. The song-birds were gone, the sparrows twittered shrilly, and in the midst of the brown autumnal desolation there bloomed in languishing loveliness a white rose upon a leafless stalk.

With a scarlet shawl about my shoulders and my head bare I was sauntering about the garden, wandering, dreaming through the frosty afternoon. I heard steps behind me, and when I looked round I saw Harry approaching, his brows knitted gloomily.

"I only want to bid you 'good-bye,'" he called out to me. "We are off to-morrow."

"When are you coming back?" I asked, hastily.

"Perhaps never," he said, with an important air. "You know--a soldier----"

"Yes, there is a threatening of war," I whispered, and my childish heart felt an intolerable pang as I spoke.

He shrugged his shoulders and tried to laugh.

"And, at all events, you, when I come back, will be a young lady with--lovers--and you will hardly remember me."

"Oh, Harry, how can you talk so!"

Rather awkwardly he holds out to me his long slender hand, in which I place my own.

Ah, how secure my cold, weak fingers feel in that warm strong hand! Why do I suddenly recall the long-past moonlit evenings in Komaritz when we sat together on the garden-steps and Harry told me ghost-stories, in dread of which, when they grew too ghastly, I used to cling close to him as if to find shelter in his strong young life from the bloodless throng of spirits he was evoking?

Thus we stand, hand in hand, before the white rose, the last which autumn had left. It droops above us, and its cheering fragrance mingles with the autumnal odours around us. I pluck it, stick it in Harry's button-hole, and then suddenly begin to sob convulsively. He clasps me close, close in his arms, kisses me, and murmurs, "Do not forget me!" and I kiss him too, and say, "Never--never!" while around us the faded leaves fall silently upon the grass.

X.

MY EDUCATION.

Now follow a couple of very colourless years. There was nothing more to anticipate from the summers. For, although Heda regularly appeared at Komaritz as soon as the city was too hot or too deserted, she did not add much to my enjoyment. Komaritz itself seemed changed when Harry was no longer there to turn everything upside-down with his good-humoured, madcap ways.

And there was a change for the worse in our circumstances; affairs at Zirkow were not so prosperous as they had been.

To vary the monotony of his country life, my uncle had built a brewery, from which he promised himself a large increase of income. It was to be a model brewery, but after it was built the startling discovery was made that there was not water enough to work it. For a while, water was brought from the river in wagons drawn by four horses, but, when this was found to be too expensive, the brewery was left to itself.

For years now it has remained thus passive, digesting in triumphant repose the sums of money which it swallowed up. The monster!

Whenever there is any little dispute between my uncle and my aunt, she is certain to throw his brew-house in his face. But, instead of being crushed by the mischief he has wrought, he declares, "The project was admirable: my idea was a brilliant one if it had only succeeded!"

But it did not succeed.

The consequence was--retrenchment and economy. My aunt dismissed two servants, my uncle kept only a pair of driving horses, and my new gowns were made out of my aunt Thérèse's old ones.

The entire winter we spent at Zirkow, and my only congenial friend was my old English governess, the Miss O'Donnell already mentioned, who came shortly before Harry's entrance into the army, not so much to teach me English as to learn German herself.

Born in Ireland, and a Catholic, she had always had excellent situations in the most aristocratic English families. This had given her, besides her other acquirements, a great familiarity with the curious peculiarities of the British peerage, and with social distinctions of rank in England, as to which she enlightened me, along with much other valuable information.

At first I thought her quite ridiculous in many respects,--her general appearance,--she had once been a beauty, and still wore corkscrew curls,--her way of humming to herself old Irish ballads, "Nora Creina," "The harp that once through Tara's halls," etc., with a cracked voice and unconscious gestures, her formality and sensitiveness. After a while I grew fond of her. What quantities of books she read aloud to me in the long evenings in January and December, while my wooden needles clicked monotonously as I knitted woollen comforters for the poor!--all Walter Scott's novels, Dickens and Thackeray, many of the works of English historians, from the academic, fluent Gibbon to that strange prophet of history, Carlyle, and every day I had to study with her one act of Shakespeare, which bored me at first. She was so determined to form my literary taste that while my maid was brushing my hair she would read aloud some lighter work, such as "The Vicar of Wakefield" or Doctor Johnson's "Rasselas."

As Uncle Paul was very desirous to perfect my education as far as possible, he was not content with these far-reaching efforts, but, with a view to further accomplishments on my part, sent me thrice a week to X---, where an old pianiste, who was said to have refused a Russian prince, and was now humpbacked, gave me lessons on the piano; and a former *ballerina*, at present married to the best caterer in X---, taught me to dance.

This last was a short, fat, good-humoured person with an enormous double chin and a complexion spoiled by bad rouge. When a ballet-dancer she had been known as Angiolina Chiaramonte; her name now is Frau Anna Schwanzara. She always lost her breath, and sometimes the buttons off her waist, when she danced for her pupils, and she prided herself upon being able to teach every known dance, even to the cancan. I did not learn the cancan, but I did learn the fandango, the czardas, and the Highland fling, with many another national dance. Waltzes and polkas I did not learn, because we had no one for a partner to practise with me; Frau Schwanzara was too short-breathed, although she was very good-humoured and did her best.

Sometimes I thought it very hard to have to get up so early and drive between high walls of snow in a rattling inspector's wagon (Uncle Paul would not allow his last good carriage to be used on these journeys) two long leagues to X---, but it was, at all events, a break in the monotony of my life.

If I was not too sleepy, we argued the whole way, Miss O'Donnell and I, usually over some historic event, such as the execution of Louis XVI. or Cromwell's rebellion. Sometimes we continued our debate as we walked about the town, where we must have been strange and yet familiar figures. Miss O'Donnell certainly was odd in appearance. She always wore a long gray cloth cloak, under which, to guard against dirt, she kilted up her petticoats so high that her red stockings gleamed from afar. On her head was perched a black velvet bonnet with a scarlet pompon, and in summer and winter she carried the same bulgy green umbrella, which she called her "Gamp." Once we lost each other in the midst of a particularly lively discussion. Nothing

daunted, she planted herself at a street-corner, and, pounding the pavement with her umbrella, called, lustily, "Zdena! Zdena! Zdena!" until a policeman, to whom I described her, conducted me to her.

In addition to Miss O'Donnel's peculiarities, the extraordinary structure of our vehicle must have attracted some attention in X----. It was a long, old-fashioned coach hung on very high springs, and it looked very like the shabby carriages seen following the hearse at third-class funerals. Twin sister of the Komaritz "Noah's Ark," it served a double purpose, and could be taken apart in summer and used as an open carriage. Sometimes it fell apart of itself. Once when we were driving quickly through the market-square and past the officers' casino in X----, the entire carriage window fell out upon the pavement. The coachman stopped the horses, and a very tall hussar picked up the window and handed it in to me, saying, with a smile, "You have dropped something, mademoiselle!" I was deeply mortified, but I would not for the world have shown that I was so. I said, simply, "Thank you; put it down there, if you please," pointing to the opposite seat,--as if dropping a window out of the carriage were the most ordinary every-day occurrence. Upon my reply to him he made a profound bow, which I thought all right. He was a late arrival in the garrison; the other officers knew us or our carriage by sight. Every one of them, when he came to X----, paid his respects to my uncle, who in due course of time returned the visit, and there was an end of it. The officers were never invited to Zirkow.

Sometimes the roads were so blocked with snow that we could not drive to town, nor could we walk far. For the sake of exercise, or what Miss O'Donnel called our "daily constitutional," we used then to walk numberless times around the house, where the gardener had cleared a path for us. As we walked, Miss O'Donnel told me stories from the Arabian Nights or Ovid's Metamorphoses, varied sometimes by descriptions of life among the British aristocracy. When once she was launched upon this last topic, I would not let her finish,--I besieged her with questions. She showed me the picture of one of her pupils, the Lady Alice B----, who married the Duke of G---- and was the queen of London society for two years.

"'Tis odd how much you look like her," she often said to me. "You are sure to make a sensation in the world; only have patience. You are born to play a great part."

If Uncle Paul had heard her, I believe he would have killed her.

Every evening we played a rubber of whist. Miss O'Donnel never could remember what cards were out, and, whenever we wished to recall a card or to transgress some rule of the game, Aunt Rosamunda always said, "That is not allowed at the Jockey Club."

Once my uncle and aunt took me upon a six weeks' pleasure-tour,--or, rather, an educational excursion. We thoroughly explored the greater part of Germany and Italy on this occasion, travelling very simply, with very little luggage, never speaking to strangers, having intercourse exclusively with pictures, sculptures, and valets-de-place. After thus becoming acquainted, in Baedeker's society, with a new piece of the world, as Aunt Rosamunda observed with satisfaction, we returned to Zirkow, and life went on as before.

And really my lonely existence would not have struck me as anything extraordinary, if Hedwig had not been at hand to enlighten me as to my deprivations.

She had been introduced into society, and wrote me of her conquests. Last summer she brought a whole trunkful of faded bouquets with her to Komaritz,--ball-trophies. Besides this stuff, she brought two other acquisitions with her to the country, a sallow complexion and an adjective which she used upon every occasion--"impossible!" She tossed it about to the right and left, applying it to everything in the dear old nest which I so dearly loved, and which she now never called anything save "Mon exil." The house at Komaritz, the garden, my dress,--all fell victims to this adjective.

Two of her friends shortly followed her to Komaritz, with a suitable train of governesses and maids,--countesses from Prague society, Mimi and Franziska Zett.

They were not nearly so affected as Heda,--in fact, they were not affected at all, but were sweet and natural, very pretty, and particularly pleasant towards me. But we were not congenial; we had nothing to say to one another; we had no interests in common. They were quite indifferent to my favourite heroes, from the Gracchi to the First Consul; in fact, they knew hardly anything about them, and I knew still less of the Rudis, Nikis, Taffis, and whatever else the young gentlemen were called, with whom they danced and flirted at balls and parties, and about whom they now gossiped with Heda.

They, too, brought each a trunkful of faded bouquets, and one day they piled them all up on the grass in the garden and set fire to them. They declared that it was the custom in society in Vienna thus to burn on Ash Wednesday every relic of the Carnival. To be sure, it was not Ash Wednesday in Komaritz, and the Carnival was long past, but that was of no consequence.

The favourite occupation of the three young ladies was to sit in the summer-house, with a generous supply of iced raspberry vinegar, and make confession of the various *passions funestes* which they had inspired. I sat by and listened mutely.

Once Mimi amiably asked me to give my experience. I turned my head away, and murmured,

ashamed, "No one ever made love to me." Mimi, noticing my distress, put her finger beneath my chin, just as if she had been my grand-aunt, and said, "Only wait until you come out, and you will bear the palm away from all of us, for you are by long odds the prettiest of us all."

When afterwards I looked in the glass, I thought she was right.

"Until you go into society," Mimi had said. Good heavens! into society!--I! For some time a suspicion had dawned upon me that Uncle Paul did not mean that I should ever "go into society." When, the day after Mimi's portentous speech, I returned to Zirkow, I determined to put an end to all uncertainty upon the subject.

After dinner--it had been an uncommonly good one--I put my hand caressingly within my uncle's arm, and whispered, softly, "Uncle, do you never mean to take me to balls, eh?"

He had been very gay, but he at once grew grave, as he replied,--

"What good would balls do you? Make your eyes droop, and your feet ache! I can't endure the thought of having you whirled about by all the young coxcombs of Prague and then criticised afterwards. Marriages are made in heaven, Zdena, and your fate will find you here, you may be sure."

"But I am not thinking of marriage," I exclaimed, indignantly. "I want to see the world, uncle dear; can you not understand that?" and I tenderly stroked his coat-sleeve.

He shook his curly head energetically.

"Be thankful that you know nothing of the world," he said, with emphasis.

And I suddenly recalled the intense bitterness in my mother's tone as she uttered the word "world," when I waked in the dark night and found her kneeling, crying, at my bedside in our old Paris home.

"Is it really so very terrible--the world?" I asked, meekly, and yet incredulously.

"Terrible!" he repeated my word with even more energy than was usual with him. "It is a hot-bed of envy and vanity, a place where one learns to be ashamed of his best friend if he chance to wear an ill-made coat; that is the world you are talking of. I do not wish you to know anything about it."

This was all he would say.

It might be supposed that the unattractive picture of the world drawn by Uncle Paul would have put a stop at once and forever to any desire of mine for a further acquaintance with it, but--there is ever a charm about what is forbidden. At present I have not the faintest desire to visit Pekin, but if I were forbidden to go near that capital I should undoubtedly be annoyed.

And day follows day. Nearly a year has passed since that unedifying conversation with my uncle.

The only amusement that varied the monotony of our existence was a letter at long intervals from Harry. For a time he was stationed in Salzburg; for a year he has been in garrison in Vienna, where, of course, he is absorbed in the whirl of Viennese society. I must confess that it did not greatly please me when I first learned that he had entered upon that brilliant worldly scene: will he not come to be like Hedwig? My uncle declares that the world is the hot-bed of envy and vanity; and yet there must be natures upon which poisonous atmospheres produce no effect, just as there are men who can breathe with impunity the air of the Pontine marshes; and Harry's nature is one of these. At least so it would seem from his letters, they are so cordial and simple, such warm affection speaks in every line. A little while ago he sent me his photograph. I liked it extremely, but I did not say so; all the more loudly, however, did my uncle express his admiration. He offered to wager that Harry is the handsomest officer in the entire army, and he shouted loudly for Krupitschka, to show him the picture.

Harry told us one interesting piece of news,--I forget whether it was this winter or the last; perhaps it was still longer ago, for Harry was stationed in Enns at the time, and the news related to our old friend Treurenberg.

He had married a girl in the world of trade,--a Fräulein Selina von Harfink. Harry, whom Lato had bidden to his marriage, and who had gone for old friendship's sake from Enns to Vienna to be the escort in the church of the first of the eight bridesmaids, made very merry in his letter over the festivity.

We were all intensely surprised; we had not heard a word of Lato's betrothal, and the day after Harry's letter came the announcement of the marriage.

Uncle Paul, who takes most of the events of life very philosophically, grew quite angry on learning of this marriage.

Since Lato has married for money, he cares nothing more for him.

"I should not care if he had made a fool of himself and married an actress," he exclaimed, over and over again, "but to sell himself--ugh!"

When I suggested, "Perhaps he fell in love with Selina," my uncle shrugged his shoulders, and seemed to consider any such possibility entirely out of the question.

We talked for two weeks at Zirkow about Lato Treurenberg's marriage.

Now we have almost forgotten it. Since Lato has been married he has been quite estranged from his former associations.

To-day is my birthday. I am nineteen years old. How kind my uncle and aunt are to me! How they try to give me pleasure! My heap of presents was really grand. Arrayed about my cake, with its lighted candles, I found two new gowns, a hat which Heda had purchased for me in Prague,--and which, by the way, would be highly appreciated upon the head of a monkey in a circus,--several volumes of English literature sent me by Miss O'Donnel from Italy, and, in a white silk sachet upon which Mimi Zett had embroidered a bird of paradise in the midst of a snow-scene (a symbol of my melancholy condition), a card, upon which was written, "A visit to some watering-place, by the way of Vienna and Paris." I uttered a shriek of delight and threw my arms around my uncle's neck.

The three young girls from Komaritz came over to Zirkow to dine, in honour of the occasion; we drank one another's health in champagne, and in the afternoon we had coffee in the woods, which was very inconvenient but very delightful. Then we consulted the cards as to our future, and Heda lost her temper because the oracle declared that she would marry an apothecary.

What nonsense it was! The cards prophesied to me that I should marry for love;--I! As if I should think of such a thing! But I was not in the least vexed, although I knew how false it was.

Towards eight o'clock the girls drove home, and I concluded the evening by taking my new bonnet to pieces and then scribbling here at my writing-table. I cannot make up my mind to go to bed. I am fairly tingling to my finger-tips with delightful anticipations. To think of seeing Paris once more,--Paris, where I was born, the very centre of the civilized world! Oh, it is too charming!

Something extraordinary will happen during this trip,--I am sure of it. I shall meet some one who will liberate me from my solitude and set me upon the pedestal for which I long; an English peer, perhaps, or a Russian prince, oh, it will of course be a Russian prince--who spends most of his time in Paris. I shall not mind his not being very young. Elderly men are more easily managed.---

(At this point the major frowns. "I should not have thought it of her, I really should not have thought it of her. Well, we shall see whether she is in earnest." And he goes on with his reading.)

June 10, ---.

I have a piece of news to put down. The Frau von Harfink who bought Dobrotschau a while ago--the estate that adjoins Zirkow, a fine property with a grand castle but poor soil--is no other than Lato Treurenberg's mother-in-law. She called upon us to-day. When Krupitschka brought the cards of the Baroness Melanie von Harfink and her daughter Paula, Aunt Rosa denounced the visit as a presumption upon the part of the ladies. She had been engaged all day long in setting the house "to rights," preparatory to our departure, and had on a very old gown in which she does not often appear; wherefore she would fain have denied herself. But I was burning with curiosity to see Lato's mother-in-law: so I remarked, "Uncle Paul and I will go and receive the ladies, while you dress."

This made my aunt very angry. "It never would occur to me to dress for these wealthy *parvenues*. This gown is quite good enough for them." And she smoothed the faded folds of her skirt so that a neatly-darned spot was distinctly conspicuous. The ladies were immediately shown in; they were extremely courteous and amiable, but they found no favour in my aunt's eyes.

There really was no objection to make to Mamma von Harfink, who is still a very handsome woman, except that her manner was rather affected. The daughter, however, was open to criticism of various kinds, and subsequently became the subject of a serious dispute between my aunt and uncle. My aunt called Fräulein Paula disagreeable, absolutely hideous, and vulgar; whereupon my uncle, slowly shaking his head, rejoined,---

"Say what you please, she may not be agreeable, but she is very pretty."

Upon this my aunt grew angry, and called Fräulein Paula a "red-haired kitchen-maid." My uncle shrugged his shoulders, and observed, "Nevertheless, there have been kitchen-maids who were not ugly."

Then my aunt declared, "I can see nothing pretty about such fat creatures; but, according to her mother's account, you are not alone in your admiration. Madame Harfink had hardly been here five minutes when she informed me that Professor X---, of Vienna, had declared that her daughter reminded him of Titian's penitent Magdalen in the Borghese Gallery in Rome, and she asked me whether I was not struck with the resemblance."

My uncle grinned--I could not see at what and said, "H'm! the Magdalen, perhaps; but whether penitent or not----" and he pinched my cheek.

The dispute continued for a while longer, and ended with my aunt's emphatic declaration that men always had the worst possible taste with regard to young girls. My uncle burst into a laugh at this, and replied, "True. I gave proof of it on the 21st of May, 1858." It was his marriage-day.

Of course my aunt laughed, and the quarrel ended. The subject was changed, and we discussed Lato Treurenberg's marriage, which had puzzled us all. My aunt declared that since she had seen the family Treurenberg's choice appeared to her more incomprehensible than ever.

My uncle shook his head sagely, and observed, "If Selina Treurenberg at all resembles her sister, it explains much to me, especially when I recall the poor fellow's peculiarities. It makes me more lenient towards him, and--I pity him from my heart." They evidently did not wish to say anything more upon the subject before me.

June 20.

This afternoon we start. I am in a fever of anticipation. How delightful! I seem to have come to the turning-point of my existence. Something wonderful is surely going to happen.

Meanwhile, I take my leave of my little book,--I shall have no time to write in it while we are away.

July 30.

Here we are back again in the old nest! Nothing either wonderful or even extraordinary happened upon the journey; on the contrary, everything was quite commonplace. I did not meet the Russian prince, but I have brought home with me a conviction of the beauty and delights of the world, and the certainty that, if fate would only grant me the opportunity, I could play a most brilliant part in it. But my destiny has nothing of the kind to offer.

I am restless and discontented, and I have great trouble in concealing my mood from my uncle and aunt. I am likewise disgusted with my ingratitude. I know that the expenses of our trip weighed heavily upon my uncle. He has bought himself no new horses, although the old ones are lame in all four legs; and my aunt has given up her pilgrimage to Bayreuth, that I might go to the baths. She expected so much for me from this trip, and now---

Still, prosaic and commonplace as it all was, I will put it down here conscientiously in detail. Various pleasant little circumstances may recur to me as I write which have escaped me in my general discontent that has tinged everything.

Our few days in Vienna were the pleasantest part of the entire trip, little as I liked the city at first.

We arrived at ten in the evening, rather exhausted by the heat, and of course we expected to see Harry at the railroad-station, my uncle having advised him of our arrival. But in vain did we peer in every direction, or rather in vain did Aunt Rosamunda thus peer (for I did nothing of the kind); there was no Harry to be seen.

While my aunt loudly expressed her wonder at his non-appearance, I never uttered a word, but was secretly all the more vexed at what seemed to me Harry's laziness and want of consideration. Of course, I attributed his absence to the fact that a young man who passed his time in flying from one fête to another in the world (which I was not to know) could hardly be very anxious to meet a couple of relatives from the country. Perhaps he had come to be just like Heda, and I shrugged my shoulders indifferently at the thought. What could it possibly matter to me? Meanwhile, my aunt had given our luggage-tickets to a porter and got with me into an open carriage, where we quietly and wearily awaited our trunks.

Around us the lights flickered in the warm, dim, night air, which was almost as close as an indoor atmosphere, and smelled most unpleasantly of dust, dried leaves, and all sorts of exhalations. On every hand crowded houses of indescribable clumsiness and ugliness; I was depressed by the mere sight of them, and suddenly experienced the most painful sensation of shrivelling up. The deafening noise and bustle were in harmony with the houses: I never had heard anything like it. Everybody jostled everybody else, all were in a hurry, and no one paid the slightest regard to anybody. It seemed as if they were one and all bound for some great entertainment and feared to be too late.

At the hotel the reason for Harry's absence was explained. We found two beautiful bunches of roses in our rooms, and a note, as follows:

"I am more sorry than I can tell, not to be able to welcome you at the station. I am, unfortunately, on duty at a garden-party at the Archduke S----'s.... I shall report myself to you, however, at the earliest opportunity.

"HARRY."

I supped with a relish, and slept soundly.

My aunt had breakfasted in our sitting-room and was reading the paper, when I had scarcely begun to dress. I was just about to brush my hair,--I have very long hair, and it is quite pretty, light brown with a dash of gold,--in fact, I was standing before the mirror in my white peignoir, with my hair hanging soft and curling all around me, very well pleased with my reflection in the glass, when suddenly I heard the jingling of spurs and sabre, and a voice which was familiar and yet unfamiliar. I trembled from head to foot.

"Zdena, hurry, and come!" called my aunt. "Here is a visitor!"

I knew well enough who it was, but, as if I did not know, I opened the door, showed myself for a moment in my white wrapper and long, loose hair,--only for a moment,--and then hastily retreated.

"Come just as you are. 'Tis only Harry; it is not as if it were a stranger. Come!" called my aunt.

But I was not to be persuaded. Not for worlds would I have had Harry suspect that--that--well, that I was in any great hurry to see him.

I dressed my hair with the most scrupulous care. Not before twenty minutes had passed did I go into the next room.

How plainly I see it all before me now,--the room, half drawing-room, half dressing-room; a trunk in one corner, in another an old piano, the key of which we were obliged to procure from the keller; in an arm-chair a bundle of shawls, over the back of a sofa our travelling-wraps, our well-polished boots in front of the porcelain stove, great patches of misty sunshine lying everywhere, the breakfast-table temptingly spread near the window, and there, opposite my aunt, his sabre between his knees, tall, slender, very brown, very handsome, an officer of hussars,--Harry.

I like him, and am a little afraid of him. He suddenly springs up and advances a step or two towards me. His eyes--the same eyes that had glanced at me as I appeared in my wrapper--open wide in amazement; his gaze is riveted upon my face. All my fear has gone; yes, I confess it to this paper,--I am possessed by an exultant consciousness of power. He is only my cousin, 'tis true, but he is the first man upon whom I have been able to prove my powers of conquest.

I put my hands in his, so cordially extended, but when he stooped as if to kiss me, I shook my head, laughing, and said, "I am too old for that."

He yielded without a word, only touching my hand respectfully with his lips and then releasing me; whereupon I went directly to the breakfast-table. But, as he still continued to gaze at me, I asked, easily,---

"What is it, Harry? Is my hair coming down?"

He shook his head, and said, in some confusion, "Not at all. I was only wondering what you had done with all your magnificent hair!"

I made no reply, but applied myself to my breakfast.

It was really delightful, our short stay in Vienna. Harry was with us all the while. He went about with us from morning till night; patiently dragged with us to shops, picture-galleries, and cathedrals, and to the dusty, sunny Prater, where the vegetation along the drive seemed to have grown shabby. We drove together to Schönbrunn, the huge, dreamy, imperial summer residence, and wandered about the leafy avenues there. We fed the swans; we fed the monkeys and the bears, while my aunt rested near by, Baedeker in hand, upon any bench she could find. She rested a great deal, and grew more tired with every day of our stay in Vienna, and with very good reason; she can hardly endure the pavement in walking, and she refuses, from fastidiousness, to take advantage of the tramway, and, from economy, to hire a carriage.

The sunset has kindled flames in all the windows of the castle, and we are still wandering in the green avenues, talking of all sorts of things, music, and literature. Harry's taste is classic; mine is somewhat revolutionary. I talk more than he; he listens. Sometimes he throws in a word in the midst of my nonsense; at other times he laughs heartily at my paradoxes, and then again

he suddenly looks askance at me and says nothing. Then I become aware that he understands far more than I of the matter in hand, and I fall silent.

The sun has set; the rosy reflection on the grass and at the foot of the old trees has faded; there is only a pale, gray gleam on the castle windows. All nature seems to sigh relieved. A cool mist rises from the basins of the fountains, like the caress of a water-nymph; the roses, petunias, and mignonette exhale delicious fragrance, which rises as incense to heaven; the lisp of the leaves and the splash of the fountain interpose a dreamy veil of sound, as it were, between us and some aggressive military music in the distance.

The twilight falls; the nurses are all taking their charges home. Here and there on the benches a soldier and a nursemaid are sitting together. It is too dark to see to read Baedeker any longer. My aunt calls to us: "Do come, children; the carriage has been waiting ever so long, and I am very hungry."

And the time had seemed so short to me. My aunt is so easily fatigued, and her aversion to tramways is so insurmountable, that she stays at home half the time in the hotel, and I make many a little expedition with Harry alone. Then I take his arm. We stroll through the old part of the city, with its sculptured monuments, its beautiful gray palaces standing side by side with the commonest lodging-houses; about us people are thronging and pushing; we are in no hurry; we should like to have time stand still,--Harry and I; we walk very slowly. I am so content, so filled with a sense of protection, when I am with him thus. It is delightful to cling to him in the crowd.

It seems to me that I should like to spend my life in slowly wandering thus in the cool of the evening through the streets, where the lights are just beginning to be lighted, where a pair of large, kindly eyes rest upon my face, and the sound of distant military music is in my ears.

The last evening before our departure arrived. We were sitting in our small drawing-room, and Harry and I were drinking iced coffee. My aunt had left hers untouched; the fever of travelling was upon her; she wandered from one room to another, opening trunks, drawers, and wardrobes, and casting suspicious glances under the piano and the sofas, sure that something would be left behind.

The keller brought in two cards,--Countess Zriny and Fräulein Tschaky,--a cousin of Uncle Paul's, with her companion.

We had called upon the Countess the day before, and had rejoiced to find her not at home. My aunt now elevated her eyebrows, and murmured, plaintively, "It can't be helped!"

Then she hurriedly carried two bundles of shawls and a hand-bag into the next room, and the ladies were shown in.

Countess Zriny is a very stout, awkward old maid, with the figure of a meal-sack and the face of a portly abbot. Harry maintains that she has holy water instead of blood in her veins, and that she has for ten years lived exclusively upon Eau de Lourdes and Count Mattei's miraculous pills. It is odd that she should have grown so stout upon such a diet.

There is nothing to say of Fräulein Tschaky.

Aunt Rosamunda received the ladies with a majestic affability peculiarly her own, and presented me as "Our child,--Fritz's daughter!"

The Countess gave me her hand, a round, fat little hand that felt as if her Swedish glove were stuffed with wadding, then put up her eyeglass and gazed at me, lifting her eyebrows the while.

"All her father!" she murmured,--"especially her profile." Then she dropped her eyeglass, sighed, "Poor Fritz! poor Fritz!" seated herself on the sofa with my aunt, and began to whisper to her, looking steadily at me all the while.

The sensitive irritability of my nature was at once aflame. If she had pitied my father only for being snatched away so early in his fair young life, for being torn so suddenly from those whom he loved! But this was not the case. She pitied him solely because he had married my mother. Oh, I knew it perfectly well; and she was whispering about it to my aunt before me,--she could not even wait until I should be away. I could hear almost every word.

My heart suddenly grew heavy,--so heavy with the old grief that I would fain forget, that I could hardly bear it. But even in the midst of my pain I observed that Harry was aware of my suffering and shared it.

Of course my cousin Zriny--for she is my cousin, after all--was otherwise extremely amiable to me. She turned from her mysterious conversation with Aunt Rosamunda, and addressed a couple of questions to me. She asked whether I liked country life, and when I replied, curtly, "I know no other," she laughed good-humouredly, just as some contented old monk might laugh,--a laugh that seemed to shake her fat sides and double chin, as she said, "*Elle a de l'esprit, la petite; elle n'est pas du tout banale.*"

How she arrived at that conclusion from my brief reply, I am unable to say.

After a quarter of an hour she rose, took both my hands in hers by way of farewell, put her head on one side, sighed, "Poor Fritz!" and then kissed me.

When the door had closed behind her, my aunt betook herself to the next room to make ready for a projected evening walk.

I was left alone with Harry. As I could not restrain my tears, and did not know how else to conceal them, I turned my back to him and pretended to arrange my hair at the pier-glass, before which stood a vase filled with the La France roses that he had brought me the day before.

It was a silly thing to do. He looked over my shoulder and saw in the mirror the tears on my cheeks, and then--he put his arm around my waist and whispered, "You poor little goose! You sensitive little thing! Why should you grieve because a kindhearted, weak-minded old woman was silly?"

Then I could not help sobbing outright, crying, "Ah, it is always the same,--I know it! I am not like the other girls in your world. People despise me, and my poor mother too."

"But this is childish," he said, gravely,--"childish and foolish. No one despises you. And--don't scratch my eyes out, Zdena--it is not your heart, merely, that is wounded at present, but your vanity, the vanity of an inexperienced little girl who knows nothing of the world or of the people in it. If you had knocked about in it somewhat, you would know how little it signifies if people in general wink and nod, and that the only thing really to care for is, to be understood and loved by those to whom we cling with affection."

He said this more gently and kindly than I can write it. He suddenly seemed very far above me in his earnest kindness of heart and his sweet reasonableness. I was instantly possessed with a feeling akin to remorse and shame, to think how I had teased him and tyrannized over him all through those last few days. And I cannot tell how it happened, but he clasped me close in his arms and bent down and kissed me on the lips,--and I let him do it! Ah, such a thrill passed through me! And I felt sheltered and cared for as I had not done since my mother's clasping arms had been about me. I was for the moment above all petty annoyances,--borne aloft by a power I could not withstand.

It lasted but a moment, for we were startled by the silken rustle of my aunt's gown, and did he release me? did I leave him? I do not know; but when Aunt Rosamunda appeared I was adjusting a rose in my breast, and Harry was--looking for his sabre!----. (When the major reached this point, he stamped on the floor with delight.)

"Aha, Rosel, which of us was right?" he exclaimed aloud. He would have liked to summon his wife from where he could see her walking in the garden, to impart to her his glorious discovery. On reflection, however, he decided not to do so, chiefly because there was a good deal of manuscript still unread, and he was in a hurry to continue the perusal of what interested him so intensely.)

---I avoided being alone with Harry all the rest of the evening, but the next morning at the railway-station, while my aunt was nervously counting over the pieces of luggage for the ninety-ninth time, I could not prevent his leaning towards me and saying, "Zdena, we were so unfortunately interrupted last evening. You have not yet told me--that---"

I felt myself grow scarlet. "Wait for a while!" I murmured, turning my head away from him, but I think that perhaps--I pressed his hand---

I must have done so, for happier eyes than those which looked after our train as it sped away I have never seen. Ah, how silly I had been! I carried with me for the rest of the journey a decided regret.----

(The major frowned darkly. "Why, this looks as if she would like to withdraw her promise! But let me see, there really has no promise passed between them.")

He glanced hurriedly over the following leaves. "Descriptions of travel--compositions," he muttered to himself. "Paris--variations upon Baedeker--the little goose begins to be tiresome--- Ah, here is something about her parents' grave--poor thing! And here----" He began to read again.)

---A few hours after our arrival we drove to the graveyard at Montmartre, an ugly, gloomy graveyard, bordering directly upon a business-street, so that the noise and bustle of the city sound deafeningly where the dead are reposing. The paths are as straight as if drawn by a ruler, and upon the graves lie wreaths of straw flowers or stiff immortelles. These durable decorations seem to me heartless,--as if the poor dead were to be provided for once for all, since it might be tiresome to visit them often.

My parents' grave lies a little apart from the broad centre path, under a knotty old juniper-tree.

I heaped it with flowers, and amid the fresh blossoms I laid the roses, now faded, which Harry gave me yesterday when we parted.

I was enchanted with Paris. My aunt was delighted with the shops. She spent all her time in them, and thought everything very reasonable. At the end of four days she had bought so many reasonable articles that she had to purchase a huge trunk in which to take them home, and she had scarcely any money left.

She was convinced that she must have made some mistake in her accounts, and she worked over them half through an entire night, but with no consoling result.

The upshot of it was that she wanted to go home immediately; but since the trip had been undertaken chiefly for my health and was to end in a visit to some sea-side resort, she wrote to my uncle, explaining the state of affairs--that is, of her finances--and asking for a subsidy.

My uncle sent the subsidy, but requested us to leave Paris as soon as possible, and to choose a modest seaside resort.

The next day we departed from Babylon.

After inquiring everywhere, and studying the guidebook attentively, my aunt finally resolved to go to St. Valery.

The evening was cold and windy when we reached the little town and drew up in the omnibus before the Hôtel de la Plage.

The season had not begun, and the hotel was not actually open, but it received us.

As no rooms were taken, all were placed at our disposal, and we chose three in the first story, one for my aunt, one for me, and one for our trunks.

The furniture, of crazy old mahogany, had evidently been bought of some dealer in second-hand furniture in Rouen, but the beds were extremely good, and the bed-linen, although "coarse as sacking," as Uncle Paul would have expressed it, was perfectly clean and white.

From our windows we looked out upon the sea and upon the little wooden hut where the safety-boat was kept, and also upon the little town park, about a hundred square yards in extent; upon the Casino, quite an imposing structure on the shore; upon the red pennons which, designating the bathing-place, made a brilliant show in the midst of the prevailing gray, and upon a host of whitewashed bath-houses waiting for the guests who had not yet arrived.

How indeed could they arrive? One had need to have come from Bohemia, not to go directly home, in such cold, damp weather as we had; but we wanted to get value from our expensive trip.

The Casino was no more open than the hotel, it was even in a decided *négligé*, but it was busily dressing. A swarm of painters and upholsterers were decorating it. The upholsterers hung the inside with crimson, the painters coloured the outside red and white.

The proprietor, a broad-shouldered young man answering to the high-sounding name of Raoul Donval, daily superintended the work of the--artists. He always wore a white cap with a broad black visor, and a stick in the pocket of his short jacket, and plum-coloured knickerbockers; and I think he considered himself very elegant.

They were draping and beautifying and painting our hotel too. Everything was being painted instead of scrubbed,--the stairs, the doors, the floors; everywhere the dirt was hidden beneath the same dull-red colour. Aunt Rosa declared that they seemed to her to be daubing the entire house with blood. Just at this time she was wont to make most ghastly comparisons, because, for lack of other literature, she was reading an historical romance in the *Petit Journal*.

She was in a far more melancholy mood than I at St. Valery. Since it had to be, I made up my mind to it, consoling myself with the reflection that I was just nineteen, and that there was plenty of time for fate, if so minded, to shape my destiny brilliantly. Unfortunately, my aunt had not this consolation, but, instead, the depressing consciousness of having given up Bayreuth. It was hard. I was very sorry for her, and did all that I could to amuse her.

I could always find something to laugh at in our visits to the empty Casino and in our walks through the town, but instead of cheering her my merriment distressed her. She had seen in the French journal which she studied faithfully every day an account of a sensitive trombone-player at the famous yearly festival at Neuilly who had broken his instrument over the head of an arrogant Englishman who had allowed himself to make merry over some detail of the festival. Therefore I could scarcely smile in the street without having my aunt twitch my sleeve and say,--

"For heaven's sake don't laugh at these Frenchmen!--remember that trombone at Neuilly."

During the first fortnight I had the whole shore, with the bath-houses and bathing-men, entirely to myself. It was ghastly! The icy temperature of the water seemed to bite into my flesh,

my teeth chattered, and the bather who held me by both my hands was as blue as his dress. Our mutual isolation had the effect of establishing a friendship between the bather and myself. He had formerly been a sailor, and had but lately returned from Tonquin; he told me much that was interesting about the war and the cholera. He was a good-looking fellow, with a fair complexion and a tanned face.

After my bath I ran about on the shore until I got warm, and then we breakfasted. My aunt did not bathe. She counted the days like a prisoner.

When the weather permitted, we made excursions into the surrounding country in a little wagon painted yellow, drawn by a shaggy donkey, which I drove myself. The donkey's name was Jeanne d'Arc,--which horrified my aunt,--and she had a young one six months old that ran after us as we drove along.

For more than two weeks we were the sole inmates of the Hôtel de la Plage. The manager of the establishment--who was likewise the head of the kitchen--drove to the station every day to capture strangers, but never brought any back.

I see him now,--short and enormously broad, with a triple or quadruple chin, sitting on the box beside the coachman, his hands on his thighs. He always wore sky-blue trousers, and a short coat buckled about him with a broad patent-leather belt. The chambermaid, who revered him, informed me that it was the dress of an English courier.

One day he brought back to the host, who daily awaited the guests, two live passengers,--an old woman and a young man.

The old woman was very poor, and took a garret room. She must have been beautiful formerly, and she looked very distinguished. She positively refused to write her name in the strangers' book. By chance we learned afterwards that she was a Comtesse d'Ivry, from Versailles, who had had great misfortunes. She had a passion for sunsets; every afternoon she had an arm-chair carried out on the shore, and sat there, wrapped in a thick black cloak, with her feet on a hot-water bottle, to admire the majestic spectacle. When it rained, she still persisted in going, and sat beneath a large ragged umbrella. Upon her return she usually sighed and told the host that the sunsets here were not nearly so fine as at Trouville,--appearing to think that this was his fault.

At last the weather brightened and it grew warm; the sun chased away the clouds, and allured a crowd of people to the lonely shore. And such people! I shudder to think of them.

We could endure the solitude, but such society was unendurable.

The next day I took my last bath.

On our return journey, at Cologne, an odd thing happened.

It was early, and I was sleepy. I was waiting for breakfast in melancholy mood, and was contemplating a huge pile of elegant hand-luggage which a servant in a very correct dark suit was superintending, when two ladies, followed by a maid, made their appearance, one fair, the other dark, from the dressing-room, which had been locked in our faces. In honour of these two princesses we had been obliged to remain unwashed. Ah, how fresh and neat and pretty they both looked! The dark one was by far the handsomer of the two, but she looked gloomy and discontented, spoke never a word, and after a hurried breakfast became absorbed in a newspaper. The fair one, on the contrary, a striking creature, with a very large hat and a profusion of passementerie on her travelling-cloak, talked a great deal and very loudly to a short, fat woman who was going with her little son to Frankfort, and who addressed the blonde as "Frau Countess."

The name of the short woman was Frau Kampe, and the name of the Countess, which I shortly learned, shall be told in due time. The Countess complained of the fatigue of travelling; Frau Kampe, in a sympathetic tone, declared that it was almost impossible to sleep in the railway-carriages at this time of year, they were so overcrowded. But the Countess rejoined with a laugh,-

"We had as much room as we wanted all the way; my husband secures that by his fees. He is much too lavish, as I often tell him. Since I have been travelling with him we have always had two railway-carriages, one for me and my maid, and the other for him and his cigars. It has been delightful."

"Even upon your wedding tour?" asked her handsome, dark companion, looking up from her reading.

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes, even upon our wedding tour," said the other. "We were a very prosaic couple, entirely independent of each other,--quite an aristocratic match!" And she laughed again with much self-satisfaction.

"Where is the Herr Count?" asked Frau Kampe. "I should like to make his acquaintance."

"Oh, he is not often to be seen; he is smoking on the platform somewhere. I scarcely ever meet

him; he never appears before the third bell has rung. A very aristocratic marriage, you see, Frau Kampe,--such a one as you read of."

The Countess's beautiful companion frowned, and the little Kampe boy grinned from ear to ear,--I could not tell whether it was at the aristocratic marriage or at the successful solution of an arithmetical problem which he had just worked out on the paper cover of one of Walter Scott's novels.

I must confess that I was curious to see the young husband who even upon his marriage journey had preferred the society of his cigars to that of his bride.

My aunt had missed the interesting conversation between Frau Kampe and her young patroness; she had rushed out to see the cathedral in the morning mist. I had manifested so little desire to join her in this artistic but uncomfortable enterprise that she had dispensed with my society. She now came back glowing with enthusiasm, and filled to overflowing with all sorts of information as to Gothic architecture.

Scarcely had she seated herself to drink the coffee which I poured out for her, when a tall young man, slightly stooping in his gait, and with a very attractive, delicately-chiselled face, entered. Was he not----? Well, whoever he was, he was the husband of the aristocratic marriage.

He exchanged a few words with the blonde Countess, and was about to leave the room, when his glance fell upon my aunt.

"Baroness, you here!--what a delight!" he exclaimed, approaching her hastily.

"Lato!" she almost screamed. She always talks a little loud away from home, which annoys me.

It was, in fact, our old friend Lato Treurenberg. Before she had been with him two minutes my aunt had forgotten all her prejudice against him since his marriage,--and, what was more, had evidently forgotten the marriage itself, for she whispered, leaning towards him with a sly twinkle of her eye and a nod in the direction of the ladies,--

"What noble acquaintances you have made!--from Frankfort, or Hamburg?"

My heart was in my mouth. No one except Aunt Rosamunda could have made such a blunder.

The words had hardly escaped her lips when she became aware of her mistake, and she was covered with confusion. Lato flushed scarlet. At that moment the departure of our train was announced, and Lato took a hurried leave of us. I saw him outside putting the ladies into a carriage, after which he himself got into another.

We travelled second-class, and therefore had the pleasure of sharing a compartment with the man-servant and maid of the Countess Lato Treurenberg.

My aunt took it all philosophically, while I, I confess, had much ado to conceal my ungrateful and mean irritation.

I succeeded, however; I do not think my aunt even guessed at my state of mind. She went to sleep; perhaps she dreamed of Cologne Cathedral. I--ah, I no longer dreamed; I had long since awakened from my dreams, and had rubbed my eyes and destroyed all my fine castles in the air.

The trip from which I had promised myself so much was over, and what had been effected? Nothing, save a more distinct appreciation of our straitened circumstances and an increase of my old gnawing discontent.

I recalled the delightful beginning of our trip, the long, dreamy summer days in Vienna, the evening at Schönbrunn. Again I saw about me the fragrant twilight, and heard, through the plash of fountains and the whispering of the linden leaves, the sound of distant military music. I saw Harry--good heavens! how plainly I saw him, with his handsome mouth, his large, serious eyes! How he used to look at me! And I recalled how beautiful the world had seemed to me then, so beautiful that I thought I could desire nothing better than to wander thus through life, leaning upon his arm in the odorous evening air, with the echo of distant military music in my ear.

Then ambition rose up before me and swept away all these lovely visions, showing me another picture,--Harry, borne down by cares, in narrow circumstances, his features sharpened by anxiety, with a pale, patient face, jesting bitterly, his uniform shabby, though carefully brushed. Ah, and should I not love him ten times more than now! he would always be the same noble, chivalric----

But I could not accept such a sacrifice from him. I could not; it would be unprincipled. Specious phrases! What has principle to do with it? I do not choose to be poor--no, I will not be poor, and therefore I am glad that we were interrupted at the right moment in Vienna. He cannot possibly imagine--ah, if he had imagined anything he would have written to me, and we have not had a line from him since we left him. He would have regretted it quite as much as I, if---

It never would occur to him to resign all his grandfather's wealth for the sake of my golden hair. Young gentlemen are not given to such romantic folly nowadays; though, to be sure, he is

not like the rest of them.

The result of all my reflections was an intense hatred for my grandfather, who tyrannized over me thus instead of allowing affairs to take their natural, delightful course; and another hatred, somewhat less intense, for the brewery, which had absorbed half of Uncle Paul's property,—that is, much more than would have been necessary to assure me a happy future. When I saw from the railway the brew-house chimney above the tops of the old lindens, I shook my fist at it.

My uncle was waiting for us at the station. He was so frankly rejoiced to have us back again that it cheered my heart. His eyes sparkled as he came to me after greeting my aunt. He gazed at me very earnestly, as if he expected to perceive some great and pleasant change in me, and then, putting his finger under my chin, turned my face from side to side. Suddenly he released me.

"You are even paler than you were before!" he exclaimed, turning away. He had expected the sea-bathing to work miracles.

"Do I not please you as I am, uncle dear?" I asked, putting my hand upon his arm. Then he kissed me; but I could see plainly that his pleasure was dashed.

Now we have been at home four days, and I am writing my memoirs, because I am tired of having nothing to do. It does not rain to-day; the sun is burning hot,—ah, how it parches the August grass! The harvest was poor, the rye-straw is short, and the grains of wheat are small. And everything was so promising in May! My uncle spends a great deal of time over his accounts.

August 8.

Something quite extraordinary has happened. We have a visitor, a cousin of Aunt Rosamunda's,—Baron Roderich Wenkendorf. He is a very amiable old gentleman, about forty-five years old. He interests himself in everything that interests me,—even in Carlyle's 'French Revolution,' only he cannot bear it. Moreover, he is a Wagnerite; that is his only disagreeable characteristic. Every day he plays duets with Aunt Rosamunda from the 'Götterdämmerung,' which makes Uncle Paul and Morl nervous. Besides, he paints, of course only for pleasure, but very ambitiously. Last year he exhibited one of his pictures in Vienna—Napoleon at St. Helena—no, Charles the Fifth in the cloister. I remember, he cannot endure the Corsican upstart. He declares that Napoleon had frightful manners. We had a dispute about it. We often quarrel; but he entertains me, he pleases me, and so, perhaps---

August 10.

It might be worth while to take it into consideration. For my sake he would take up his abode in Bohemia. I do not dislike him, and my aunt says that marry whom you will you can never get used to him until after marriage. Harry and I should always be just the same to each other; he would always be welcome as a brother in our home, of course. I cannot really see why people must marry because they love each other.

CHAPTER III.

AN ARRIVAL.

When the major reached this point in his niece's memoirs, he rubbed his forehead thoughtfully. "H'm!" he murmured; "why must people marry because they love each other? By Jove! On the whole, it is well that I now have some idea of what is going on in that insane little head." After this wise the major quieted his scruples as to the unpardonable indiscretion he had committed.

The reading of Zdena's extraordinary production had so absorbed his attention that he had failed to hear the approach of some heavy vehicle which had drawn up before the castle, or the rhythmic beat of the hoofs of two riding-horses. Now he was suddenly startled by a firm step to the accompaniment of a low jingling sound in the corridor outside his room-door, at which there came a knock.

"Come in!" he called out.

A young officer of hussars in a blue undress uniform entered.

"Harry! is it you?" the major exclaimed, cordially. "Let me have a look at you! What has put it into your head to drop down upon us so unexpectedly, like the *deus ex machinâ* in the fifth act of a melodrama?"

The young fellow blushed slightly. "I wanted to surprise you," he said, laughing, in some confusion.

"And you will stay a while with us? How long is your leave?"

"Six weeks."

"That's right. And you're glad to be at home once more?" said the major, smiling broadly, and rubbing his hands.

He seemed to his nephew to be rather *distract*, which he certainly was, for all the while he was thinking of matters of which no mention was made.

"My uncle has either been taking a glass too much or he has drawn the first prize in a lottery," Harry thought to himself as he said, aloud, "Hedwig has just come over, and Aunt Melanie."

"Ah, the Zriny: has she quartered herself upon you?" the major asked, with something of a drawl.

"I escorted her here from Vienna. Aunt Rosamunda deputed me to inform you of our relative's arrival, and to beg you to come immediately to the drawing-room."

"H'm, h'm!--I'll go, I'll go," murmured the major, and he left the room apparently not very well pleased. In the corridor he suddenly turned to his nephew, who was following at his heels. "Have you seen Zdena yet?" he asked, with a merry twinkle of his eye.

"N--o."

"Well, go find her."

"Where shall I look for her?"

"In the garden, in the honeysuckle arbour. She is posing for her elderly adorer that he may paint her as Zephyr, or Flora, or something of the kind."

"Her elderly adorer? Who is he?" Harry asked, with a frown, his voice sounding hard and sharp.

"A cousin of my wife's, Baron Wenkendorf is his name, an enormously rich old bachelor, and head over ears in love with our girl. He calls himself a painter, in spite of his wealth, and he has induced the child to stand for some picture for him. He makes love to her, I suppose, while she poses."

"And she--what has she to say to his homage?" asked Harry, feeling as if some one were choking him.

"Oh, she's tolerably condescending. She does not object to being made love to a little. He is an agreeable man in spite of his forty-six years, and it certainly would be an excellent match."

As the major finished his sentence with an expression of countenance which Harry could not understand, the paths of the two men separated. Harry hurried down into the garden; the major walked along the corridor to the drawing-room door.

"H'm! I have warmed him up," the major said to himself; "it will do no harm if they quarrel a little, those two children: it will bring the little goose to her senses all the sooner. There is only *one* healthy solution for the entire problem. You----!" he shook his forefinger at the empty air. "Why must people marry because they love each other? Only wait, you ultrasensible little goose; I will remind you of that one of these days."

CHAPTER IV.

A QUARREL.

Meanwhile, Harry has rushed out into the garden. He is very restless, very warm, very much agitated. It never occurs to him that his uncle has been chaffing him a little; he cannot suspect that the major has any knowledge of his sentiments.

"She cannot be so worthless!" he consoles himself by reflecting, while his eyes search for her in the distance.

With this thought filling his mind, the young officer hurries on. He does not find her at first; she is not in the honeysuckle arbour.

The sultriness of the August afternoon weighs upon the dusty vegetation of the late summer. The leaves of the trees and shrubs droop wearily; the varied luxuriance of bloom is past; the first crop of roses has faded, the next has not yet arrived at maturity. Only a few red verbenas and zinnias gleam forth from the dull green monotony.

At a turn of the path Harry suddenly starts, and pauses,--he has found what he is looking for.

Directly in the centre of the hawthorn-bordered garden-path there is an easel weighted with an enormous canvas, at which, working away diligently, stands a gentleman, of whom Harry can see nothing but a slightly round-shouldered back, the fluttering ribbons of a Scotch cap set on the back of a head covered with short gray hair, and a gigantic palette projecting beyond the left elbow; while at some distance from the easel, clearly defined against the green background, stands a tall, graceful, maidenly figure draped in a loose, fantastic robe, her arms full of wild poppies, a large hat wreathed with vine-leaves on her small head, her golden-brown hair loose upon her shoulders,--Zdena! Her eyes meet Harry's: she flushes crimson,--the poppies slip from her arms and fall to the ground.

"You here!" she murmurs, confusedly, staring at him. She can find no more kindly words of welcome, and her face expresses terror rather than joyful surprise, as a far less sharp-sighted lover than Harry Leskjewitsch could not fail to observe.

He makes no reply to her words, but says, bluntly, pointing to the artist at the easel, "Be kind enough to introduce me."

With a choking sensation in her throat, and trembling lips, Zdena stammers the names of her two adorers, the old one and the young one. The gentlemen bow,--Harry with angry formality, Baron Wenkendorf with formal amiability.

"Aunt Rosa tells me to ask you to come to the drawing-room," Harry says, dryly.

"Have any guests arrived?" asks Zdena.

"Only my sister and Aunt Zriny."

"Oh, then I must dress myself immediately!" she exclaims, and before Harry is aware of it she has slipped past him and into the house.

Baron Wenkendorf pushes his Scotch cap a little farther back from his forehead, which gives his face a particularly amazed expression, and gazes with the same condescending benevolence, first at the vanishing maidenly figure, and then at the picture on the easel; after which he begins to put up his painting-materials. Harry assists him to do so, but leaves the making of polite remarks entirely to the "elderly gentleman." He is not in the mood for anything of the kind. He sees everything at present as through dark, crimson glass.

Although Zdena's distress arises from a very different cause from her cousin's, it is none the less serious.

"Oh, heavens!" she thinks to herself, as she hurries to her room to arrange her dishevelled hair, "why must he come before I have an answer ready? He surely will not insist upon an immediate decision! It would be terrible! Anything but a forced decision; that is the worst thing in the world."

Such, however, does not seem to be the opinion of her hot-blooded cousin. When, a quarter of an hour afterwards, she goes out into the corridor and towards the drawing-room door, she observes a dark figure standing in the embrasure of a window. The figure turns towards her, then approaches her.

"Harry! ah!" she exclaims, with a start; "what are you doing here? Are you waiting for anybody?"

"Yes," he replies, with some harshness, "for you!"

"Ah!" And, without looking at him, she hurries on to the door of the drawing-room.

"There is no one there," he informs her; "they have all gone to the summer-house in the garden. Wenkendorf proposes to read aloud the libretto of 'Parzifal.'" He pauses.

"And did you stay here to tell me this?" she stammers, trying to pass him, on her way to the steps leading into the garden. "It was very kind of you; you seem destined to play the part of sheep-dog to-day, to drive the company together."

They go into the garden, and the buzz of voices reaches their ears from the summer-house. They have turned into a shady path, above which arches the foliage of the shrubs on either side. Suddenly Harry pauses, and seizing his cousin's slender hands in both his own, he gazes steadily and angrily into her eyes, saying, in a suppressed voice,--

"Zdena, how can you hurt me so?"

Her youthful blood pulsates almost as fiercely as does his own; now, when the moment for an explanation has come, and can no longer be avoided, now, one kind word from him, and all the barriers which with the help of pure reason she has erected to shield her from the insidious sweetness of her dreams will crumble to dust. But Harry does not speak this word: he is far too agitated to speak it. Instead of touching her heart, his harshness irritates her pride. Throwing back her head, she darts an angry glance at him from her large eyes.

"I do not know what you mean."

"I mean that you are letting that old coxcomb make love to you," he murmurs, angrily.

She lifts her eyebrows, and replies, calmly, "Yes!"

The young officer continues to gaze searchingly into her face.

"You are thoughtless," he says, slowly, with emphasis. "In your eyes Wenkendorf is an old man; but he does not think himself so old as you think him, and--and----" Suddenly, his forced composure giving way, he bursts forth: "At the least it is ridiculous! it is silly to behave as you are doing!"

In the entire dictionary Harry could have found no word with which to describe Zdena's conduct that would have irritated her more than "silly." If he had called her unprincipled, devilish, odious, cruel, she could have forgiven him; but "silly!"--that word she never can forgive; it makes her heart burn and smart as salt irritates an open wound.

"I should like to know by what right you call me thus to account!" she exclaims, indignantly.

"By what right?" he repeats, beside himself. "Can you ask that?"

She taps the gravel of the pathway defiantly with her foot and is obstinately silent.

"What did you mean by your treatment of me in Vienna? what did you mean by all your loving looks and kind words? what did you mean when you--on the evening before you left----"

Zdena's face is crimson, her cheeks and ears burn with mortification.

"We grew up together like brother and sister," she murmurs. "I have always considered you as a brother----"

"Ah, indeed! a brother!" His pulses throb wildly; his anger well-nigh makes him forget himself. Suddenly an ugly idea occurs to him,--an odious suspicion. "Perhaps you were not aware there in Vienna that by a marriage with you I should resign my brilliant prospects?"

They confront each other, stiff, unbending, both angry, each more ready to offend than to conciliate.

Around them the August heat broods over the garden; the bushes, the flowers, the shrubbery, all cast black shadows upon the smooth-shaven, yellowing grass, where here and there cracks in the soil are visible. Everything is quiet, but in the distance can be heard the gardener filling his large watering-can at the pump, and the jolting along the road outside the garden of the heavy harvest-wagons laden with grain.

"Did you know it then?" he asks again, more harshly, more contemptuously.

Of course she knew it, quite as well as she knows it now; but what use is there in her telling him so, when he asks her about it in such a tone?

Instead of replying, she frowns haughtily and shrugs her shoulders.

For one moment more he stands gazing into her face; then, with a bitter laugh, he turns from her and strides towards the summer-house.

"Harry!" she calls after him, in a trembling undertone, but his blood is coursing too hotly in his veins--he does not hear her. Although he is one of the softest-hearted of men, he is none the less one of the most quick-tempered and obstinate.

We leave it to the reader to judge whether the major would have been very well satisfied with

this result of his cunning diplomacy.

Whilst the two young people have been thus occupied in playing at hide-and-seek with their emotions and sentiments, the little summer-house, where the reading was to be held, has been the scene of a lively dispute. Countess Zriny and Baron Wenkendorf have made mutual confession of their sentiment with regard to Wagner.

The Countess is a vehement opponent of the prophet of Bayreuth, in the first place because in her youth she was a pupil of Cicimara's and consequently cannot endure the 'screaming called singing' introduced by Wagner; secondly, because Wagner's operas always give her headache; and thirdly, because she has noticed that his operas are sure to exercise an immoral influence upon those who hear them.

Wenkendorf, on the contrary, considers Wagner a great moral reformer, the first genius of the century in Germany,--Bismarck, of course, excepted. As he talks he holds in his hand the thick volume of Wagner's collected librettos, with his forefinger on the title-page of 'Parzifal,' impatiently awaiting the moment when he can begin to read aloud.

Hitherto, since the Countess and Wenkendorf are both well-bred people, their lively dispute has been conducted in rather a humorous fashion, but finally Wenkendorf suggests a most reprehensible and, in the eyes of the Countess, unpardonable idea.

"Whatever may be thought of Wagner's work, it cannot be denied," he says, with an oratorical flourish of his hand, "that he is at the head of the greatest musical revolution ever known; that he has, so to speak, delivered music from conventional Catholicism, overladen as it is with all sorts of silly old-world superstition. He is, if I may so express myself, the Luther of music."

At the word 'Luther,' uttered in raised tones, the bigoted Countess nearly faints away. In her eyes, Luther is an apostate monk who married a nun, a monster whom she detests.

"Oh, if you so compare him, Wagner is indeed condemned!" she exclaims, flushing with indignation, and trembling through all her mass of flesh.

At this moment Zdena and her cousin enter. Countess Zriny feels it her duty to embrace the girl patronizingly. Hedwig says something to her about her new gown.

"Did you get it in Paris?" she asks. "I saw one like it in Vienna last summer,--but it is very pretty. You carry yourself much better than you used to, Zdena,--really a great improvement!--a great improvement!"

At last all are seated. Baron Wenkendorf clears his throat, and opens the portly volume.

"Now we can begin," Frau Rosamunda observes.

The Baron begins. He reads himself into a great degree of enthusiasm, and is just pronouncing the words,--

"Then after pain's drear night
Comes morning's glorious light;
Before me gleams
 Brightly the sacred wave,
The blessed daylight beams,
 From night of pain to save
Gawain----"

when Frau Rosamunda, who has been rummaging in her work-basket, rises.

"What is the matter, Rosamunda?" the Baron asks, impatiently. He is the only one who addresses her by her beautiful baptismal name unmutated.

"Excuse me, my dear Roderich, but I cannot find my thimble. Zdena, be so kind as to go and get me my thimble."

While Zdena has gone to look for it, Frau von Leskjewitsch turns to her cousin, who is rather irritated by this interruption, and exclaims, "Very interesting!--oh, extremely interesting! Do you not think so?" turning for confirmation of her opinion to the other listeners. But the other listeners do not respond. Countess Zriny, who, with her hands as usual encased in Swedish gloves, is knitting with thick, wooden needles something brown for the poor, only drops her double chin majestically upon her breast, and Harry--usually quite unsurpassable in the well-bred art of being bored with elegance and decorum--is tugging angrily at his moustache.

Zdena shortly returns with the missing thimble. The reading begins afresh, and goes quite smoothly for a time; Wenkendorf is satisfied with his audience.

"Oh, wonderful and sacred one!" he is reading, with profound emotion.

Everyone is listening eagerly. Hark! A scratching noise, growing louder each minute, and finally ending in a pounding at the summer-house door, arouses the little company from its rapt attention. A smile lights up Frau Rosamunda's serene features:

"It is Morl. Let him in, Harry." Morl, the hostess's black poodle, is admitted, goes round the circle, laying his paw confidently upon the knee of each member of it in turn, is petted and caressed by his mistress, and finally, after he has vainly tried to oust the Countess Zriny from the corner of the sofa which he considers his own special property, establishes himself, with a low growl, in the other corner of that piece of furniture.

Wenkendorf, meanwhile, drums the march from 'Tannhäuser' softly on the cover of his thick book and frowns disapprovingly. Harry observes his annoyance with satisfaction, watching him the while attentively, and reflecting on the excellent match in view of which Zdena has forgotten her fleeting attachment for the playmate of her childhood.

"A contemptible creature!" he says to himself: "any man is good enough to afford her amusement. Who would have thought it? Fool that I was! I'm well out of it,--yes, really well out of it."

And whilst he thus seriously attempts to persuade himself that, under the circumstances, nothing could be more advantageous for him than this severance of all ties with his beautiful, fickle cousin, his heart burns like fire in his breast. He has never before felt anything like this torture. His glance wanders across to where Zdena sits sewing, with bent head and feverish intentness, upon a piece of English embroidery.

The reading is interrupted again,--this time by Krupitschka, who wants more napkins for afternoon tea. Wenkendorf has to be assured with great emphasis that they all think the text of 'Parzifal' extremely interesting before he can be induced to open the book again. Suddenly the gravel outside crunches beneath approaching footsteps. The major's voice is heard, speaking in courteous tones, and then another, strange voice, deep and guttural. The summer-house door is opened.

"A surprise, Rosel," the major explains. "Baroness Paula!"

The first to go forward and welcome the young lady cordially is Harry.

CHAPTER V.

BARONESS PAULA.

The unexpected entrance of the famous beauty produces two important results,--the final cessation of the reading of 'Parzifal,' and a temporary reconciliation between Wenkendorf and Countess Zriny.

Whilst Frau Rosamunda receives her guest, not without a degree of formal reserve, the two aforesaid worthy and inquisitive individuals retire to a corner to consult together as to where these Harfinks come from, to whom they are related, the age of their patent of nobility, and where they got their money.

Since neither knows much about the Harfinks, their curiosity is ungratified. Meanwhile, Baroness Paula, lounging in a garden-chair beside the majestic hostess, chatters in a lively fashion upon every conceivable topic, as much at her ease as if she had been a daily guest at Zirkow for years. Her full voice is rather loud, her fluent vocabulary astounding. She wears a green Russia linen gown with Turkish embroidery on the skirt and a Venetian necklace around her throat, with an artistically-wrought clasp in front of her closely-fitting waist. The effect of her cosmopolitan toilet is considerably enhanced by a very peaked Paris bonnet--all feathers--and a pair of English driving-gloves. She has come in her pony-carriage, which she drives herself. Not taking into account her dazzling toilet, Paula is certainly a pretty person,--very fully developed and well grown, with perhaps too short a waist and arms a trifle too stout. Her features are regular, but her face is too large, and its tints of red and white are not sufficiently mingled; her lips are too full, the dimples in her cheeks are too deep when she smiles. Her hair is uncommonly beautiful,--golden, with a shimmer of Titian red.

Her manner corresponds with her exterior. There is not a trace of maidenly reserve about her. Her self-satisfaction is impregnable. She talks freely of things of which young girls do not usually talk, and knows things which young girls do not usually know.

She is clever and well educated,--left school with honours and listened to all possible university lectures afterwards. She scatters about Latin quotations like an old professor, and talks about everything,--the new battle panorama in Vienna, the latest greenroom scandal in Pesth, the most recent scientific hypothesis, and the last interesting English divorce case. One cannot help feeling that she has brought a certain life into the dead-and-alive little company which had failed to be enlivened by the reading of 'Parzifal.'

"*Quelle type!*" Wenkendorf remarks to Countess Zriny.

"*Épouvantable!*" she whispers.

"*Épouvantable!*" he responds, staring meanwhile at the brilliant apparition. "Her figure is not bad, though," he adds.

"Not bad?" the Countess repeats, indignantly. "Why, she has the figure of a country bar-maid; involuntarily one fancies her in short petticoats, with her arms full of beer-mugs."

The Baron shakes his head, as if reflecting that there is nothing so very unattractive in the image of the young lady in the costume of a bar-maid; at the same time, however, he declares with emphasis that these Harfinks seem to be odious *canaille*, which, although it is perhaps his conviction, does not hinder him from admiring Paula.

All the gentlemen present admire her, and all three, the major, the Baron, and Harry, are soon grouped about her, while the ladies at the other end of the room converse,--that is, make disparaging remarks with regard to the Baroness Paula.

Harry, of the three men, is most pressing in his attentions, which amount almost to devotion. Whatever he may whisper to her she listens to with the unblushing ease which makes life so smooth for her. Sometimes she represses him slightly, and anon provokes his homage.

The ladies hope for a while, but in vain, that she will go soon. She is pleased to take a cup of afternoon tea, after which all return to the house, where at Harry's request she makes a display of her musical acquirements.

First she plays, with extreme force and much use of the pedals, upon the venerable old piano, unused to such treatment, even from the major, the ride of the Valkyrias, after which she sings a couple of soprano airs from 'Tannhäuser.'

Harry admires her splendid method; Countess Zriny privately stops her ears with a little cotton-wool. Hour after hour passes, and Krupitschka finally announces supper. Baroness Paula begins hurriedly to put on her driving-gloves, but when Frau Leskjewitsch, with rather forced courtesy, invites her to stay to supper, she replies, "With the greatest pleasure."

And now the supper is over. Harry's seat, meanwhile, has been next to Paula's, and he has continued to pay her extravagant compliments, which he ought not to have done; and, moreover, without eating a morsel, he has drunk glass after glass of the good old Bordeaux of which the major is so proud. All this has produced a change in him. The gnawing pain at his heart is lulled to rest; his love for Zdena and his quarrel with her seem relegated to the far past. For the present, here is this luxuriant beauty, with her flow of talk and her Titian hair. Without being intoxicated, the wine has mounted to his brain; his limbs are a little heavy; he feels a pleasant languor steal over him; everything looks rather more vague and delightful than usual; instead of a severe, exacting beauty beside him, here is this wonderful creature, with her dazzling complexion and her green, naiad-like eyes.

Countess Zriny and Hedwig have already ordered their old-fashioned coach and have started for home. Harry's horses--his own and his groom's--are waiting before the entrance.

It is ten o'clock,--time for bed at Zirkow. Frau Rosamunda rubs her eyes; Zdena stands, unheeded and weary, in one of the window embrasures in the hall, looking out through the antique, twisted grating upon the brilliant August moonlight. Paula is still conversing with the gentlemen; she proposes a method for exterminating the phylloxera, and has just formulated a scheme for the improvement of the Austrian foundling asylums.

They are waiting for her pony-carriage to appear, but it does not come. At last, the gardener's boy, who is occasionally promoted to a footman's place, comes, quite out of breath, to inform his mistress that Baroness Paula's groom is in the village inn, so drunk that he cannot walk across the floor, and threatening to fight any one who interferes with him.

"Very unpleasant intelligence," says Paula, without losing an atom of her equanimity. "There is nothing left to do, then, but to drive home without him. I do not need him; he sits behind me, and is really only a conventional encumbrance, nothing more. Good-night, Baroness! Thanks, for the charming afternoon. Goodnight! good-night! Now that the ice is broken, I trust we shall be good neighbours." So saying, she goes out of the open hall door.

Frau Rosamunda seems to have no objections to her driving without an escort to Dobrotschau, which is scarcely three-quarters of an hour's drive from Zirkow, and even the major apparently considers this broad-shouldered and vigorous young woman to be eminently fitted to make her

way in the world alone. But Harry interposes.

"You don't mean to drive home alone?" he exclaims. "Well, I admire your courage,--as I admire every thing else about you," he adds, *sotto voce*, and with a Blight inclination of his head towards her,--"but I cannot permit it. You might meet some drunken labourer and be exposed to annoyance. Do me the honour to accept me as your escort,--that is, allow me to take the place of your useless groom."

"By no means!" she exclaims. "I never could forgive myself for giving you so much trouble. I assure you, I am perfectly able to take care of myself."

"On certain occasions even the most capable and clever of women lose their capacity to judge," Harry declares. "Be advised this time!" he implores her, as earnestly as though he were praying his soul out of purgatory. "My groom will accompany us. He must, of course, take my horse to Dobrotschau. Have no scruples."

As if it would ever have occurred to Baroness Paula to have "scruples"! Oh, Harry!

"If you really would be so kind then, Baron Harry," she murmurs, tenderly.

"Thank God, she has gone at last!" sighs Frau Rosamunda, as she hears the light wagon rolling away into the night. "At last!"

CHAPTER VI.

ENTRAPPED.

Before Harry seated himself beside the robust Paula in the pony-carriage, a slender little hand was held out to him, and a pale little face, half sad, half pouting, looked longingly up at him.

He saw neither the hand nor the face. Oh, the pity of it!

The night is sultry and silent. The full moon shines in a cloudless, dark-blue sky. Not a breath of air is stirring; the leaves of the tall poplars, casting coal-black shadows on the white, dusty highway, are motionless.

The harvest has been partly gathered in; sometimes the moonlight illumines the bare fields with a yellowish lustre; in other fields the sheaves are stacked in pointed heaps, and now and then a field of rye is passed, a plain of glimmering, silvery green, still uncut. The bearded stalks stand motionless with bowed heads, as if overtaken by sleep. From the distance comes the monotonous rustle of the mower's scythe; there is work going on even thus far into the night.

The heavy slumberous air has an effect upon Harry; his breath comes slowly, his veins tingle.

Ten minutes have passed, and he has not opened his lips. Paula Harfink looks at him now and then with a keen glance.

She is twenty-seven years old, and, although her life has been that of a perfectly virtuous woman of her class, existence no longer holds any secrets for her. Endowed by nature with intense curiosity, which has been gradually exalted into a thirst for knowledge, she has read everything that is worth reading in native and foreign modern literature, scientific and otherwise, and she is consequently thoroughly conversant with the world in which she lives.

Harry's exaggerated homage during the afternoon has suggested the idea that he contemplates a marriage with her. That other than purely sentimental reasons have weight with him in this respect she thinks highly probable, but there is nothing offensive to her in the thought. She knows that, in spite of her beauty, she must buy a husband; why then should she not buy a husband whom she likes?

Nothing could happen more opportunely than this drive in the moonlight. She is quite sure of bringing the affair to a satisfactory conclusion.

Click-clack--the ponies' hoofs beat the dusty road in monotonous rhythm, tossing light silvery clouds of dust into the moonlight. Harry is still silent, when--a plump hand is laid upon his arm.

"Please," Paula murmurs, half laughing, and handing him the reins, "drive for me. The ponies are so fresh to-night, they almost pull my hands off."

Harry bows, the ponies shake their manes, snort proudly, and increase their speed, seeming to feel a sympathetic hand upon the reins.

"And I fancied I could drive!" Paula says, with a laugh; "it is a positive pleasure to see you handle the reins."

"But such toys as these ponies!" he remarks, with a rather impatient protest.

"Can you drive four-in-hand?" she asks, bluntly.

"Yes, and five-in-hand, or six-in-hand, for that matter," he replies.

"Of course! How stupid of me to ask! Did you not drive five-in-hand on the Prater, three years ago on the first of May? Three chestnuts and two bays, if I remember rightly."

"Yes; you certainly have an admirable memory!" Harry murmurs, flattered.

"Not for everything," she declares, eagerly; "I never can remember certain things. For instance, I never can remember the unmarried name of Peter the Great's mother."

"She was a Narischkin, I believe," says Harry, who learned the fact on one occasion when some foolish Narischkin was boasting of his imperial connections.

Heaven knows what induces him to make a display to Paula of his historical knowledge. He usually suppresses everything in that direction which he owes to his good memory, as a learned marriageable girl will hold her tongue for fear of scaring away admirers. Harry thinks it beneath his dignity to play the cultured officer. He leaves that to the infantry.

"You distance me in every direction," Paula says; "but as a whip you inspire me with the most respect. I could not take my eyes off your turn-out that day in the Prater. How docile and yet how spirited those five creatures were under your guidance! And you sat there holding the reins with as much indifference apparently as if they had been your shake at a state ceremony. I cannot understand how you contrive to keep the reins of a five-in-hand disentangled."

"I find it much more difficult to understand how a man can play the guitar," Harry says, dryly.

Paula laughs, though with a sense of vexation at being still so far from the attainment of her purpose. She takes off her tall hat, tosses it carelessly into the seat behind them, and slowly pulls the gloves off her white hands.

"That is refreshing!" she says, and then is silent. For the nonce it is her wisest course.

Harry's eyes seek her face, then take in her entire figure, and then again rest upon her face. The moon is shining with a hard, bluish brilliancy, almost like that of an electric light, and it brings into wondrous relief the girl's mature beauty. Its intense brightness shimmers about her golden hair; the red and white of her complexion blend in a dim, warm pallor. Her white hands rest in her lap as she leans back among the cushions of the phaeton.

Click-clack--click-clack--the hoofs of the horses fly over the smooth, hard road; duller and less regular grows the beat of the horses' hoofs behind the wagon,--of Harry's steed and that of his groom.

The fields of grain have vanished. They are driving now through a village,--a silent village, where every one is asleep. The dark window-panes glisten in the moonlight; the shadows of the pointed roofs form a black zigzag on the road, dividing it into two parts,--one dark, one light. Only behind one window shines a candle; perhaps a mother is watching there beside a sick or dying child. The candle-light, with its yellow gleam, contrasts strangely with the bluish moonlight. A dog bays behind a gate; otherwise, all is quiet.

And now the village lies behind them,--a chaos of black roofs, whitewashed walls, and dark lindens. To the right and left are pasture-lands, where countless wild chamomile-flowers glitter white and ghostly among the grass, in the midst of which rises a rude wooden crucifix. The pungent fragrance of the chamomile-flowers mingles with the odour of the dust of the road.

Then the pastures vanish, with the chamomile-flowers and the oppressive silence. A forest extends on either side of the road,--a forest which is never silent, where even in so quiet a night as this the topmost boughs murmur dreamily. It sounds almost like the dull plaint of human souls, imprisoned in these ancient pines,--the souls of men who aspired too high in life, seeking the way to the stars which gleamed so kindly when admired from afar, but which fled like glittering will-o'-the-wisps from those who would fain approach them.

The moonlight seems to drip down the boles of the monarchs of the wood like molten silver, to lie here and there upon the underbrush around their feet. A strong odour rises from the warm woodland earth,--the odour of dead leaves, mingling deliciously with all other forest fragrance.

"How wonderful!" Paula whispers.

"Yes, it is beautiful," says Harry; and again his eyes seek the face of his companion.

"And do you know what is still more beautiful?" she murmurs. "To feel protected, safe--to know that some one else will think for you."

The road grows rough; the wheels jolt over the stones; the little carriage sways from side to side. Paula clutches Harry's arm. Her waving hair brushes his cheek; it thrills him. She starts back from him.

"Pardon me," she murmurs, as if mortified.

"Pardon me, Baroness," he says. "I had no idea that the forest-road was so rough; it is the shortest. Did you not come by it to Zirkow?"

"No."

"You ought to have warned me."

"I had forgotten it."

Again the wheels creak; tire ponies snort their dissatisfaction, the little vehicle sways, and Paula trembles.

"I am afraid it will be rougher yet," says Harry. "How stupid of me not to have thought of it! There!--the mud is really deep. Who could have supposed it in this drought? We are near the Poacher's ditch: I can perceive the swampy odour in the air."

"The Poacher's ditch?" Paula repeats, in a low tone. "Is that the uncanny place where the will-o'-the-wisps dance?"

"Are you afraid?"

"Yes."

"So brave an Amazon--afraid?"

"Yes, for the first time in my life. I do not know what has come over me," she whispers.

"A poor compliment for me!" he says, then pauses and looks at her.

She turns away her head as if she were blushing.

The tall pines crowd closer and closer on either side of the road; the strip of moon-lit sky grows narrower overhead; the damp odour of decaying vegetation poisons the air. The gloom is intense, the moonbeams cannot find their way hither. In particular the road and the lower portion of the tree-trunks are veiled in deep shade. A tiny blue flame flickers up from the ground, dances among the trees,--then another--and another---

"Ah!" Paula screams and clings like a maniac to Harry. He puts his arm round her, and soothes her, half laughing the while. Did his lips actually seek hers? A sudden, lingering kiss bewilders him, like the intoxicating perfume of a flower.

It lasts but a second, and he has released her.

"Forgive me!" he cries, distressed, confused.

Does she really not understand him? At all events she only shakes her head at his words, and murmurs, "Forgive?--what is there to forgive? It came so unexpectedly. I had no idea that you loved me, Harry."

His cheeks burn. The forest has vanished, the road is smooth; click-clack--the ponies' hoofs fly through the dust, and behind comes the irregular thud of eight other hoofs along the road. Harry looks round, and sees the groom, whom he had forgotten.

The dim woodland twilight has been left far behind; the moon floods the landscape with silvery splendour. All is silent around; not a leaf stirs; only the faint, dying murmur of the forest is audible for a few moments.

Ten minutes later Harry draws up before the Dobrotschau castle. "You will come to see mamma to-morrow?" Paula whispers, pressing her lover's hand. But Harry feels as if he could annihilate her, himself, and the whole world.

CHAPTER VII.

AN INVITATION.

"My dear Baroness,--

"Will you and all your family give us the pleasure of your company at dinner on Sunday next, at six o'clock? We wish to surprise you with the revelation of a secret that will, we think, interest you.

"I hear you have a friend with you. It would, of course, be an added pleasure if Baron Wenkendorf would join us on Sunday.

"Hoping for a favourable reply, I am

"Sincerely yours,

"EMILIE HARFINK."

This note the Baroness Leskjewitsch takes from an envelope smelling of violets and adorned with an Edelweiss, and reads aloud in a depressed tone to her husband, her niece, and her cousin, all of whom listen with a more or less contemptuous expression of countenance.

Not that the note is in itself any more awkward and pretentious than other notes of invitation,--no; but the fact that it comes from Baroness Harfink is quite sufficient to make the Zirkow circle suspicious and ironical.

Three days have passed since the afternoon when Harry and Zdena quarrelled, and Zdena has had time thoroughly to repent her experiment.

The little company is assembled at the breakfast-table in a small summer-house whence there is a view of a tiny fountain leaping about a yard into the air from an oval basin.

Frau Rosamunda thinks the view of this fountain refreshing; the major despises the plaything, calls this breakfast-arbour the "wash-house," or, when he means to be particularly disagreeable, "Wash-Basin Hall," assuming the attitude, as he so designates it, of a kangaroo,--his elbows pressed to his sides, the palms of his hands turned outwards,--and availing himself of his most elegant German accent, which is unfortunately rather unnatural.

"Surprise us? What surprise can the Baroness Harfink prepare for us in which we shall take any interest?" Frau Rosamunda says, musingly, laying the note down beside her plate.

"Oh, leave me out! She knows that you are prone to curiosity, and she is doing what she can to attract you to her house," the major declares. "The 'surprise' is the bit of cheese in the Dobrotschau mouse-trap,--that is all. It may be a new service of old china, or some Japanese rug with golden monsters and chimeras sprawling about on it."

"No; there is a tone of exultation about the note which indicates something far grander," says Frau Rosamunda, thoughtfully, buttering a piece of bread. "I rather think there is a new son-in-law to the fore."

"H'm! Fräulein Paula's betrothal would certainly be a matter of special importance to us," the major says, contemptuously. "Perhaps it might make Harry ill. He made violent love to her the other day!" and the old cuirassier glances at Zdena. She is sipping a cup of tea, however, and her face cannot be seen.

"I thought perhaps," Frau Rosamunda observes, "that Harry might----"

"No, Rosa. Your genius is really too great," the major interrupts her, "if you can fancy for a moment that Harry meant anything serious by his attentions to that village bar-maid."

Zdena has put down her teacup; her delicate nostrils quiver disdainfully, her charming mouth expresses decided scorn. How could Harry suppose----? Nonsense!

"Well, stranger things have come to pass," observes Frau Rosamunda, sagely. "Do not forget that Lato Treurenberg has married into the Harfink family."

"Oh, he--he was in debt--h'm!--at least his father was in debt," the major explains. "That is entirely different. But a man like Harry would never risk his colossal inheritance from his uncle for the sake of Paula Harfink. If it were for some one else, he might do so; but that red-cheeked dromedary--ridiculous!"

"I really do not understand you. You seemed perfectly devoted to her the other day," rejoins

Frau Rosamunda. "You all languished at her feet,--even you too, Roderich."

Baron Wenkendorf looks up from a pile of letters and papers which he has been sorting.

"What is the subject under discussion?" he asks. Dressed in the extreme of fashion, in a light, summer suit, a coloured shirt with a very high collar, a thin, dark-blue cravat with polka-dots, and the inevitable Scotch cap, with fluttering ribbons at the back of the neck, he would seem much more at home, so far as his exterior is concerned, on the shore at Trouville, or in a magnificent park of ancient oaks with a feudal castle in the background, than amidst the modest Zirkow surroundings. He suspects this himself, and, in order not to produce a crushing effect where he is, he is always trying to display the liveliest interest in all the petty details of life at Zirkow. "What is the subject under discussion?" he asks, with an amiable smile.

"Oh, the Harfink."

"Still?" says Wenkendorf, lifting his eyebrows ironically. "The young lady's ears must burn. She seems to me to have been tolerably well discussed during the last three days."

"I merely observed that you were all fire and flame for her while she was here," Frau Rosamunda persists, "and that consequently I do not understand why you now criticise her so severely."

"The impression produced upon men by that kind of woman is always more dazzling than when it is lasting," says the major.

"H'm!--she certainly is a very beautiful person, but--h'm!--not a lady," remarks Wenkendorf; and his clear, full voice expresses the annoyance which it is sure to do whenever conversation touches upon the mushroom growth of modern *parvenues*. "Who are these Harfinks, after all?"

"People who have made their own way to the front," growls the major.

"How?"

"By good luck, industry, and assurance," replies the major. "Old Harfink used to go regularly to his work every morning, with his pickaxe on his shoulder; he slowly made his way upward, working in the iron-mines about here; then he married a wealthy baker's daughter, and gradually absorbed all the business of the district. He was very popular. I can remember the time when every one called him 'Peter.' Next he was addressed as 'Sir,' and it came to be the fashion to offer him your hand, but before giving you his he used to wipe it on his coat-tail. He was comical, but a very honest fellow, a plain man who never tried to move out of his proper sphere. I think we never grudged him his wealth, because it suited him so ill, and because he did not know what to do with it." And the major reflectively pours a little rum into his third cup of tea.

"I do not object to that kind of *parvenu*," says Wenkendorf. "The type is an original one. But there is nothing to my mind more ridiculous than the goldfish spawned in a muddy pond suddenly fancying themselves unable to swim in anything save eau de cologne. H'm, h'm! And that plain, honest fellow was, you tell me, the father of the lovely Paula?"

"God forbid!" exclaims the major, bursting into a laugh at the mere thought.

"You have a tiresome way of beginning far back in every story you tell, Paul," Frau Rosamunda complains. "You begin all your pedigrees with Adam and Eve."

"And you have a detestable habit of interrupting me," her husband rejoins, angrily. "If you had not interrupted me I should have finished long ago."

"Oh, yes, we all know that. But first you would have given us a description of old Harfink's boots!" Frau Rosamunda persists.

"They really were very remarkable boots," the major declares, solemnly. "They always looked as if, instead of feet, they had a peck of onions inside them."

"I told you so. Now comes the description of his cap," sighs Frau Rosamunda.

"And the lovely Paula's origin retreats still further into obscurity," Wenkendorf says, with well-bred resignation.

"She is old Harfink's great-grand-daughter," says Zdena, joining for the first time in the conversation.

"Old Harfink had two sons," continues the major, who hates to have the end of his stories told prematurely; "two sons who developed social ambition, and both married cultivated wives,--wives who looked down upon them, and with whom they could not agree. If I do not mistake, there was a sister, too. Tell me, Rosel, was there not a sister who married an Italian?"

"I do not know," replies Frau Rosamunda. "The intricacies of the Harfink genealogy never inspired me with the faintest interest."

The major bites his lip.

"One thing more," says Wenkendorf. "How have you managed to avoid an acquaintance with the Harfinks for so long, if the family has belonged to the country here for several generations?"

"Harfink number two never lived here," the major explains. "And they owned the iron-mines, but no estate. Only last year the widow Harfink bought Dobrotschau,--gallery of ancestral portraits, old suits of armour, and all. The mines have been sold to a stock company."

"Not a very pleasing neighbourhood, I should say," observes Wenkendorf.

"Surprise you with the revelation of a secret," Frau Rosamunda reads, thoughtfully, in a low tone from the note beside her plate.

And then all rise from table. Zdena, who has been silent during breakfast, twitches her uncle's sleeve, and, without looking at him, says,--

"Uncle dear, can I have the carriage?"

The major eyes her askance: "What do you want of the carriage?"

"I should like to drive over to Komaritz; Hedwig will think it strange that I have not been there for so long."

"H'm! don't you think Hedwig might do without you for a little while longer?" says the major, who is in a teasing humour.

"Oh, let her drive over," Frau Rosamunda interposes. "I promised to send the housekeeper there a basket of Reine-Claudes for preserving, and Zdena can take them with her. And, Zdena, you might stop at Dobrotschau; I will leave it to your diplomatic skill to worm out the grand secret for us. I protest against assisting on Sunday at its solemn revelation."

"Then shall I refuse the invitation for you?"

"Yes; tell them that we expect guests ourselves on Sunday. And invite the Komaritz people to come and dine, that it may be true," the major calls after the girl.

She nods with a smile, and trips into the castle. It is easy to see that her heart is light.

"Queer little coquette!" thinks the major, adding to himself, "But she's a charming creature, for all that."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SECRET.

An hour later Zdena, a huge red silk sunshade held over her handsome head, is driving rapidly towards Dobrotschau. She intends to make peace with her cousin.

The exaggerated attentions which he paid to Paula vexed her for the moment, but now she remembers them with only a smile of contempt. "Poor Harry!" she murmurs, in a superior, patronizing way. "Poor Harry! he is a thoroughly good fellow, and so devoted to me!"

The carriage rolls swiftly along the smooth road, upon which the last traces of a recent shower are fast fading beneath the August heat. The sky is blue and cloudless. The sun is rising higher; the stubble-fields to the right and left lie basking in its light; the shadows of the trees grow shorter and blacker, and the dark masses of the distant forests stand out in strong contrast with the sunny fields.

Avoiding the rough forest road, the coachman takes the longer course along the highway. An hour and a quarter passes before Zdena drives through an arched gate-way, surmounted by a crest carved in the stone, into a picturesque court-yard, where between two very ancient lindens stands a Saint John of Nepomuk, whose cross has fallen out of his marble arms, and at whose feet an antique fountain, plashing dreamily, tells of long-gone times,--times that possess no interest for the present inmates of the castle.

Zdena does not waste a glance upon the picturesque beauty of her surroundings. Two riding-

horses, very much heated, and led up and down the old-fashioned court-yard, at once engage her attention. Are those not Harry's horses? What is Harry doing here? A slight sensation of anxiety assails her. Then she smiles at her nonsensical suspicions, and is glad that she shall thus meet Harry sooner than she had hoped.

A footman in a plain and tasteful livery hurries forward to open her carriage door; the ladies are at home.

Zdena trips up the steps to the spacious, airy hall, where, among antique, heavy-carved furniture, a couple of full suits of armour are set up, sword in gauntlet, like a spellbound bit of the Middle Ages, on either side of a tall clock, upon whose brass face the effigy of a grinning Death--his scythe over his shoulder--celebrates his eternal, monotonous triumph. On the walls hang various portraits, dim with age, of the ancestors of the late possessor, some clad in armour, some with full-bottomed wigs, and others again wearing powdered queues; with ladies in patch and powder, narrow-breasted gowns, and huge stiff ruffs.

"If these worthies could suddenly come to life, how amazed they would be!" thinks Zdena. She has no more time, however, for profound reflections; for from one of the high oaken doors, opening out of the hall, comes Harry.

They both start at this unexpected encounter; he grows deadly pale, she flushes crimson. But she regains her self-possession sooner than he can collect himself, and while he, unable to utter a word, turns his head aside, she approaches him, and, laying her hand gently upon his arm, murmurs, in a voice sweet as honey, "Harry!"

He turns and looks at her. How charming she is! With the arch condescension of a princess certain of victory, she laughs in his face and whispers,--

"Are you not beginning to be sorry that you said such hateful things to me the other day?"

He has grown paler still; his eyes alone seem blazing in his head. For a while he leaves her question unanswered, devouring her lovely, laughing face with his gaze; then, suddenly seizing her almost roughly by both wrists, he exclaims,--

"And are you not beginning to be sorry that you gave me cause to do so?"

At this question, imprudent as it is, considering the circumstances, Zdena hangs her golden head, and whispers, very softly, "Yes."

It is cold and gloomy in the hall; the two suits of armour cast long dark-gray shadows upon the black-and-white-tiled floor; two huge bluebottle flies are buzzing on the frame of an old portrait, and a large moth with transparent wings and a velvet body is bumping its head against the ceiling, whether for amusement or in despair it is impossible to say.

Zdena trembles all over; she knows that she has said something conclusive, something that she cannot recall. She is conscious of having performed a difficult task, and she expects her reward. Something very sweet, something most delicious, is at hand. He must clasp her in his arms, as on that evening in Vienna. Ah, it is useless to try to deceive herself,--she cannot live without him. But he stands as if turned to stone, ashy pale, with a look of horror.

A door opens. Paula Harfink enters the hall, tall, portly, handsome after her fashion, in a flowered Pompadour gown, evidently equipped for a walk, wearing a pair of buckskin gloves and a garden-hat trimmed with red poppies and yellow gauze.

"Ah! have you been waiting for me up-stairs, Harry?" she asks; then, perceiving Zdena, she adds, "A visitor!--a welcome visitor!"

To Zdena's amazement and terror, she finds herself tenderly embraced by Paula, who, looking archly from one to the other of the cousins, asks, "Shall we wait until Sunday for the grand surprise, Harry? Let your cousin guess. Come, Baroness Zdena, what is the news at Dobrotschau?"

For one moment Zdena feels as if a dagger were plunged into her heart and turned around in the wound; then she recovers her composure and smiles, a little contemptuously, perhaps even haughtily, but naturally and with grace.

"Oh, it is not very difficult to guess," she says. "What is the news? Why, a betrothal. You have my best wishes, Baroness; and you too, Harry,--I wish you every happiness!"

CHAPTER IX.

AN ENCOUNTER.

No one can bear pain with such heroic equanimity as can a woman when her pride or her sense of dignity is aroused. Full twenty minutes have elapsed since the light has been darkened in Zdena's sky, her thought of the future embittered, and every joy blotted out of her existence. During these twenty minutes she has talked and laughed; has walked in the park with Paula and Harry; has pointed out to the betrothed couple the comically human physiognomy of a large pansy in a flower-bed; has looked on while Paula, plucking a marguerite, proceeds, with an arch look at Harry, to consult that old-fashioned oracle, picking off the petals one by one, with, "He loves me, he loves me not." Yes, when urged to partake of some refreshment, she has even delicately pared and cut up with a silver knife a large peach, although she could not swallow a mouthful of it. How could she, when she felt as if an iron hand were throttling her!

And now she is in the carriage again, driving towards home. As she drove off she had a last glimpse of Paula and Harry standing side by side in the picturesque court-yard before the castle, beside the fountain, that vies with the lindens in murmuring its old tales,—tales that no longer interest any one. They stood there together,—Paula waving her hand and calling parting words after the visitor; Harry stiff and mute, lifting his cap. Then Paula put her hand upon his arm to go back into the castle with him,—him, her lover, her property!

And Zdena is alone at last. The pain in her heart is becoming torture. Her breath comes short and quick. At the same time she has the restless, impatient sensation which is experienced by all who are unaccustomed to painful emotion, before they can bring themselves to believe in the new and terrible trouble in which they find themselves,—a sensation of being called upon to shake off some burden unjustly imposed. But the burden can neither be shifted nor shaken off.

Her consciousness is the burden, the burden of which she cannot be rid except with life itself. Life,—it has often seemed to her too short; and, in spite of all her transitory girlish discontent, she has sometimes railed at fate for according to mankind so few years in which to enjoy this lovely, sunny, laughing world. But now her brief earthly future stretches out endlessly before her,—an eternity in which joy is dead and everything black and gloomy.

"Good God! will this torture last forever?" she asks herself. No, it is not possible that such pain can last long; she will forget it, she must! It seems to her that she can at least be rid of some of it if she can only weep her fill in solitude. Yes, she must cry it out before she goes back to Zirkow, before she meets again the keen, kindly eyes that would fain pry into her very soul.

Meanwhile, she has told the coachman to drive to Komaritz. The carriage rolls through the long village. The air tastes of straw and hay; the rhythmic beat of the thrashers' flails resounds from the peasants' small barns. Zdena stops her ears; she cannot bear the noise,—the noise and the garish, cruel light. At last the village lies behind her. The sound of flails is still heard in the distance; to Zdena they seem to be beating the summer to death with clubs.

The carriage drives on, drives towards the forest. On the edge of the wood stands a red-and-white signpost, the two indexes of which point in opposite directions through the depths of the leafy thicket: one pathway is tolerably smooth, and leads to Komaritz; the other, starting from the same point, is rough, and leads to Zirkow.

She calls to the coachman. He stops the horses.

"Drive on to Komaritz and leave the plums there," she orders him, "and I will meanwhile take the short path and walk home." So saying, she descends from the vehicle.

He sees her walk off quickly and with energy; sees her tall, graceful figure gradually diminish in the perspective of the Zirkow woodland path. For a while he gazes after her, surprised, and then he obeys her directions.

If Krupitschka had been upon the box he would have opposed his young mistress's order as surely as he would have disobeyed it obstinately. He would have said, "The Baroness does not understand that so young a lady ought not to go alone through the forest—the Herr Baron would be very angry with me if I allowed it, and I will not allow it."

But Schmidt is a new coachman. He does as he is bidden, making no objection.

Zdena plunges into the wood, penetrates deeper and deeper into the thicket, aimlessly, heedlessly, except that she longs to find a spot where she can hide her despair from human eyes. She does not wish to see the heavens, nor the sun, nor the buzzing insects and wanton butterflies on the edge of the forest.

At last the shade is deep enough for her. The dark foliage shuts out the light; scarcely a hand's-breadth of blue sky can be seen among the branches overhead. She throws herself on the ground and sobs. After a while she raises her head, sits up, and stares into space.

"How is it possible? How could it have happened?" she thinks. "I cannot understand. From waywardness? from anger because I was a little silly? Oh, God! oh, God! Yes, I take pleasure in luxury, in fine clothes, in the world, in attention. I really thought for the moment that these were what I liked best,--but I was wrong. How little should I care for those things, without him! Oh, God! oh, God! How could he find it in his heart to do it!" she finally exclaims, while her tears flow afresh down her flushed cheeks.

Suddenly she hears a low crackling in the underbrush. She starts and looks up. Before her stands an elderly man of medium height, with a carefully-shaven, sharp-cut face, and a reddish-gray peruke. His tall stove-pipe hat is worn far back on his head, and his odd-looking costume is made up of a long green coat, the tails of which he carries under his left arm, a pair of wide, baggy, nankeen trousers, a long vest, with buttons much too large, and a pair of clumsy peasant shoes. The most remarkable thing about him is the sharp, suspicious expression of his round, projecting eyes.

"What do you want of me?" stammers Zdena, rising, not without secret terror.

"I should like to know what you are crying for. Perhaps because you have quarrelled with your cousin Henry," he says, with a sneer.

He addresses her familiarly: who can he be? Evidently some one of unsound mind; probably old Studnecka from X---, a former brewer, who writes poems, and who sometimes thinks himself the prophet Elisha, under which illusion he will stop people in the road and preach to them. This must be he. She has heard that so long as his fancies are humoured he is perfectly gentle and harmless, but that if irritated by contradiction he has attacks of maniacal fury, and has been known to lay violent hands upon those who thus provoke him.

Before she finds the courage to answer him, he comes a step nearer to her, and repeats his question with a scornful smile which discloses a double row of faultless teeth.

"How do you know that I have a cousin?" asks Zdena, still more alarmed, and recoiling a step or two.

"Oh, I know everything, just as the gypsies do."

"Of course this is the prophet," the girl thinks, trembling. She longs to run away, but tells herself that the prudent course will be to try to keep him in good humour until she has regained the path out of this thicket, where she has cut herself off from all human aid. "Do you know, then, who I am?" she asks, trying to smile.

"Oh, yes," replies this strange prophet, nodding his head. "I have long known you, although you do not know me. You are the foolish daughter of a foolish father."

"How should he have any knowledge of me or of my family?" she reflects. The explanation is at hand. She remembers distinctly that the prophet Studnecka was one of the eccentric crowd that Baron Franz Leskjewitsch was wont to assemble about him for his amusement during the three or four weeks each year when the old man made the country around unsafe by his stay here.

"You know my grandfather too, then?" she continues.

"Yes, a little," the old man muttered. "Have you any message to send him? I will take it to him for you."

"I have nothing to say to him!--I do not know him!" she replies. Her eyes flash angrily, and she holds her head erect.

"H'm I he does not choose to know you," the old man remarks, looking at her still more keenly.

"The unwillingness is mutual. I have not the least desire to know anything of him," she says, with emphasis.

"Ah!--indeed!" he says, with a lowering glance from beneath his shaggy eyebrows. "Shall I tell him so, from you?"

"If you choose!" she replies. Suddenly an idea strikes her; she observes him in her turn more keenly than hitherto, his face, his figure, his hands, tanned and neglected, but slender and shapely, with almond-shaped nails. There is something familiar in his features.

Is he really the brewer Studnecka, the fool? And if no fool, who can it be that ventures thus to address her? Something thrills her entire frame. A portrait recurs to her memory,--a portrait of the elder Leskjewitsch, which, since the family embroilment, has hung in the lumber-room at Zirkow. There is not a doubt that this crazy old creature is her grandfather.

He sees that she has recognized him.

Her bearing has suddenly become haughty and repellent. She adjusts her large straw hat, which has been hanging at the back of her neck.

"Then I am to tell him from you that you do not wish to have anything to do with him?" the old man asks again.

"Yes." Her voice is hard and dull.

"And besides," he asks, "have you nothing else to say to him?" He looks at her as if to read her soul.

She returns his look with eyes in whose brown depths the tears so lately shed are still glistening. She knows that she is putting the knife to her own throat, but what matters it? The gathered bitterness of years overflows her heart and rises to her lips.

"And besides,"--she speaks slowly and provokingly,--"besides, I should like to tell him that I consider his conduct cold-hearted, petty, and childish; that after he has tormented to death two people, my father and my mother, he might, in his old age, attempt by love and kindness to make some amends for his wickedness, instead of going on weaving fresh misery out of his wretched hatred and obstinacy, and--that never whilst I live will I make one advance towards him!" She bows slightly, turns, and leaves him. He looks after her graceful figure as it slowly makes its way among the underbrush and is finally lost to sight.

"A splendid creature! What a carriage! what a figure! and what a bewitching face! No wonder she has turned the brain of that silly lad at Komaritz. He knows what's what. The child shows race," he mutters; "she's a genuine Leskjewitsch. All Fritz.--Poor Fritz!"

The old man passes his hand across his forehead, and then gazes after her once more. Is that her blue dress glimmering among the trees? No, it is a bit of sky. She has vanished.

Zdena manages to slip up to her own room unobserved when she reaches Zirkow. She makes her first appearance at table, her hair charmingly arranged, dressed as carefully as usual, talkative, gay. The most acute observer would hardly suspect that a few hours previously she had all but cried her eyes out.

"And did you bring us the piece of news from Dobrotschau?" asks Frau Rosamunda during the soup, which Zdena leaves untasted.

"Oh, yes. And most extraordinary it is," she replies. "Paula Harfink is betrothed."

"To whom?"

"To Harry," says Zdena, without the quiver of an eyelash, calmly breaking her bread in two as she speaks.

"To Harry? Impossible!" shouts the major.

"Not at all," Zdena declares, with a smile. "I saw him with her. She already calls him by his first name."

"I do not understand the world nowadays," growls the old soldier, adding, under his breath, "That d--d driving about in the moonlight!"

Frau von Leskjewitsch and her cousin Wenkendorf content themselves during the remainder of the meal with discussing the annoying consequences for the family from such a connection, partaking, meanwhile, very comfortably of the excellent dinner. The major glances continually at his niece. It troubles him to see her smile so perpetually. Is it possible that she is not taking the matter more seriously to heart?

After dinner, when Frau von Leskjewitsch has carried her cousin off to the greenhouse to show him her now gloxinias, the major chances to go into the drawing-room, which he supposes empty. It is not so. In the embrasure of a window stands a figure, motionless as a statue,--quite unaware of the approach of any one. The major's heart suffers a sharp pang at sight of that lovely, tender profile, the features drawn and pinched with suppressed anguish. He would like to go up to his darling,--to take her in his arms. But he does not dare to do so. How can one bestow caresses upon a creature sore and crushed in every limb? He leaves the room on tiptoe, as one leaves the room of an invalid who must not be disturbed.

"God have mercy on the poor child!" he murmurs.

CHAPTER X.

A GARRISON TOWN.

As was formerly remarked at the sale of the effects of Mademoiselle Pauline C----, "Very little body-linen and very many diamonds," so it may be said of the population of X----: very few inhabitants, but very many hussars.

The town consists of a barracks and a Casino; the post-office, church, and school-house, as well as all the big and little houses, new and tasteless, or old and ruinous, are merely a secondary affair.

The ugly square barracks, painted red, is situated upon what is called "The Ring," a spacious, uneven square, unpaved but trodden hard, and, besides, covered with dust, straw, remains of bundles of hay, and all kinds of dirt pertaining to a stable.

Opposite the barracks is the Casino, also called "*Hostinee u bylé ruze*," or "The White Rose Inn." The barracks stands alone, haughtily exclusive. Adjoining the Casino and the post-office, however, are various ugly or half-ruinous structures, and opposite the post-office there is a line of unedifying building, describing a spacious circle,--low huts, two-storied houses, houses with mansard roofs, houses painted yellow, light green, or light pink, with a saint in a blue niche over the front door, and houses with creaking weathercocks on the roof, all half ruinous, but clinging affectionately to one another, like drunken recruits bent upon mutual support.

It is noon. From the open windows of the most pretentious of these houses come the notes of a waltz, with a loud sound of shuffling and scraping, alternating with screaming and laughter. The story goes that the wife of the steward of the Casino, Frau Albina Schwanzara, former *prima ballerina* at Troppau, is teaching the cancan behind those same windows to one of the celebrities of the little town, the wife of a wealthy tallow-chandler, and that the lady in question, for the entertainment of the corps of officers now stationed at X---, is to dance the aforesaid beautiful dance at the next "sociable," dressed as a chimney-sweeper. "Fast at any price!" is the device of the celebrity. The lively music is the only animate circumstance in "The Ring;" the sultry August heat has stricken dead everything else. The kellner at the door of the Casino, the sentinel at the gate of the barracks, are nodding where they stand. In a corner of the square is the wagon of a troupe of strolling players,--a green-painted house on wheels,--to which is harnessed a one-eyed steed with very long legs and a tail like a rat's. The prima donna of the troupe, a slovenly woman in shabby dancing-slippers, is squatting on a bundle of hay, flirting with a cavalry sergeant. A lank youth with long, straight, fair hair is thrashing with his suspenders a pig tied at the back of the wagon, while he holds up his trousers over his stomach with his left hand. Several other children of Thespis lie stretched out snoring, among various drums and ropes, in the dust.

All the people who happen to be in the square stare at them.

The universal interest is shortly diverted, however, by the arrival of two equipages and a luggage-wagon, all three driving down a side street to rein up before the post-office. In the first of the two vehicles, a large convenient landau, two ladies are seated with a young man opposite them. The second carriage is occupied by a valet and two maids.

They have come from the nearest railway-station, and have merely stopped at the post-office for any letters and papers that may be awaiting them. While the servant is procuring these within the building, the young man alights from the landau and enters into conversation with the postmaster, eagerly inquiring what regiment is at present in garrison at X----.

The curiosity of an increasing public becomes almost morbid. All crowd around the post-office. The young actress has lost her admirer,--the sergeant has rushed up to the young man.

"Oh, Herr Lieutenant!" he calls out, eagerly; then, ashamed of his want of due respect, he straightens himself to the correct attitude and salutes with his hand at his cap. Two officers, each with a billiard-cue in his hand, come hastily out of the Casino, followed by a third,--Harry Leskjewitsch. The stranger receives the first two with due courtesy; Harry he scans eagerly.

"You here, Harry!" he exclaims, going up to him with outstretched hands.

The lady on the right in the landau lowers the red Bilk parasol with which she has hitherto shielded her face from public curiosity, and takes out her eye-glass; the other leans forward a little. Both ladies are in faultless travelling-dress. The one on the right is a beauty in her way, fair, with a good colour, a full figure, and regular features, although they may be a trifle sharp. Her companion is beautiful, too, but after an entirely different style,--a decided brunette, with a pale face and large eyes which, once gazed into, hold the gazer fast, as by the attraction one feels to solve a riddle.

"Treurenberg!" Harry exclaims, grasping the stranger's hands in both his own.

"I thought you were in Vienna," Treurenberg replies. "I cannot tell you how glad I am to see you! When did we meet last?"

"At your marriage," says Harry.

"True! It seems an eternity since then." Treurenberg sighs. "Only fancy, I had to shoot my 'Old Tom' last winter!"

At this moment a little cavalcade passes across the square to reach the barracks,--an Amazon in a tight, very short riding-dress, followed and accompanied by several gentlemen.

Treurenberg's attention is attracted by the horse-woman, who, although much powdered, rather faded, and with a feverish glow in her large, dark eyes, shows traces of very great beauty.

"Is not that Lori Trauenstein?" Lato asks his new-found friend.

"Yes,--now Countess Wodin, wife of the colonel of the regiment of hussars in garrison here."

"An old flame of mine," Lato murmurs. "Strange! I scarcely recognized her. This is the first time I have seen her since----" he laughs lightly--"since she gave me my walking-ticket! Is Wodin the same as ever?"

"How could he be anything else!"

"And is she very fast?"

"Very," Harry assents.

The ladies in the landau have both stretched their necks to look after the Amazon. But while the face of the blonde expresses merely critical curiosity, in her companion's dark eyes there is sad, even horrified, surprise.

The Amazon and her train disappear beneath the arched gate-way of the barracks.

"Lato!" the portly blonde calls to Treurenberg from the landau.

He does not hear her.

"Do you remember my 'Old Tom'?" he asks his friend, returning to his favourite theme.

"I should think so. A chestnut,--a magnificent creature!"

"Magnificent! A friend,--an actual friend. That fat Rhoden--a cousin of my wife's--broke his leg in riding him at a hunt. But, to speak of something pleasanter, how are they all at Komaritz? Your cousin must be very pretty by this time?" And Treurenberg looks askance at his friend.

"Very," Harry replies, and his manner suddenly grows cold and constrained. "But allow me to speak to your wife," he adds. "By the way, who is the young lady beside her?"

"H'm! a relative,--a cousin of my wife's."

"Present me, I pray," says Harry.

He then pays his respects to the Countess Treurenberg and to her companion, whose name he now learns is Olga Dangeri.

The Countess offers him her finger-tips with a gracious smile. Olga Dangeri, nodding slightly, raises her dark, mysterious eyes, looks him full in the face for a moment, and then turns away indifferent. The servant comes out of the post-office with a great bundle of letters, which the Countess receives from him, and with two or three packages, which he hands over to the maids.

"What are you waiting for, Lato? Get in," the Countess says.

"Drive on. I shall stay here with Leskjewitsch for a while," Treurenberg replies.

"Mamma is waiting breakfast for us."

"I shall breakfast in the Casino. My respects to your mother."

"As you please." The young Countess bows to Harry stiffly, with a discontented air, the horses start, a cloud of dust rises, and the landau rolls away. With his eyes half closed, Harry looks after the heavy brown carriage-horses.

"Lato, that off horse is spavined."

"For heaven's sake don't notice it! My mother-in-law bought the pair privately to surprise me. She paid five thousand guilders for them."

"H'm! Who persuaded her to buy them?"

"Pistasch Kamenz. I do not grudge him his bargain," murmurs Lato, adding, with a shake of the head, "'Tis odd, dogs and horses are the only things in which we have the advantage over the financiers."

With which he takes his friend's arm and crosses the square to the Casino.

CHAPTER XI.

AN OLD FRIEND.

They are sitting in the farthest corner of the smoky dining-hall of the Casino, Harry and his friend, by a window that looks out upon a little yard. Harry is smoking a cigar, and sits astride of a chair; Lato contrives to sprawl over three chairs, and smokes cigarettes, using about five matches to each cigarette. Two glasses, a siphon, and a bottle of cognac stand upon a rickety table close by.

The room is low, the ceiling is almost black, and the atmosphere suggests old cheese and stale cigar-smoke. Between the frames of their Imperial Majesties a fat spider squats in a large gray web. At a table not far from the two friends a cadet, too thin for his uniform, is writing a letter, while a lieutenant opposite him is occupied in cutting the initials of his latest flame, with his English penknife, on the green-painted table. Before a Bohemian glass mirror in a glass frame stands another lieutenant, with a thick beard and a bald pate, which last he is endeavouring artistically to conceal by brushing over it the long thick hair at the back of his neck. His name is Spreil; he has lately been transferred to the hussars from the infantry, and he is the butt for every poor jest in the regiment.

"I cannot tell you how glad I am to see you," Treurenberg repeats to his friend. As he speaks, his cigarette goes out; he scrapes his twenty-fourth match in the last quarter of an hour, and breaks off its head.

"The same old lack of fire!" Harry says, by way of a jest, handing him his lighted cigar.

"Yes, the same old lack of fire!" Treurenberg repeats.

Lack of fire! How often he has been reproached with it as a boy! Lack of fire; that means everything for which fire stands,—energy, steadfastness, manly force of will. There is no lack of passion, on the other hand; of dangerous inflammable material there is too much in his nature; but with him passion paralyzes effort instead of spurring to action. One need only look at him as he half reclines there, smiling dreamily to himself, scarcely moving his lips, to know him for what he is, indolent, impressionable, yet proud and morbidly refined withal; a thoroughly passive and very sensitive man. He is half a head taller than Harry, but carries himself so badly that he looks shorter; his face, framed in light brown hair and a soft pointed beard, is sallow; his large gray eyes are veiled beneath thick lids which he rarely opens wide. His hands are especially peculiar, long, slender, soft, incapable of a quick movement; hands formed to caress, but not to fight,—hardly even to clasp firmly.

It is said that the colonel of the regiment of Uhlans, in which Lato served before his marriage to Selina Harfink, once declared of him, "Treurenberg ought to have been a woman, and then, married to a good husband, something might perhaps have been made of him."

This criticism, which ought to have been uttered by a woman rather than by a logical, conventional man, went the round of Treurenberg's comrades. "The same old lack of fire," Lato repeats, smiling to himself. He has the mouth and the smile of a woman.

Harry knows the smile well, but it has changed since the last time he saw it. It used to be indolent, now it is sad.

"Have you any children?" Harry asks, after a while.

Treurenberg shivers. "I had a boy, I lost him when he was fifteen months old," he says, in a low, strained tone.

"My poor fellow! What did he die of?" Harry asks, sympathetically.

"Of croup. It was over in one night,—and he was so fresh and healthy a child! My God! when I think of the plump little arms he used to stretch out to me from his little bed every morning," Lato goes on, hoarsely, "and then, as I said, in a few hours—gone! The physician did all that he could for the poor little fellow,—in vain; nothing did any good. I knew from the first that there was no hope. How the poor little chap threw himself about in his bed! I sometimes dream that I hear him gasping for breath, and he clung to me as if I could help him!" Treurenberg's voice breaks;

he passes his hand over his eyes. "He was very little; he could hardly say 'papa' distinctly, but it goes terribly near one's heart when one has nothing else in the world,--I--I mean, no other children," he corrects the involuntary confession.

"Well, all days have not yet ended in evening," Harry says, kindly, and then pauses suddenly, feeling--he cannot tell why--that he has made a mistake.

Meanwhile, the lieutenant at the table has finished his initials, and has, moreover, embellished them with the rather crude device of a heart. He rises and saunters aimlessly about the large, low room, apparently seeking some subject for chaff, for boyish play. He kills a couple of flies, performs gymnastic exercises upon two chairs, and finally approaches the cadet, who, ensconced in a corner, behind a table, is scribbling away diligently.

"Whom are you writing to?" he asks, sitting astride of a chair just opposite the lad.

The cadet is silent.

"To your sweetheart?"

The cadet is still silent.

"I seem to have guessed rightly," says the lieutenant, adding, "But tell me, does your present flame--here the sun called Wodin--tolerate a rival sun?"

"I am writing to my mother," the cadet says, angrily. At the mention of the name of Wodin he flushes to the roots of his hair.

"Indeed!--how touching!" the lieutenant goes on. "What are you writing to her? Are you asking her for money? or are you soothing her anxiety with an account of the solid character of your principles? Do show me your letter."

The cadet spreads his arms over the sheet before him, thereby blotting the well-formed characters that cover it. "I tell you what, Stein----!" he bursts forth at his tormentor, his voice quivering with anger.

Meanwhile, Lato turns towards him. "Toni!" he exclaims, recognizing a relative in the irate young fellow,--"Toni Flammingen!--can it be? The last time I saw you, you were in your public-school uniform. You've grown since then, my boy."

Stein turns away from this touching family scene, and, taking his place behind Lieutenant Spreil, who is still occupied in dressing his hair, observes, in a tone of great gravity,--

"Don't you think, Spreil, that you could make part of your thick beard useful in decorating that bald head of yours? Comb it up each side and confine it in place with a little sticking-plaster. It might do."

Spreil turns upon him in a fury. "It might do for me to send you a challenge!" he thunders.

"By all means: a little extra amusement would be welcome just now," Stein retorts, carelessly.

Spreil bows, and leaves the room with majesty.

"For heaven's sake, Stein, what are you about?" Harry, who has been observing the scene, asks the idle lieutenant.

"I have made a vow to rid our regiment of the fellow,--to chaff him out of it," Stein replies, with the sublime composure which results from the certainty of being in the right. "We do not want the infantry cad. If he is determined to mount on horseback, let him try a velocipede, or sit astride of Pegasus, for all I care; but in our regiment he shall not stay. You'll be my second, Les?"

"Of course, if you insist upon it," Harry replies; "but it goes against the grain. I detest this perpetual duelling for nothing at all. It is bad form."

"You need not talk; you used to be the readiest in the regiment to fight. I remember you when I was in the dragoons. But a betrothed man must, of course, change his views upon such subjects."

At the word "betrothed" Harry shrinks involuntarily. Treurenberg looks up.

"Betrothed!" he exclaims. "And to whom?"

"Guess," says the lieutenant, who is an old acquaintance of Treurenberg's.

"It is not hard to guess. To your charming little cousin Zdena."

The lieutenant puckers his lips as if about to whistle, and says, "Not exactly. Guess again."

Meanwhile, Harry stands like a man in the pillory who is waiting for a shower of stones, and says not a word.

"Then--then--" Treurenberg looks from the lieutenant to his friend, "I have no idea," he murmurs.

"To the Baroness Paula Harfink," says the lieutenant, his face devoid of all expression.

There is a pause. Treurenberg's eyes try in vain to meet those of his friend.

From without come the clatter of spurs and the drone of a hand-organ grinding out some popular air.

"Is it true?" asks Treurenberg, who cannot rid himself of the idea that the mischievous lieutenant is jesting. And Harry replies, as calmly as possible,--

"It is not yet announced. I am still awaiting my father's consent. He is abroad."

"Ah!"

The lieutenant pours out a thimbleful of brandy from the flask on the table, mixes it with seltzer-water and sugar, and, raising it to his lips, says, gravely, "To the health of your betrothed, Leskjewitsch,--of your sister-in-law, Treurenberg."

"This, then, was the news of which my mother-in-law made such mysterious mention in her last letters," Lato murmurs. "This is the surprise of which she spoke. I--I hope it will turn out well," he adds, with a sigh.

Harry tries to smile. From the adjoining billiard-room come the voices of two players in an eager dispute. The malicious lieutenant pricks up his ears, and departs for the scene of action with the evident intention of egging on the combatants.

"Lato," Harry asks, clearing his throat, "how do you mean to get home? I have my drag here, and I can drop you at Dobrotschau. Or will you drive to Komaritz with me?"

"With the greatest pleasure," Treurenberg assents. "How glad I shall be to see the old place again!"

He is just making ready for departure, when several officers drop in at the Casino, almost all of them old friends of his. They surround him, shake hands with him, and will not let him go.

"Can you wait a quarter of an hour for me?" he asks his friend.

Harry nods. He takes no part in the general conversation. He scarcely moves his eyes from the spider-web between the Imperial portraits. A fly is caught in it and is making desperate efforts to escape. The bloated spider goes on spinning its web, and pretends not to see it.

"Have a game of *bézique*? You used to be so passionately fond of *bézique*," Harry hears some one say. He looks around. It is Count Wodin, the husband of the pretty, coquettish horsewoman, who is speaking. Lato turns to Harry.

"Can you wait for me long enough?" he asks, and his voice sounds uncertain and confused. "One short game."

Harry shrugs his shoulders, as if to say, "As you please." Then, standing with one knee on a chair in the attitude of a man who is about to take leave and does not think it worth while to sit down again, he looks on at the game.

The first game ends, then another, and another, and Treurenberg makes no move to lay the cards aside. His face has changed: the languid smile has gone, his eyes are eager, watchful, and his face is a perfectly expressionless mask. His is the typical look of the well-bred gambler who knows how to conceal his agitation.

"*Cent d'as*--double *bézique*!" Thus it goes on to the accompaniment of the rustle of the cards, the rattle of the counters, and from the adjoining room the crack of the ivory balls against one another as they roll over the green cloth.

"Well, Lato, are you coming?" asks Harry, growing impatient.

"Only two games more. Can you not wait half an hour longer?" asks Treurenberg.

"To speak frankly, I am not much interested in listening to your 'Two hundred and fifty,'--'five hundred,'--and so on."

"Naturally," says Lato, with his embarrassed smile. He moves as if to rise. Wodin hands him the cards to cut. "Go without me. I will not keep you any longer. Some one here will lend me a horse by and by. Shall we see you to-morrow at Dobrotschau?" With which Treurenberg arranges his twelve cards, and Harry nods and departs.

"Tell me, did you ever see a more blissful lover?" asks the teasing lieutenant, who has just returned from the billiard-room. As the disputants, in spite of all his efforts to the contrary, have

made up their quarrel, there is nothing more for him to do there. "He seems inspired indeed at the thought of his beloved." And he takes a seat on the table nearest the players.

"Every point in trumps," says Treurenberg, intent upon his game.

"It is my impression that he would like to drink her health in aconite," the lieutenant continues.

"That betrothal seems to me a most mysterious affair," mutters Wodin. "I do not understand Leskjewitsch: he was not even in debt."

The lieutenant bites his lip, makes a private sign to Wodin, and takes pains not to look at Treurenberg.

Lato flushes, and is absorbed in polishing his eyeglass, which has slipped out of his eye.

"I lose three thousand," he says, slowly, consulting his tablets. "Shall we have another game, Wodin?"

CHAPTER XII.

A GRAVEYARD IN PARIS.

Paris, in the middle of August.

At about five in the afternoon, an old gentleman in a greenish-black overcoat that flutters about his thickset figure almost like a soutane, trousers that are too short, low shoes with steel buckles, and an old-fashioned high hat beneath which can be seen a rusty brown wig, issues from a quiet hotel much frequented by strangers of rank.

His features are marked and strong. His brown skin reminds one of walnut-shells or crumpled parchment. Beneath his bushy eyebrows his prominent eyes glance suspiciously about him. It would be difficult to guess at this man's social position from his exterior. To the superficial observer he might suggest the peasant class. The ease, however, with which he bears himself among the fashionably-dressed men in the street, the despotic abruptness of his manner, the irritability with which he disputes some petty item in his hotel bill, while he is not at all dismayed by the large sum total, give the keller, who stands in the door-way looking after him, occasion for reflection.

"He's another of those miserly old aristocrats who suppress their title for fear of being plundered," he decides, with a shrug, as he turns back into the hotel, stopping on his way to inform the *conciierge* that, in his opinion, the old man is some half-barbaric Russian prince who has come to Europe to have a look at civilization.

The name in the strangers' book is simply Franz Leskjewitsch.

Meanwhile, the stranger has walked on through the Rue de Rivoli to the corner of the Rue Castiglione, where he pauses, beckons to a fiacre, and, as he puts his foot heavily and awkwardly upon its step, calls to the driver, "*Cimetière Montmartre!*"

The vehicle starts. The old man's eyes peer about sharply from the window. How changed it all is since he was last in this Babylon, twenty-two years ago, while the Imperial court was in its splendour, and Fritz was still alive!

"Yes, yes, it is all different,--radically different," he murmurs, angrily. "The noise is the same, but the splendour has vanished. Paris without the Empire is like Baden-Baden without the gaming-tables. Ah, how fine it was twenty-two years ago, when Fritz was living!"

Yes, he was not only living, but until then he had never been anything but a source of pleasure to his father; the same Fritz who had afterwards so embittered life for him that the same father had stricken him from his heart and had refused him even a place in his memory. But it is dangerous to try to rid ourselves of the remembrance of one whom we have once loved idolatrously. We may, for fear of succumbing to the old affection, close our hearts and lock them fast against all feeling of any kind. But if they do not actually die in our breasts, there will, sooner or later, come a day when memory will reach them in spite of our locks, and will demand for the dead that tribute of tears which we have refused to grant.

There are few things more ghastly in life than tears shed for the dead twenty years too late.

"Yes, a frivolous fellow, Fritz was,--frivolous and obstinate," the old man says to himself, staring at the brilliant shop-windows in the Rue de la Paix and at the gilded youths sauntering past them; "but when was there ever a man his equal? What a handsome, elegant, charming fellow, bubbling over with merriment and good humour and chivalric generosity! And the fellow insisted on marrying a shop-girl!" he mutters, between his teeth. The thought even now throws him into a fury. He had been so proud of the lad, and then--in one moment it was all over; no future to look to, the young diplomat's career cut short, the family pride levelled in the dust.

The old rage had well-nigh filled his soul, when a lovely, pallid face rises upon his memory. Could Manette Duval have really been as charming as that golden-haired girl he had met awhile ago in the woods? The little witch looked as like Fritz as a delicate girl can look like a bearded man, and she had, withal, a foreign grace, the like of which had never hitherto characterized any Leskjewitsch child, and which might perhaps be an inheritance from her Parisian mother.

And suddenly the father's conscience, silenced through all these long years, asserts itself. Yes, the marriage had been a folly, and Fritz had ruined his career by it. But suppose Fritz had, through his own fault, broken both his arms, or put out his eyes, or done anything else that would have destroyed his future, would it have been for his father to turn from him, reproaching him angrily for his folly, saying, "You have annihilated your happiness by your own fault; you have blasted the hopes I had for you; henceforth be as wretched as you deserve to be; I will have none of you, since I can no longer be proud of you!"

The old man bites his lip and hangs his head.

The carriage rolls on. The weather is excessively warm. In front of the shabby cafés on the Boulevard Clichy some people are sitting, brown and languid. Behind the dusty windows of the shops the shop-girls stand gazing drearily out upon their weary world, as if longing for somewhat of which they have read or dreamed,--something fresh and green; long shadows upon moist, fragrant lawns; gurgling brooks mirroring the sun.

An emotion of compassion stirs in the old man's breast at sight of these "prisoners," and if one by chance seems to him prettier, paler, sadder than the rest, he asks himself, "Did she perhaps look so? No wonder Fritz pitied the poor creature! he had such a warm, tender heart!"

The fiacre stops; the old man rubs his eyes. "How much?" he asks the driver.

The man scans his fare from head to foot with a knowing glance:

"Five francs."

Baron Leskjewitsch takes four francs from the left pocket of his waistcoat, and from the right pocket of his trousers, where he keeps his small change, one sou, as a gratuity. These he gives to the driver, and sternly dismisses him. The man drives off with a grin.

"The old miser thinks he has made a good bargain," he mutters.

The 'miser' meanwhile paces slowly along the broad, straight path of the cemetery, between the tall chestnuts planted on either side.

How dreary, how desolate a church-yard this is, upon which the noise and bustle of the swarming city outside its gates clamorously intrude!--a church-yard where the dead are thrust away as troublesome rubbish, only to put them where they can be forgotten. It is all so bare and prosaic; the flat stones lie upon the graves as if there was a fear lest, if not held down in such brutal fashion, the wretched dead would rise and return to a world where there is no longer any place for them, and where interests hold sway in which they have no part. Urns and other pagan decorations are abundant; there are but few crosses. The tops of the chestnut-trees are growing yellow, and here and there a pale leaf falls upon the baked earth.

A gardener with a harshly-creaking rake is rooting out the sprouting grass from the paths; some gossiping women are seated upon the stone seats, brown, ugly, in starched and crimped white muslin caps, the gaps made by missing teeth in their jaws repulsively apparent as they chatter. A labouring man passes with a nosegay half concealed in the breast of his coat, and in his whole bearing that dull shamefacedness which would fain bar all sympathy, and which is characteristic of masculine grief. The old Baron looks about him restlessly, and finally goes up to the raking gardener and addresses him, asking for the superintendent of the place. After much circumlocution, gesticulation, and shouting on both sides, the two at last understand each other.

"*Monsieur cherche une tombe, la tombe d'un étranger décédé à Paris?* When? Fifteen years ago. That is a very long time. And no one has ever asked after the grave before? Had the dead man no relatives, then? Ah, such a forgotten grave is very sad; it will be difficult to identify it. Maybe--who knows?--some other bodies have been buried there. Here is the guard."

"For what is Monsieur looking?"

"A grave."

"The name?"

"Baron Frédéric Leskjewitsch." The old man's voice trembles: perhaps it is too late; perhaps he has again delayed too long.

But no: the guard's face immediately takes on an intelligent expression.

"*Tres bien, monsieur; par id, monsieur.* I know the grave well. Some one from the Austrian embassy comes every year to look after it on the part of the relatives, and this year, not long ago,—oh, only a short time ago,—two ladies came and brought flowers; an elderly lady, and one quite young—oh, but very lovely, monsieur. *Par ici, par ici.*"

Following the attendant, the old man turns aside from the broad, principal path into a labyrinth of narrow foot-ways winding irregularly in and out among the graves. Here the church-yard loses its formal aspect and becomes pathetic. All kinds of shrubbery overgrow the graves. Some flowers—crimson carnations, pale purple gillyflowers, and yellow asters—are blooming at the feet of strangely-gnarled old juniper-trees. The old man's breath comes short, a sort of greed possesses him, a wild burning longing for the bit of earth where lies buried the joy of his life.

The labouring man with hanging head has reached his goal the first. He is already kneeling beside a grave,—tiny little grave, hardly three feet long, and as yet unprovided with a stone. The man passes his hard hand over the rough earth tenderly, gently, as if he were touching something living. Then he cowers down as if he would fain creep into it himself, and lays his head beside the poor little nosegay on the fresh soil.

"*Par ici, monsieur*,—here is the grave," calls the attendant.

The old Baron shivers from head to foot.

"Where?"

"Here."

A narrow headstone at the end of another stone lying flat upon the ground and enclosed by an iron palisade fence,—this is all—! A terrible despair takes possession of the father. He envies the labourer, who can at least stroke the earth that covers his treasure, while he cannot even throw himself upon the grave from which a rusty iron grating separates him.

Nothing which he can press to his heart,—nothing in which he can take a melancholy delight. All gone,—all! A cold tombstone enclosed in a rusty iron grating,—nothing more—nothing!

CHAPTER XIII.

AT DOBROTSCHAU.

It is the day after Treurenberg's meeting with Harry in the dusty little garrison town.

Lato is sitting at his writing-table, counting a package of bank-notes,—his yesterday's winnings. He divides them into two packets and encloses them in two letters, which he addresses and seals and sends by a servant to the post. He has thus wiped out two old debts. No sooner have the letters left his hand than he brushes his fingers with his handkerchief, as if he had touched something unclean.

Poor Treurenberg! He has never been a spendthrift, but he has been in debt ever since his boyhood. His pecuniary circumstances, however, have never been so oppressive, never have there been such disagreeable complications in his affairs, as since he has had a millionaire for a wife.

He leans his elbows on his writing-table and rests his chin on his hands. Angry discontent with himself is tugging at his nerves. Is it not disgusting to liquidate an old debt to his tailor, and to pay interest to a usurer, with his winnings at play? What detestable things cards are! If he loses he hates it, and if he wins—why, it gives him a momentary satisfaction, but his annoyance at having impoverished a friend or an acquaintance is all the greater afterwards. Every sensible disposition of the money thus won seems to him most inappropriate. Money won at cards should be scattered about, squandered; and yet how can he squander it,—he who has so little and needs so much? How often he has resolved never to touch cards again! If he only had some strong, sacred interest in life he might become absorbed in it, and so forget the cursed habit. He has not

the force of character that will enable him to sacrifice his passion for play to an abstract moral idea. His is one of those delicate but dependent natures that need a prop in life, and he has never had one, even in childhood.

"What is the use of cudgelling one's brains till they ache, about what cannot be helped?" he says at last, with a sigh, "or which I at least cannot help," he adds, with a certain bitterness of self-accusation. He rises, takes his hat, and strolls out into the park. A huge, brown-streaked stag-hound, which had belonged to the old proprietor of the castle and which has dogged Lato's heels since the previous evening, follows him. From time to time he turns and strokes the animal's head. Then he forgets---

At the same time, Paula is sitting in her study, on the ground-floor. It looks out on the courtyard, and is hung with sad-coloured leather, and decorated with a couple of good old pictures. She is sitting there clad in a very modern buff muslin gown, with a fiery red sash, listening for sounds without and with head bent meanwhile over Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet.'

The noise of distant hoofs falls upon her ear, and a burning blush suffuses her plump cheek. Upon the white shade, which is pulled down, falls the shadow of a horse's head, and then the upper portion of his rider's figure. The hoofs no longer sound. Through the sultry summer stillness--breaking the monotonous plashing of the fountain and the murmur of the old linden--is heard the light, firm pat of a masculine hand upon a horse's neck, the caress with which your true horseman thanks his steed for service rendered; then an elastic, manly tread, the clatter of spurs and sabre, a light knock at the door of Paula's room, and Harry Leskjewitsch enters.

Paula, with a smile, holds out to him both her hands; without smiling he dutifully kisses one of them.

A pair of lovers in Meissen porcelain stands upon a bracket above Paula's writing-table,--lovers who have been upon the point of embracing each other for something more than a century. Above their heads hovers a tiny ray of sunshine, which attracts Harry's attention to the group. He and Paula fall into the very same attitudes as those taken by the powdered dandy in the flowered jacket and the little peasant-girl in dancing-slippers,--they are on the point of embracing; and for the first time in his life Harry wishes he were made of porcelain, that he might remain upon the point.

His betrothal is now eight days old. The first day he thought it would be mere child's play to loosen the knot tied by so wild a chance, but now he feels himself fast bound, and is conscious that each day casts about him fresh fetters. In vain, with every hour passed with his betrothed, does he struggle not to plunge deeper into this labyrinth, from which he can find no means of extricating himself. In vain does he try to enlighten Paula as to his sentiments towards her by a stiff, repellent demeanour, never lying to her by look, word, or gesture.

But what does it avail him to stand before her like a saint on a pedestal? Before he is aware, she has drawn his head towards her and kissed him on both eyes, whereupon both lovers sigh,--each for a different reason,--and then sit down opposite each other. Paula, however, does not long endure such formality. She moves her chair closer to his, and at last lays her hand on the young officer's shoulder.

Harry is positively wretched. No use to attempt to deceive himself any longer: Paula Harfink is in love with him.

Although she brought about the betrothal by means of cool cunning and determination, daily intercourse with the handsome, chivalric young fellow has kindled a flame in her mature heart, and her passion for him grows with every hour passed in his society.

It is useless to say how little this circumstance disposes him in her favour. Love is uncommonly unbecoming to Paula. It is impossible to credit her with the impulse that forgets self and the world, or with the amount of ideal stupidity which invests all the nonsense of lovers with grace and naturalness. Involuntarily, every one feels inclined to smile when so robust and enlightened a woman--enlightened in all directions--suddenly languishes, and puts on the semblance of ultra-feminine weakness. Harry alone does not smile; he takes the matter very tragically.

Sometimes, in deep privacy he clinches his fist and mentally calls his betrothed "a love-sick dromedary!"

Naturally he does not utter such words aloud, not even when he is alone in his room, not even in the dark; but--thought is free!

"What have you been doing all this time?" Paula asks at last, archly, thus breaking the oppressive silence.

"This time? Do you mean since yesterday?" he asks, frowning.

"It seemed long to me," she sighs. "I--I wrote you a letter, which I had not the courage to send you. There, take it with you!" And she hands him a bulky manuscript in a large envelope. It is not the first sizable billet-doux which she has thus forced upon him. In a drawer of his writing-table

at Komaritz there reposes a pile of such envelopes, unopened.

"Have you read the English novel I sent you yesterday?--wonderful, is it not?--hero and heroine so like ourselves."

"I began it. I thought it rather shallow."

"Oh, well, I do not consider it a learned work. I never care for depth in a novel,--only love and high life. Shall we go on with our Shakespeare?" she asks.

"If you choose. What shall we read?"

"The moonlight scene from Romeo and Juliet."

Harry submits.

Meanwhile, Lato, with his brown attendant, wanders along the shady paths of the Dobrotschau park. Now and then he pays some attention to his shaggy companion, strokes his head, sends him after a stick, and finally has him take a bath in the little reed-encircled lake on the shores of which stand weather-stained old statues, while stately swans are gliding above its green depths. These last indignantly chase the clumsy intruder from their realm.

"Poor fellow! they will have none of you!" Treurenberg murmurs, consoling the dog as he creeps out upon the bank with drooping tail and ears.

Suddenly he hears the notes of a piano from the direction of the castle. He turns and walks towards it, almost as if he were obeying a call.

Pausing before an open glass door leading into the garden, he looks in upon a spacious, airy apartment, the furniture of which consists of a large Gobelin hanging, a grand piano, and some bamboo chairs scattered about.

At the piano a young girl is seated playing a dreamy improvisation upon 'The Miller and the Brook,' that loveliest and saddest of all Schubert's miller-songs. It is Olga. Involuntarily Lato's eyes are riveted upon the charming picture. The girl is tall and slim, with long, slender hands and feet. If one might venture to criticise anything so beautiful as her face, its pure oval might be pronounced a thought too long.

Her features are faultless, despite their irregularity; the forehead is low, the eyebrows straight and delicately pencilled, the eyes large and dark, and, when she opens them wide, of almost supernatural brilliancy. The mouth is small, the under lip a trifle too full, and the chin a little too long.

Those irregularities lend a peculiar charm to the face, reminding one of certain old Spanish family portraits,--dark-eyed beauties with high collars, and with huge pearls in their ears. The facts that Olga neither wears a bang nor curls her hair upon her forehead, but has it parted simply in the middle to lie in thick waves on either side of her head, and that her complexion is of a transparent pallor, contribute still further to her resemblance to those distinguished individuals. She wears a simple white gown, with a Malmaison rose stuck in her belt. Lato's eyes rest upon her with artistic satisfaction. The tender melody of the Miller's Song soothes his sore heart as if by a caress. He softly enters the room, sits down, and listens. Olga, suddenly aware by intuition of his presence, turns her head.

"Ah!--you here?" she exclaims, blushing slightly, and taking her hands from the keys.

"I have made so bold," he replies, smiling. "Have you any objection?"

"No; but you should have announced yourself," she says, with a little frown.

"Ah, indeed!" he rejoins, in the tone in which one teases a child. "Well, the listening to a musical soliloquy is generally considered only a harmless indiscretion."

"Yes; when I am playing something worth listening to I have no objection, but I prefer to keep my halting improvisations to myself."

"Well, then, play something worth listening to," he says, good-humouredly.

She turns again to the instrument, and begins, with great brilliancy of touch, to play a bravura-scherzo, by some Viennese composer at present in fashion.

"For heaven's sake," Treurenberg, whose feeling for music is as delicate as his appreciation of all beauty, interrupts her, "do not go on with that ghastly Witches' Sabbath!"

"The 'ghastly Witches' Sabbath' is dedicated to your cousin, Countess Wodin," Olga replies, taking up a piece of music from the piano. "There it is!" she points to the title-page "'Dedicated to the Frau Countess Irma Wodin, *née* Countess Trauenstein, by her devoted servant, etc.'" I thought

the thing might interest you."

"Not in the least. Be a good girl, and play the Miller's Song over again."

She nods amiably. Again the dreamy melody sighs among the strings of the piano. Lato, buried in thought, hums the words,--

"Where'er a true heart dies of love,
The lilies fade that grave above."

"Do you know the words too?" Olga exclaims, turning towards him.

"If you but knew how often I have heard that song sung!" he replies, with the absent air of a man whose thoughts are straying in a far past.

"At concerts?"

"No, in private."

"By a lady?" she asks, half persistently, half hesitatingly.

"Yes, grand inquisitor, by a lady; by a lady for whom I had a little *tendresse*--h'm!--a very sincere *tendresse*. She sang it to me every day. The very evening before her betrothal she sang it to me; and how deliciously sweet it was! Would you like to know who it was?"

"Yes."

"The Countess Wodin."

"The Countess Wodin!" Olga exclaims, amazed.

Lato laughs. "You cannot understand how any one could take any interest in such a flirt?"

"Oh, no," she says, thoughtfully, "it is not that. She is very pretty even yet, and gay and amusing, but--he is horrible, and I cannot understand her marrying him, when----"

"When she might have had me?" he concludes her sentence, laughing.

"Frankly, yes." As she speaks she looks full in his face with undisguised kindness.

He smiles, flattered, and still more amused. "What would you have? Wodin was rich, and I--I was a poor devil."

"Oh, how odious!" she murmurs, frowning, her dark eyes glowing with indignation. "I cannot understand how any one can marry for money----" She stops short. As she spoke her eyes met his, and his were instantly averted. An embarrassing pause ensues.

Olga feels that she is upon dangerous ground. They both change colour,--he turns pale, she blushes,--but her embarrassment is far greater than his. When he looks at her again he sees that there are tears in her eyes, and he pities her.

"Do not vex yourself, Olga," he says, with a low, bitter laugh. And taking one of her slender hands in his, he strokes it gently, and then carries it to his lips.

"Ah, still *aux petits soins*?--how touching!" a harsh nasal voice observes behind the pair. They look round and perceive a young man, who, in spite of his instant apology for intruding, shows not the slightest disposition to depart. He is dressed in a light summer suit after the latest watering-place fashion. He is neither tall nor short, neither stout nor slender, neither handsome nor ugly, but thoroughly unsympathetic in appearance. His very pale complexion is spotted with a few pock-marks; his light green eyes are set obliquely in his head, like those of a Japanese; the long, twisted points of his moustache reach upward to his temples, and his hair is brushed so smoothly upon his head that it looks like a highly-polished barber's block. But all these details are simply by the way; what especially disfigures him is his smile, which shows his big white teeth, and seems to pull the end of his long, thin nose down over his moustache.

"Fainacky!" exclaims Treurenberg, unpleasantly surprised.

"Yes, the same! I am charmed to see you again, Treurenberg," exclaims the Pole. "Have the kindness to present me to your wife," he adds, bowing to Olga.

"I think my wife is dressing," Treurenberg says, coldly. "This is a young relative,--a cousin of my wife's.--Olga, allow me to introduce to you Count Fainacky."

In the mean time Paula is occupied with her betrothed's education. In tones that grow drowsier and drowsier, while his articulation becomes more and more indistinct, Harry stumbles

through Shakespeare's immortal verse.

Paula's part is given with infinite sentiment. The thing is growing too tiresome, Harry thinks.

"I really have had enough of this stuff for once!" he exclaims, laying aside his volume.

"Ah, Harry, how can you speak so of the most exquisite poetry of love that ever has been written?"

He twirls his moustache ill-humouredly, and murmurs, "You are very much changed within the last few days."

"But not for the worse?" she asks, piqued.

"At last she is going to take offence," he says to himself, exultantly, and he is beginning to finger his betrothal-ring, when the door opens and a servant announces, "Herr Count Fainacky."

"How well you look, my dear Baroness Paula! Ah, the correct air, beaming with bliss,--*on connaît cela!* Taking advantage of your Frau mother's kind invitation, I present myself, as you see, without notification," the Pole chatters on. "How are you, Harry? In the seventh heaven, of course,--of course." And he drops into an arm-chair and fans himself with a pink-bordered pocket-handkerchief upon which are depicted various jockeys upon race-horses, and which exhales a strong odour of musk.

"I am extremely glad to see you," Paula assures the visitor. "I hope you have come to stay some days with us. Have you seen mamma yet?"

"No." And Fainacky fans himself yet more affectedly. "I wandered around the castle at first without finding any one to announce me. Then I had an adventure,--ha, ha! *C'est par trop bête!*"

"What was it?"

"In my wanderings I reached an open door into a room looking upon the garden. There I found Treurenberg and a young lady,--only fancy,--I thought it was his wife. I took that--what is her name?--Olga--your *protégée*--for your sister,--for the Countess Selina, and begged Treurenberg to present me to his wife,--ha, ha! *Vraiment c'est par trop bête!*"

At this moment a tall, portly figure, with reddish hair, dazzling complexion, and rather sharp features, sails into the room.

"Here is my sister," says Paula, and a formal introduction follows.

"Before seeing the Countess Selina I thought my mistake only comical. I now think it unpardonable!" Fainacky exclaims, with his hand on his heart. "Harry, did the resemblance never strike you?" He gazes in a rapture of admiration at the Countess.

"What resemblance?" asks Harry.

"Why, the resemblance to the Princess of Wales."

CHAPTER XIV.

OLGA.

"And pray who is Fräulein Olga?"

It is Fainacky who puts this question to the Countess Treurenberg, just after luncheon, during which meal he has contrived to ingratiate himself thoroughly with Lato's wife.

He and the Countess are seated beneath a red-and-gray-striped tent on the western side of the castle; beside them stands a table from which the coffee has not yet been removed. The rest of the company have vanished.

The Baroness Harfink is writing a letter to her brother, one of the leaders of the Austrian democracy, who was once minister for three months; Paula and Harry are enjoying a *tête-à-tête* in the park, and Treurenberg is taking advantage of the strong sunlight to photograph alternately and from every point of view a half-ruinous fountain and two hollyhocks.

"Pray who is this Fräulein Olga?" Fainacky asks, removing the ashes from the end of his cigarette with the long finger-nail of his little finger.

"Ah, it is quite a sad story," is the Countess Selina's reply.

"Excuse me if I am indiscreet; I had no idea----" the Pole begins.

"Oh, you are one of the family, quite one of the family," Selina assures him, with an amiable smile. "I might have thought the question embarrassing from any one else, but I can speak to you without reserve of these matters. You are perhaps aware that a sister of my father's,--is only sister,--when quite an old maid,--I believe she was thirty-seven,--ran off with an actor, a very obscure comedian; I think he played the elderly knights at the Rudolfsheim Theatre, and as the bandit Jaromir he turned her head. She displayed the *courage de ses opinions*, and married him. He treated her brutally, and she died, after fifteen years of wretched married life. On her death-bed she sent for my father, and bequeathed her daughter to his care. This was Olga. My father--I cannot tell how it happened--took the most immense fancy to the girl. He tried to persuade mamma to take her home immediately. Fancy! a creature brought up amid such surroundings, behind the foot-lights. True, my aunt was separated from her bandit Jaromir for several years before her death; but under such strange circumstances mamma really could not take the little gypsy into the house with her own half-grown daughters. So she was sent to a convent, and we all hoped she would become a nun. But no; and when her education was finished, shortly before papa's death, mamma took her home. I was married at the time, and I remember her arrival vividly. You can imagine how terrible it was for us to admit so strange an element among us. But, although he seldom interfered in domestic affairs, it was impossible to dispute papa's commands."

"H'm, h'm!" And the Pole's slender white fingers drum upon the top of the table. "*Je comprends*. It is a great charge for your mother, and *c'est bien dur*." Although he speaks French stumbingly, he continually expresses himself in that tongue, as if it is the only one in which he can give utterance to the inmost feelings of his soul.

"Ah, mamma has always sacrificed everything to duty!" sighs Selina; "and somebody had to take pity upon the poor creature."

"Nobly said, and nobly thought, Countess Selina; but then, after all,--an actor's daughter,--you really do not know all that it means. Does she show no signs of her unfortunate parentage?"

"No," says Selina, thoughtfully; "her manners are very good, the spell of the Sacré Cœur Convent is still upon her. She is not particularly well developed intellectually, but, since you call my attention to it, she does show some signs of the overstrained enthusiasm which characterized her mother."

"And in combination with her father's gypsy blood. Such signs are greatly to be deplored," the Pole observes. "You must long to have her married?"

"A difficult matter to bring about. Remember her origin." The Countess inclines her head on one side, and takes a long stitch in her embroidery. "She must be the image of her father. The bandit Jaromir was a handsome man of Italian extraction."

"Is the fellow still alive?" asks the Pole.

"No, he is dead, thank heaven! it would be terrible if he were not," says Selina, with a laugh. "*À propos*," she adds, selecting and comparing two shades of yellow, "do you think Olga pretty?"

"H'm! *pas mal*,--not particularly. Had I seen her anywhere else, I might perhaps have thought her pretty, but here--forgive my frankness, Countess Selina--no other woman has a chance when you are present. You must be conscious of that yourself."

"*Vil flatteur!*" the young wife exclaims, playfully lashing the Pole's hand with a skein of wool. The pair have known each other for scarcely three hours, and they are already upon as familiar a footing as if they had been friends from childhood. Moreover, they are connections. At Carlsbad, where Fainacky lately made the acquaintance of the Baroness Harfink and her daughter Paula, he informed the ladies that one of his grandmothers, a Löwenzahn by birth, was cousin to an uncle of the Baroness's.

The persistence with which he dwelt upon this fact, the importance he attached to being treated as a cousin by the Harfinks, touched Paula as well as her mother. Besides, as they had already told Selina, they liked him from the first.

"One is never ashamed to be seen with him," was the immediate decision of the fastidious ladies; and as time passed on they discovered in him such brilliant and unusual qualities that they considered him a great acquisition,--an entertaining, cultivated man of some talent.

He is neither cultivated nor entertaining, and as for his talent, that is a matter of opinion. If his singing is commonplace, his performance on the piano commonplace, and the *vers de société* which he scribbles in young ladies' extract-books more commonplace than all, in one art he certainly holds the first rank,--the art of discovering and humouring the weaknesses of his fellow-

mortals, the art of the flatterer.

To pursue this art with distinguished ability two qualifications are especially needful--impudence and lack of refinement. With the help of these allies the strongest incense may be wafted before one's fellow-creatures, and they will all--with the exception of a few suspicious originals--inhale it eagerly. Experience has taught Fainacky that boldness is of far more avail in this art than delicacy, and he conducts himself accordingly.

Flattery is his special profession, his means for supporting his idle, coxcomb existence--flattery and its sister art, slander. A successful epigram at another's expense gives many of us more pleasure than a compliment paid to ourselves.

He flutters, flattering and gossiping, from one house to another. The last few weeks he has spent with a bachelor prince in the neighbourhood, who, a sufferer from neuralgia in the face, has been known, when irritated, to throw the sofa-cushions at his guests. At first Fainacky professed to consider this a very good joke; but one day when the prince showed signs of selecting more solid projectiles for the display of his merry humour, Fainacky discovered that the time had come for him to bestow the pleasure of his society elsewhere.

Dobrotschau seemed to offer just what he sought, and he has won his hostess's heart a second time by his abuse during luncheon of his late host's cook.

While he is now paying court to the Countess Selina, a touching scene is enacting in another part of the garden. Paula, who during her walk with her betrothed has perceived Treurenberg with his photographic apparatus in the distance, proposes to Harry that they be photographed as lovers. The poor young fellow's resistance avails nothing against Paula's strong will. She triumphantly drags him up before the apparatus, and, after much trying, discovers a pose which seems to her sufficiently tender. With her clasped hands upon Harry's shoulder, she gazes up at him with enthusiastic devotion.

"Do not look so stern," she murmurs; "if I did not know how you love me, I should almost fancy you hated me."

Lato, half shutting his eyes in artistic observation of the pair, takes off the shield of the instrument, saying, "Now, if you please!"

The impression is a failure, because Harry moved his head just at the critical moment. When, however, Paula requires him to give pantomimic expression to his tender sentiments for the second time, he declares that he cannot stay three minutes longer, the 'vet' is waiting for him at Komaritz.

"Oh, that odious 'vet'!" sighs Paula. "This is the third time this week that you have had to leave me because of him."

Harry bites his lip. Evidently it is high time to invent another pretext for the unnatural abbreviation of his visits. But--if she would only take offence at something!

"Can you not come with me to Komaritz?" he asks Lato, in order to give the conversation a turn, whereupon Lato, who instantly accedes to his request, hurries into the castle to make ready for his ride. Shortly afterwards, riding-whip in hand, he approaches Selina, who is still beneath the red-and-gray tent with Fainacky.

"Ah, you are going to leave me alone again, faithless spouse that you are!" she calls out, threatening him with a raised forefinger. Then, turning to the Pole, she adds, "Our marriage is a fashionable one, such as you read of in books: the husband goes one way, the wife another. 'Tis the only way to make life tolerable in the long run, is it not, Lato?"

Lato makes no reply, flushes slightly, kisses his wife's hand, nods carelessly to Fainacky, and turns to go.

"Shall you come back to dinner?" Selina calls after him.

"Of course," he replies, as he vanishes behind the shrubbery.

Fainacky strokes his moustache thoughtfully, stares first at the Countess, then at the top of the table, and finally gives utterance to an expressive "Ah!"

Lato hurries on to overtake his friend, whom he espies striding towards the park gate.

Suddenly Olga approaches him, a huge straw hat shading her eyes, and in her hands a large, dish-shaped cabbage-leaf full of inviting, fresh strawberries.

"Whither are you hurrying?" she asks.

"I am going to ride to Komaritz with Harry," he replies. "Ah, what magnificent strawberries!"

"I know they are your favourite fruit, and I plucked them for you," she says.

"In this heat?--oh, Olga!" he exclaims.

"The sun would have burned them up by evening," she says, simply.

He understands that she has meant to atone for her inadvertence of the morning, and he is touched.

"Will you not take some?" she asks, persisting in offering him the leaf.

He takes one. Meanwhile, his glance encounters Harry's. Olga is entirely at her ease, while Lato--from what cause he could not possibly tell--is slightly embarrassed.

"I have no time now," he says, gently rejecting the hand that holds the leaf.

"Shall I keep them for your dessert?--you are coming back to dinner?" she asks.

"Certainly. I shall be back by six o'clock," he calls to her. "Adieu, my child."

As the two friends a few minutes later ride down the long poplar avenue, Harry asks,--

"Has this Olga always lived here?"

"No. She came home from the convent a year after my marriage. Selina befriends her because Paula cannot get along with her. She often travels with us."

"She seems pleasant and sympathetic," says Harry, adding, after a short pause, "I have seldom seen so perfect a beauty."

"She is as good as gold," Lato says, quickly, adding, in a rather lower tone, "and most forlorn, poor thing!"

CHAPTER XV.

COMRADES AND FRIENDS.

The clumsy Komaritz mansion casts its huge shadow upon the old-fashioned garden, upon the large rectangular flower-beds bordered with sage and parsley, wherein bloom in gay companionship sweet-smelling centifolia roses, dark-blue monk's-hood, scarlet verbenas, and lilac phlox; upon the tangle of raspberry- and blackberry-bushes that grow along the garden wall; and upon the badly-mown lawn. Ancient pear-trees and apple-trees mingle their shade with that of the old house.

An afternoon languor broods over it all. The buzz of bees above the flower-beds sounds languid; languid sounds the rustle of the leaves when, after a prolonged slumber, they awake for an instant, shiver, and then fall silent again; languid is the tone of the old piano, upon which the youngest Leskjewitsch is practising the 'Cloches du Monastere,' under the supervision of a teacher engaged for the summer holidays,--a Fräulein Laut.

Nothing is for the present to be seen or heard of the other inmates of the castle. Hedwig is consulting with her maid, and the Countess Zriny is endeavouring to repair a great misfortune. On her journey from Vienna to Komaritz she relieved her maid, who was overladen with hand-bags, of two objects particularly dear to her soul,--a carved, partly-painted and partly-gilded St. John, and a large bottle of eau de Lourdes. In changing trains at Pernik, she slipped and fell at full length upon the platform; the bottle of eau de Lourdes flew one way and the St. John another; the bottle was broken, and St. John not only lost his head and one hand, but when the poor Countess gathered up his remains he proved to be injured in every part. His resuscitation is at present the important task of the old lady's life. At this moment she is working away at the folds of his garment with much devotion--and black oil paint.

Harry and Lato have told no one of their arrival. They are lying upon a grassy slope beneath a huge apple-tree, smoking, and exchanging reminiscences.

"How homelike all this is!" says Treurenberg, in his soft voice, and with a slightly drawling intonation. "I grow ten years younger here. The same flowers, the same trees, the same fragrance, the same world-forgotten solitude, and, if I am not mistaken,"--he smiles a little,--"the same music. You used to play the 'Convent Bells' then."

"Yes," Harry replies, "'Les Cloches du Monastere' was the acme and the point of departure of my musical studies. I got rid of my last music-teacher and my last 'coach' at the same time."

"Do you mean Tuschalek?" asks Treurenberg.

"That was his name."

"H'm! I can see him now. Heavens! those hands!" Treurenberg gazes reflectively into space. "They were always as red as radishes."

"They reminded me rather of carrots that had just been pulled out of the ground," Harry mutters.

"How the old times rise up before me!" Lato muses, letting his glance wander anew over the garden, where there is buzzing of innumerable bees; over the clumsy façade of the mansion; over the little eminence where still stand the quarters of Tuschalek and the Pole; then up to the old ruined castle, which stands out against the dark-blue August skies an almost formless shape, brown and grim, with its old scars from fire, and hung about with wreaths of wild climbing vines.

"'Tis odd,--something has seemed to me lacking about the dear old nest," Lato begins again, after a pause. "Now I know what it is."

"Well?"

"The little figure of your cousin Zdena. I am always looking for her to come skipping from among the flowers like a wayward little fairy."

Harry frowns, plucks a buttercup growing in the grass, and is mute.

Without heeding his friend's mood, Treurenberg goes on: "As a child, she was most charming and unusually intelligent and gifted. Has the promise of her childhood not been fulfilled?"

Harry pulls another buttercup out of the grass, and carefully deposits it beside the first.

"That is a matter of opinion," he remarks, carelessly, without looking at his friend.

"'Tis strange! Many a girl's beauty vanishes suddenly at about fourteen without leaving a trace; but I would have wagered my head that your cousin would have been beautiful," remarks Lato.

"I have not said that she is ugly," Harry growls.

"But you do not like her!" Lato now rivets his eyes full upon the gloomy face of his former playmate.

Harry turns away his head.

"I did not say I did not like her," he bursts out, "but I can't talk of her, because--because it is all her fault!"

"What is 'all'?" asks Lato, still looking fixedly at his friend.

Harry frowns and says nothing.

Lato does not speak again for a few moments. Then, having lighted a fresh cigar, he begins: "I always fancied,--one so often arranges in imagination a friend's future for him, particularly when one's own fate is fixed past recall,--I always said to myself that you and your cousin would surely come together. I liked to think that it would be so. To speak frankly, your betrothal to Paula was a great surprise to me."

"Indeed? Well, so it was to me!" Harry blurts out, then turns very red, is ashamed of his unbecoming confession; and then--then he is glad that it has been extorted from him; glad that he can speak frankly about the affair to any one with whom he can take counsel.

Treurenberg draws a long breath, and then whistles softly to himself.

"Sets the wind in that quarter?" he says at last. "I thought so. I determined that you should show your colours. And may I ask how you ever got into such a confounded scrape?"

Harry groans. "What would you have?--moonlight, nervous excitement,--all of a sudden there we were! I had quarrelled with my cousin Zdena--God bless her! In spite of her whims and fancies,--one never knows what she would be at,--she is the dearest, loveliest creature----! But that is only by the way----"

"Not at all, not at all; it interests me extremely," Treurenberg interrupts him, laughing.

"That may be, but it has very little to do with my explanation," Harry rejoins, dryly. "The fact is, that it was a warm night in August, and I was driving alone with Paula,--that is, with no coachman, and only my groom, who followed with my horse, and whom I entirely forgot,--from

Zirkow to Dobrotschau, along that rough forest road,--you remember,--where one is jolted against one's companion at every step, and there is opportunity for a girl to be becomingly timid--h'm! She suddenly became frightened at a will-o'-the-wisp, she never struck me before as having such weak nerves,--and--well, I was distraught over my quarrel with Zdena, and I had taken perhaps a glass too much of Uncle Paul's old Bordeaux; in short, I kissed her. In an instant I recollected myself, and, if I am not mistaken, I said, 'Excuse me!' or, 'I beg pardon!' She cannot have heard this extremely sensible remark, however, for in the twinkling of an eye I was betrothed. The next day I was determined to put an end to such nonsense, and I sat down at my writing-table--confound it all! I never was great with the pen, and the model of such a letter as I wanted to write was not to be found in any 'Complete Letter-Writer.' Everything I tried to put on paper seemed to me so terribly indelicate and rough, and so I determined to tell the mother. I meant to bring forward a previous and binding attachment; to plead in my excuse the superlative charms of the Baroness Paula--oh, I had it all splendidly planned; but the old Baroness never let me open my lips, and so matters came to be arranged as you find them."

Through the open glass doors of the dining-room, across the flower-beds, comes the faint voice of the old piano. But it is no longer echoing the 'Cloches du Monastere,' but a wailing canzonetta by some popular local composer upon which the youngest Leskjewitsch is expending a most unnecessary amount of banging upon keys and pressing of pedals. With a grimace Harry stops his ears. Treurenberg looks very grave.

"You do not, then, intend to marry Paula?"

"God forbid!" Harry exclaims.

"Then,--Lato bites his lip, but goes on calmly,--"forgive an old friend who is aware of the difficulty of your position, for the disagreeable remark,--but if you do not intend to marry my sister-in-law, your conduct with regard to her is not only very unbecoming but also positively wrong."

"Why?" Harry asks, crossly.

"Why?" Lato lifts his eyebrows. "Why, because you compromise her more deeply with every visit you pay her. You cannot surely deceive yourself as to the fact that upon the superficial observer you produce the impression of an unusually devoted pair of lovers."

"I do not understand how you can say such a thing!" Harry exclaims, angrily, "when you must have seen----"

"That you are on the defensive with Paula," Treurenberg interrupts him, with a wan smile. "Yes, I have seen it."

"Well, she ought to see it too," Harry mutters.

Lato shrugs his shoulders.

"She must lose patience sooner or later," says Harry.

"It is difficult to exhaust the patience of a young woman whose sensibilities are not very delicate and who is very much in love," his friend replies. "You must devise some other, and--forgive my frankness--some more honest and straightforward means for attaining your end."

Harry puffs furiously at his cigarette, sending a cloud of smoke over the flower-bed. "Lato, you are rough upon me, but not rougher than I am upon myself. If you knew how degraded I feel by my false position, if you knew how the whole matter weighs upon me, you would do something more for me than only hold up a candle by the light of which I perceive more clearly the misery of my position. You would----"

"What?" Lato asks, disturbed.

"Help me!"

Lato looks at him in dismay for a moment, and then stammers, "No, Harry, do not ask it of me,--not of me. I could do you no good. They never would let me speak, any more than my mother-in-law would allow you to speak. And even if I finally prevailed upon them to listen, they would blame me for the whole affair, would believe that I had excited your mind against the family."

"How could they possibly imagine that you could conduct yourself so towards a friend?" Harry asks, with a grim smile.

Lato turns his head aside.

"Then you will not do me this service?"

"I cannot!" Treurenberg murmurs, faintly.

"I might have known it!" Harry breaks forth, his eyes flashing with indignant scorn. "You are

the same old fellow, the very same,--a good fellow enough, yes, sympathetic, compassionate, and, as long as you are allowed to remain perfectly passive, the noblest of men. But as soon as anything is required of you,--if any active interference is called for at your hands, there's an end of it. You simply cannot, you would rather die than rouse yourself to any energetic action!"

"Perhaps so," Lato murmurs, with a far-away look in his eyes, and a smile that makes Harry's blood run cold.

A pause ensues, the longest of the many pauses that have occurred in this *tête-à-tête*.

The bees seem to buzz louder than ever. A dry, thirsty wind sighs in the boughs of the apple-tree; two or three hard green apples drop to the ground. At last Treurenberg gathers himself up.

"You must take me as I am," he says, wearily; "there is no cutting with a dull knife. I cannot possibly enlighten my mother-in-law as to the true state of your feelings. It would do no good, and it would make an infernal row. But I will give you one piece of good advice----"

Before he is able to finish his sentence his attention is arrested by a perfect babel of sounds from the dining-room. The piano music is hushed, its discord merged into the angry wail of a shrieking feminine voice and the rough, broken, changing tones of a lad,--the rebellious pupil, Vladimir Leskjewitsch. The hurly-burly is so outrageous that every one is roused to investigate it. Countess Zriny rushes in, with short, waddling steps, the paint-brush with which she has been mending St. John's robe still in her hand; Hedwig rushes in; Harry and Lato rush in.

"What is the matter? What is the matter?"

"You poured that water on the keys intentionally, to prevent your playing," the teacher angrily declares to her pupil.

"I do not deny it," Vladimir rejoins, loftily.

The spectators suppress a smile, and are all, as is, alas! so frequently the case, on the side of the culprit, a tall, overgrown lad of about fourteen, with a handsome dark face, large black eyes, a short, impertinent nose, and full, well-formed lips. With hands thrust deep into the pockets of his blue jacket, he gravely surveys the circle, and tosses his head defiantly.

"You hear him! you hear him!" Fräulein Laut screams, turning to the by-standers. Then, approaching Vladimir, she asks, angrily, "And how can you justify such conduct?"

Vladimir scans her with majestic disdain. "How can you justify your having ruined all my pleasure in music?" he asks, in a tragic tone, and with a bombastic flourish of his hand. "That piano has been my dear friend from childhood!"--he points feelingly to the instrument, which is yellow with age, has thin, square legs, and six pedals, the use of which no one has ever yet fathomed,--"yes, my friend! And today I hate it so that I have well-nigh destroyed it! Fräulein Laut, justify that."

"Must I be subjected to this insolence?" groans the teacher.

"Vladimir, go to your room!" Harry orders, with hardly maintained gravity.

Vladimir departs with lofty self-possession. The teacher turns contemptuously from those present, especially from Harry, who tries to appease her with a few courteous phrases. With a skilful hand she takes the piano apart, dismembers the key-board, and spreads the hammers upon sheets of tin brought for her from the kitchen by Blasius, the old servant, that the wet, swollen wood may be dried before the fire.

"Take care lest there be an *auto-da-fé*," Harry calls after her. Without deigning to reply, she vanishes with the bowels of the piano.

Blasius, meanwhile, with imperturbable composure, has spread the table for the evening meal at one end of the spacious room, in which there is now diffused an agreeable odour of fresh biscuits. A mountain of reddish-yellow almond cakes is flanked on one side by a plate of appetizing rye bread, on the other by butter garnished with ice and cresses. There is a fruit-basket at either end of the table, filled with peaches, early grapes, and all kinds of ripe green and purple plums, while a bowl of cut glass holds whipped cream cooled in ice. Finally, old Blasius brings in a tray fairly bending beneath the burden of various pitchers and flagons, the bewildering number of which is due to the fact that at Komaritz the whims of all are consulted, and consequently each one orders something different, be it only a different kind of cream.

"As of old, no one is in danger at Komaritz of death from starvation," Lato remarks, smiling.

"Help us to be rid of the provision," Harry says.

Hedwig repeats the invitation rather affectedly, but Lato, looking at his watch, discovers that he has already overstayed his time by an hour.

All express regret, and bid him farewell.

"And the good advice you were about to give me?" Harry says, interrogatively, as he takes leave of his friend, having accompanied him to the gate of the court-yard.

"Cut short your leave of absence; go away," Lato replies. "You will at least be relieved for the time from any necessity for dissimulation, and such affairs are better adjusted by letter."

Harry gazes gloomily into space; Lato springs into the saddle. "Adieu!" he calls out, and is gone.

CHAPTER XVI.

LATO TREURENBERG.

Ding-dong--ding-dong! the Angelus bells are ringing through the evening air with their message of rest for weary mortals.

The long shadows of the trees grow paler, and vanish, taking with them all the glory of the world and leaving only a dull, borrowed twilight to hover above the earth.

The sun has set. Ding-dong! rings the bell of Komaritz, near at hand, as Lato rides past; the bells of the other villages echo the sound dreamily, to have their notes tossed back by the bells of the lonely chapels on the mountain-sides across the steel-gray stream, whose waters glide silently on ward. Ding-dong! each answers to all, and the tired labourer rejoices in unison.

The hour of rest has come, the hour when families reassemble after the pursuits and labours of the day have ceased to claim and separate them,--when mortals feel more warmly and sensibly the reality of family ties. Thin blue smoke is curling from the chimneys; here and there a woman can be seen standing at the door of a cottage, shading her eyes with her hand as she looks expectantly down the road. Upon the doorstep of a poor hut sits a brown, worn labourer, dirty and ragged, about to eat his evening meal with a leaden spoon from an earthen bowl; a young woman crouches beside him, with her back against the door-post, content and silent, while a chubby child, with bare legs somewhat bowed, and a curly head, leans against his knee and, with its mouth open in expectation, peeps into the earthen bowl. The father smiles, and from time to time thrusts a morsel between the fresh, rosy lips. Then he puts aside the bowl and takes the little fellow upon his knee. It is a pretty child,--and perhaps in honour of the father's return home--wonderfully clean, but even were this not the case--- Most of the children tumbling about before the huts on this sultry August evening are neither pretty nor clean; they are dirty, ragged, dishevelled; many are sickly, and some are crippled; but there is hardly one among them to whom this hour does not bring a caress.

An atmosphere of mutual human sympathy seems to brood in silence above the resting earth, while the bells ring on,--ding-dong, ding-dong.

Lato has left the village behind him, and is trotting along the road beneath the tall walnuts. The noise of wagons, heavily laden with the harvest, and the tramp of men upon the road fall upon his ear,--everything is going home.

There is a languor in the aromatic summer air, somewhat that begets in every human being a desire for companionship, a longing to share the burden of existence with another. Even the flowers seem to bend their heads nearer to one another.

Now the bells are hushed, the road is deserted; Lato alone is still pursuing his way home. Home? Is it possible that he has accustomed himself to call his mother-in-law's castle home? In many a hotel--at "The Lamb," for example, in Vienna he has felt much more at home. Where, then, is his home? He vainly asks himself this question. Has he ever had a home?

The question is still unanswered. His thoughts wander far back into the past, and find nothing, not even a few tender memories. Poor Lato! He recalls his earliest years, his childhood. His parents were considered the handsomest couple in Austria. The Count was fair, tall, slender, with an apparent delicacy of frame that concealed an amount of physical strength for which he was famous, and with nobly-chiselled features. His duels and his love-affairs were numerous. He was rashly brave, and irresistible; so poor an accountant that he always allowed his opponents to reckon up his gains at play, but when his turn came to pay a debt of honour he was never known to make an error in a figure. It is scarcely necessary to mention that his gambling debts were the only ones the payment of which he considered at all important. He was immensely beloved by his subordinates,--his servants, his horses, and his dogs; he addressed them all with the German

"thou," and treated them all with the same good-humoured familiarity. He was thought most urbane, and was never guilty of any definite intentional annoyance; but he suffered from a certain near-sightedness. He recognized as fellow-mortals only those fellow-mortals who occupied the same social plane with himself; all others were in his eyes simply population,—the masses.

There is little to tell of his wife, save that she was a brilliant brunette beauty, with very loud manners and a boundless greed of enjoyment. She petted little Lato like a lapdog; but one evening, just as she was dressed for a ball, she was informed that the child had been taken violently ill with croup, whereupon she flew into a rage with those who had been so thoughtless and unfeeling as to tell her such a thing at so inopportune a moment. Her carriage was announced; she let it wait while she ran up-stairs to the nursery, kissed the gasping little patient, exclaimed, with a lifted forefinger, "Be a good boy, my darling; don't die while mamma is at the ball!" and vanished.

The little fellow was good and did not die. As a reward, his mother gave him the largest and handsomest rocking-horse that was to be found in Vienna. Such was the Countess Treurenberg as a mother; and as a wife—well, Hans Treurenberg was satisfied with her, and her behaviour was no one else's affair. The couple certainly got along together admirably. They never were seen together except when they received guests.

Peace to her ashes! The Countess paid a heavy price for her short-lived joys. When scarcely twenty-six years old, she was attacked by a mortal disease. Her condition was all the more painful because she persisted in concealing her malady from the world, even denying its existence. Up to the last she went into society, and she died in full dress, diamonds and all, in a glare of light, on a lounge in her dressing-room.

The widower at first took her death so terribly to heart that his associates remarked upon it.

"Treurenberg is really a very good fellow!" they said, and so he was.

For a time he kept little Lato with him constantly. Even on the evenings when gambling was going on, and they played long and high at Hans Treurenberg's, the boy was present. When hardly twelve years old he was fully initiated into the mysteries of all games of chance. He would sit silent and quiet until far into the night, watching the course of the game, trembling with excitement at any sudden turn of luck. And how proud he was when he was allowed to take a hand! He played extremely well for his age, and his luck was constant. His father's friends made merry over his gambling ability. His father would pat his cheeks, stroke his hair off his forehead, take his face between his hands, and kiss him. Then, with his fingers beneath the lad's chin, he would turn his face this way and that, calling his guests' attention to the boy's beauty, to his eyes sparkling with eagerness, to his flushed cheeks. Then he would kiss the boy again, make him drink a glass of champagne, and send him to bed.

Then was sown the seed of the evil passion which was in after-years to cause Lato so many an hour of bitter suffering. Calm, almost phlegmatic, with regard to all else, as soon as he touched a card his excitement was intense, however he might manage to conceal it.

When Count Hans grew tired of the constant companionship of his son, he freed himself from it after a perfectly respectable fashion. He sent him to Prague, a city renowned for the stolidity of its institutions, committing him to the care of relatives, and of a professor who undertook to supply the defects of the boy's neglected education. When Lato was eighteen he entered a regiment of hussars.

Hereafter, if the father took but little pains about his son, he certainly showed him every kindness,—paid his debts, and laughed while he admired the young man's mad pranks. Moreover, he really loved him, which did not, however, hinder him from contriving to have Lato declared of age at twenty, that the young fellow might have possession of his maternal inheritance, since he himself needed money.

It was at this time that the elder Treurenberg's view of life and the world underwent a remarkable change. He became a Liberal, and this not only in a political sense, but socially, a much rarer transformation. He appeared frequently at the tables of wealthy men of business, where he was valued not merely as an effective aristocratic decoration, but as a really charming companion. His liberal views took on more magnificent dimensions: he announced himself a heretic with regard to the exclusiveness of the Austrian aristocracy, smiled at the folly of Austrian court etiquette, and then, one fine day he made friends with the wealthy *parvenu*, Conte Capriani, and, throwing overboard as useless ballast impeding free action the '*noblesse oblige*' principle, he devoted himself blindly and with enthusiasm to stock-gambling. The result was hardly encouraging. When Lato applied to his father one day for a considerable sum of money, it was not to be had. Melancholy times for the Treurenbergs ensued; thanks, however, to the friendship of Conte Capriani, who sometimes helped him to a really profitable transaction, Count Hans was able to keep his head above water. And he continued to hold it as high as ever, to preserve the same air of distinction, to smile with the same amiable cordiality in which there was a spice of *hauteur*; in a word, he preserved the indefinable prestige of his personality, which made it impossible that Conte Capriani's demeanour towards him should ever partake of the nature of condescension. The only thing required of Count Hans by Capriani was that he should

spend a couple of weeks with him every year in the hunting-season. This the Count seemed quite willing to do, and he therefore appeared every year, in August or October, at Heinrichsdorf, an estate in West Hungary, where Capriani had preferred to live since his affair with young Count Lodrin had made his castle of Schneeberg impossible for him as a place of residence.

One year the Count asked his son to accompany him to Heinrichsdorf.

Will Lato ever forget the weeks he spent there, the turning-point as they were of his existence? How foreign and tiresome, how hard and bald, it all was! how uncomfortable, how uncongenial!--the furniture, among which here and there, as was the fashion, some costly antique was displayed; the guests, among whom were various representatives of historic Austrian nobility; the Conte's secretary, a choleric Hungarian, who concealed the remnant of a pride of rank which ill became his present position beneath an aggressive cynicism, and who was wont to carry in his pocket, when he went to walk, a little revolver, with which he shot at sparrows or at the flies creeping upon some wall, by way perhaps of working off the bitterness of his soul. There, too, was the master of the house, showing the same frowning brow to all whom he met, contradicting all with the same rudeness, hunting to earth any stray poetic sentiment, and then, after a violent explosion of pure reason, withdrawing gloomily to his cabinet, where he could give himself over to his two passions,--that for money-making, and that for setting the world at naught.

The only person in the assemblage whom Lato found attractive was the mistress of the mansion, with whom he often talked for hours, never ceasing to wonder at the melancholy grace and quiet dignity of her bearing, as well as at the well-nigh morbid delicacy and high moral tone of her sentiments.

Above all did Lato dislike those among the guests of a like rank with his own, men who were like himself in money difficulties, and who hovered about this deity of the stock market in hopes of obtaining his blessing upon their speculations.

Count Hans moved among all these aristocratic and un-aristocratic luminaries with the same unchanging grace that carried him victoriously over all annoyances,--always genial and courtly; but the son could not emulate his father's ease of mind and manner; he felt depressed and humiliated.

Then the Baroness Harfink and her daughters made their appearance. The two striking, pleasure-loving girls had an enlivening effect upon the wearied assemblage.

Paula was the cleverer of the two, but she talked too much, which was tiresome, and then she had a reputation for learning, which frightened men away. Selina, on the other hand, knew how to veil her lack of cleverness beneath an interesting taciturnity; she had a fashion of slowly lifting her eyelids which appealed to a man's fancy. With a degree of prudence frequently displayed by rather dull girls, she forbore to appeal to the crowd, and concentrated her efforts to charm upon Lato. She accompanied him in the pheasant-shooting parties, took lessons from him in lawn-tennis,--in a white dress, her loosened hair gleaming in the sunlight,--or simply lay quietly back in a rocking-chair in the shade in front of the castle, gazing at him with her large, half-closed eyes, while he, half in jest, half in earnest, said all sorts of pretty things.

There was always play in the evenings at the castle, and usually very high play. The atmosphere about the gaming-tables was hardly agreeable, and the Conte moved about among them, taking no share in such "silly waste of time," while every one else was eager to win. Lato took part in the unedifying pastime, and at first fortune befriended him; then he lost. His losses embarrassed him, and he withdrew from playing. He was not the only one to avoid the gambling-tables after a short trial of luck; several gentlemen followed his example. The Conte took triumphant note of this, and arranged a party for five-kreutzer whist, in which he joined.

Lato bit his lip. Never before had his unfortunate pecuniary circumstances so weighed upon him. The thirst for gold--the prevailing epidemic at Heinrichsdorf--demanded a fresh victim.

There had been a hunting-dinner; Conte Capriani's wine had been unusually fiery; every one was gay; Heinrichsdorf could remember no such brilliant festivity. The windows of the drawing-room where the company were assembled were open and looked out upon the park. The intoxicating fragrance of the sultry August night was wafted into the room; the stars sparkled above the black tree-tops, twinkling restlessly, like deceitful will-o'-the-wisps, in the blue vault of heaven; the sweet, wild music of a band of Hungarian gypsies came floating into the apartment with the fragrance of the night. Selina looked wonderfully beautiful on that evening, a sultana-like beauty, nothing more, but she harmonized with the spell of the August night. She wore a red crape gown, red as flickering fire, red as benumbing poppy-blossoms, very *décolletée*, and its decided colour heightened the white, pearly lustre of the girl's neck and arms. The lines about her mouth had not then settled into a stereotyped smile; her nose was not sharp; the sheen of her hair had not been dimmed by perpetual powdering. Essentially commonplace as she was, for the moment there was about her a mingling of languor and excitement, which betrays an accelerated movement of the heart. Selina Harfink was in love. Lato was perfectly aware of it, and that she was in love with him. He bestowed but little thought upon this fact, however. What could come of it? And yet, whenever he was with her, a cold shiver ran through him.

The mysterious shades of night were invaded by music and the summer breeze; wherever Lato was he saw that red gown. A hand was laid upon his arm, and when he turned he gazed into a pair of eyes veiled yet glowing.

"Why do you avoid me?" Selina whispered.

"Southern Roses!" one of the gentlemen standing near a window called to the musicians, and immediately there floated out into the night, to mingle with the low whisper of the linden leaves, the notes of the first bars of that most beguiling of all Strauss's beguiling waltzes.

He danced with her, and then--almost rudely--he left her. It was the only time he had danced with her that evening, and now he left the room, hurrying away to be somewhere where that red dress was not before his eyes. And yet he had the sensation of overcoming himself, of denying himself at least a pleasant excitement.

Why? What could ever come of it?

For the first time in several days he joined the gamesters. He played high, with varying luck, but when he left the gaming-table he carried with him the consciousness of having lost more than he was at present in a condition to pay.

He went to his room and began mechanically to undress. A fever seemed burning in his veins; how sultry it was! through the open windows he could see black thunder-clouds gathering in the skies. The air was damp and laden with a fragrance so sweet as to be almost sickening. A low murmur sighed among the leaves of the shrubbery in the park,--melancholy, mysterious, alluring, yet mingled with a soft plaint, breathing above the late summer roses. "Enjoy! enjoy! life is brief!" He turned away, lay down, and closed his eyes; but still he seemed to see the red dress. He could not think of marrying her. A girl from such a family and with such a crowd of insufferable connections! Had she only been a poor little thing whom he could snatch away from her surroundings; but no, if he married her, he was sufficiently clear in his mind for the moment to understand, he must adjust himself to her social position. The power was hers,--money!

Oh, this wretched money! At every turn the lack of it tormented him; he had tried to retrench, to economize, but how paltry such efforts seemed to him! What a good use he could make of it if he had it! She was very beautiful----

A light footfall made itself heard in the passage outside his door. Was not that his father's step? Lato asked himself. The door opened; Count Hans entered, straight, tall, and slender, with haughty, refined features and sparkling blue eyes, very bald, very gray; but what vitality and energy he showed in his every movement! At this moment Lato felt a great admiration for his father, beside whom he himself seemed pitifully weak. He took shame to himself; what would his father say could he know of the ideas which he, Lato Treurenberg, had just been entertaining?

"Still awake, Lato?" the knightly old man asked, kindly, sitting down on the edge of his son's bed. "I saw from below your light still burning, and I wanted to ask if anything were troubling you. You are not wont to suffer from sleeplessness."

Lato was touched, and doubly ashamed of the low, mean way of extricating himself from his difficulties which had but now seemed to him almost possible.

"One's thoughts run such riot, sometimes," he murmured.

"H'm!" The father put his cigar between his lips and puffed forth a cloud of smoke to float upward to the ceiling. "I think you lost at baccarat to-night," he remarked.

"Yes."

"Much?"

"More than I can pay at present," Lato replied, with a weary smile.

"As if that were of any moment!" Count Hans consoled him. "I am at your service, and am, besides, your debtor."

"But, father----"

"Yes, yes, I tell you it is so. I am your debtor. Do you think I forget it? Indeed I do not. I am sorry that I cannot help it; but 'tis the fault of circumstances. The estates yield absolutely nothing; they require money enough, but when it comes to looking for any return I look in vain. No one who has not tried it knows what a sinking-fund land is. It cannot go on thus; we must make a fundamental effort, or we shall be ruined!"

"Yes, father," Lato murmured, "we must be in earnest, instead of enjoying ourselves thoughtlessly and with a dread of work. We have lost our force; we have been faithless to our principles; we must begin a new existence, you and I." As he uttered these high-sounding words, Lato had the unpleasant sensation of repeating something learned by rote; the big phrases confused him; he was embarrassed by the consciousness of his father's too ready satire. He looked up at him, but the old Count did not seem to have heard him. This was a relief; he sighed,

and was silent. Suddenly the red dress fluttered before his eyes again.

Count Hans raised his head, and murmured, "She looked very lovely this evening."

"Who?" asked Lato, slowly. He did not need to ask; he knew that his father had shared his thoughts. He was terribly startled. Something seemed to be crumbling away which he had believed would always stand firm.

"Selina, of course--the only really pretty woman in the house," said Count Hans. "Her beauty has expanded wonderfully in the last few days. It is always becoming to pretty women to be in love."

"In love?" Lato repeated, his throat contracted, his tongue dry.

The old Count laughed. "Ah, you're a sly fellow, Lato."

Lato was mute.

His father continued: "They are all jealous of you, Lato. Did you not see what happened this evening in the conservatory, just after dinner? Pistasch Kamenz proposed to her, and she refused him. He told me of it himself, and made light of it; but he was hard hit. I can quite understand it. She is an exceedingly beautiful woman; she does not carry herself well, 'tis true--with women of her class the physical training is sure to be neglected--but all that can be changed."

Lato was still mute. So, then, Pistasch Kamenz had tried that of which he, Lato, had been ashamed, and had failed. He should not fail.

The old Count waited a moment, and then went on: "I am sorry for Kamenz; the match would have been an excellent one for him; he would have settled down."

"Settled down--upon his wife's money!" Lato muttered, without looking at his father.

"Is there anything new in that?" exclaimed the Count, with unruffled composure. "A man of honour can take nothing from a woman whom he loves, but everything from his wife. 'Tis an old rule, and it is comical,"--Count Hans laughed softly,--"how here in Austria we require that a rich wife should always belong to the same sphere with her husband; he is forgiven for a *mésalliance* only if he marries a beggar. It is pure folly! We shall never amount to anything unless we toss aside the entire burden of prejudice which we drag about with us. It weighs us down; we cannot keep step with the rest; how can a man run sheathed in mail? With the exception of a few magnates among us who are able to enjoy their prestige, we are wretchedly off. We spend our lives sacrificing ourselves for a position which we cannot maintain respectably; we pamper a chimera to be devoured by it in the end. Most of all do I admire the *bourgeoisie*, whom we impress, and whose servility keeps bright the nimbus about our heads. Bah! we can do nothing more with the old folly! We must mingle in the fresh life of the present."

"Yes," Lato muttered again, but more indistinctly than at first, "we ought to work, to achieve somewhat."

Count Hans did not, perhaps, hear this remark; at all events he did not heed it.

"All the huge new fortunes in England marry into the aristocracy," he said.

Outside, the same strange alluring murmur breathed above the thirsty flowers; the breeze of the coming storm streamed into the room.

"To marry a woman for the sake of her money is detestable," Count Hans began afresh, and his voice was almost as soft and wooing as that of the summer night outside; "but, good heavens! why should one refuse to marry a girl whom he loves just because she is rich?"

He paused. Lato had closed his eyes.

"Are you asleep?" his father murmured.

Lato shook his head, without speaking. The old Count arose, extinguished the candle on the table, and softly withdrew.

CHAPTER XVII.

MISMATED.

About four months afterwards Lato stood with Selina Harfink before the altar, in a large splendidly-decorated church filled with a crowd of people, among whom Lato, as he walked towards the altar, mechanically sought some familiar face,--at first in vain. At last he found some one,--his old English teacher; then a horse-dealer with whom he had had transactions; and then there in the background--how could they have escaped him?--about a dozen ladies of his own circle. Some of them held their eye-glasses to their eyes, then crowded together and whispered among themselves. He turned away his head.

How dared they whisper about him! He had not sold himself; he was marrying a girl whom he loved, who was accidentally rich!

The long train moved slowly up to the altar. Lato felt as if he were dragging after him a burden that grew heavier with every step. He was glad to be able to kneel down before the priest. He looked at his bride. She knelt beside him, brilliantly beautiful, glowing with passion, supremely content. In vain did he look for the shimmer of tears in her eyes, for a trace of virginal shyness in her features, for aught that could arouse sympathy and tenderness. No; about her full red lips there was the tremor of gratified vanity and of triumphant--love! Love?

From her face Lato's gaze wandered among the wedding-guests. Strangers,--all strangers. His family was represented by his father and the Countess Zriny, a distant cousin of Count Hans, who had once been in love with him. Lato shivered. Solemn music resounded through the church. Tears rose to his eyes. Suddenly a strange wailing sound mingled with the strains of the chant. He looked up. Behind the tall church windows fluttered something black, formless, like a mourning banner. It was the broken top of a young tree, not quite torn from the parent stem, waving to and fro in the wind.

And then the priest uttered the words that decided his future fate.

Before the departure of the young couple, and whilst Selina was making ready for their journey, Count Hans had an opportunity for emotion. He paced restlessly to and fro in the room where with Lato he was awaiting the bride, trying vainly to say something cheering to the bridegroom, something to arouse in him a consciousness of the great good fortune in which he himself was a sharer. At last the voices of the bride and her friends were heard approaching. The old nobleman went up to his son, laid his hands tenderly upon his shoulders, and exclaimed, "Hold up your head, old fellow: your life is before you, your life is before you!"

And Lato repeated, "My life is before me----" The next instant the door opened.

"The carriage is waiting!"

The last words that Selina said to her friends out of the window of the carriage just before driving off were, "Do not forget to send me the newspapers, if there is anything in them about our marriage."

The horses started, the carriage rolled on. How swiftly the wheels flew over the stones! In the twilight, illumined only by the glare of the carriage lamps, Lato could see the outline of Selina's figure as she sat beside him, and the pure red and white of her face, only partially concealed by her veil. He put his arm around her, and she nestled close to him and raised her lips to his. His ardour was chilled by an annoying sensation which he could not at first trace to its source. It was produced by the strong perfume which Selina used. It was the same perfume that had been a favourite with the actress who had been Lato's first love, a handsome, fair woman, with an incomparable complexion. He was suddenly reminded that Selina looked like her, and it vexed him.

Selina had long since forgotten it,--women almost always forget such things,--but in the early times of her marriage it would not have pleased her to think it a "distinguished one." She was desperately in love with Lato, served him like a slave, racked what brain she had to prepare surprises for him in the way of costly gifts, and left entirely to him the disposal of her property. Not a penny would she call her own. It all belonged to him,--all. It was quite touching to see her penitent air when she applied to him, whispering, "I am a terrible spendthrift, Lato. Do not be angry; but I want some more money. Will you not pay my milliner's bill for me? And then, if I am very good, you'll give me something to put in my portomonnaie,--a hundred guilders,--only a hundred guilders, Lato darling?"

At first such scenes annoyed him terribly, and he tried hard to prevent them. Then--well, he got used to them, even felt flattered, touched; almost forgot whence came the money that was now so abundant with him,--believed, at all events, that others had forgotten it,--and played the lavish husband with his wife, bestowed costly gifts upon her, and was pleased with her admiration of them.

All this time he lived in a kind of whirl. He had accustomed himself to his young wife's

endearments, as he had accustomed himself to travel with a train of servants, to occupy the best rooms in the best hotels, to drink the best wines, to smoke the best cigars, to have enormous bills at the tailor's, to gratify all his expensive tastes, to spend time in devising costly plans for the future, and, half involuntarily, to do it all as if he no longer remembered a time when he had been obliged to consider well every outlay.

In after-years his cheeks burned when he recalled this part of his life,--but there was no denying the fact--he had for a time been ostentatiously extravagant, and with his wife's money. Poor Lato!

Two years the whirl lasted; no longer.

At first he had tried to continue in the service, but the hardships of a military life became burdensome to him as he yielded to the new sense of luxury, and Selina, for her part, had no taste for the annoyances that fell to her share in the nomadic life of a soldier's wife. He resigned. They planned to purchase an estate, but could not agree upon where to purchase; and they zigzagged about, travelling from Nice to Rome, and from Rome to Paris, everywhere courteously received and fêted.

Then came their child. Selina, of course, passed the time of her confinement in Vienna, to be under her mother's protection, and nearly paid for her child's life with her own. When she recovered, her entire nature seemed changed; she was always tired. Her charm had fled. Her nose grew sharp, there were hard lines about her mouth, her face became thin, while her figure broadened.

And her feeling for Lato underwent a fundamental alteration. Hers was one of those sensual, cold-hearted natures which, when the first tempest of passion has subsided, are incapable of any deeper sentiment, and her tenderness towards her husband decreased with astonishing celerity. Henceforth, vanity became her sole passion, and in Vienna she was best able to satisfy it. The greatest enjoyment she derived from her foreign travel and from her intercourse with distinguished people lay in being able to discourse of them to her Vienna circle. She went into the world more than ever,--the world which she had known from childhood,--and dragged Lato with her. She was never weary of displaying in financial society her new title, her distinguished husband, her eccentric Parisian toilets.

Her world sufficed her. She never dreamed of asking admission to his world. He made several melancholy attempts to introduce his wife among his relatives; they failed lamentably. No one had any particular objection to Selina. Had she been a poor girl all would have vied with one another in doing something for her "for dear Lato's sake." But to receive all that loud, vulgar, ostentatious Harfink tribe, no one could require of them, not even the spirit of the age. Why did not Lato take his wife to the country, and separate her from her family and their influence? Then after some years, perhaps---- It was such an unfortunate idea to settle in Vienna with his wife!

Yes, an unfortunate idea!

Wherever he showed himself with his wife, at the theatre, on the Prater, everywhere, his acquaintances greeted him cordially from a distance, and avoided him as if he had been stricken with a contagious disease. On the occasion of the death of one of his aunts, he received kind letters of condolence from relatives who lived in the next street!

Selina was not in the slightest degree annoyed by all this. It always had been so in Austria, and probably always would be so. She had expected nothing else. And Lato,--what had he expected? he who understood such matters better than she did? A miracle, perhaps; at least an exception in his favour.

His life in Vienna was torture to him. He made front against his former world, defied it, even vilified it, and was possessed by a hungry desire for what he had lost, for what he had prized so little when it was naturally his own. If he could but have found something to replace what he had resigned! Sincerity, earnestness, a deeper grasp of life, elevation of thought,--all of which he might have found among the best of the *bourgeoisie*,--he had sufficient intellect and refinement to have enjoyed. Perhaps under such influences there was stuff in him of a kind to be remodelled, and he might have become a useful, capable man. But the circle in which he was forced to live was not that of the true *bourgeoisie*. It was an inorganic mass of rich people and idlers tossed together, all with titles of yesterday, who cared for nothing in the world save money-getting and display,--a world in which the men played at languid dulness and the women at frivolity, because they thought it '*chic*,' in which all wanted to be 'fast,' to make a sensation, to be talked of in the newspapers,--a world which, with ridiculous exclusiveness, boasted of its anti-Semitic prejudices, and in which the money acquired with such unnatural celerity had no room for free play, so that the golden calf, confined within so limited an arena, cut the most extraordinary capers. These people spent their time in perfecting themselves in aristocratic demeanour and in talking alternately of good manners, elegant toilets, and refined *menus*. The genuine patrician world of trade held itself aloof from this tinsel society, or only accidentally came into contact with it.

Lato's was a very unpleasant experience. The few people of solid worth whom he met at his mother-in-law's avoided him. His sole pleasure in life was his little son, who daily grew plumper, prettier, merrier. He would stretch out his arms to his father when the merest baby, and crow

with delight. What a joy it was for Lato to clasp the little creature in his arms!

The boy was just fifteen months old when the first real quarrel took place between Lato and his wife, and estranged them for life.

Hitherto Lato had had the management and right of disposal of his wife's property, and although more than one disagreeable remark anent his extravagance had fallen from her lips he had taken pains not to heed them. But one day he bought a pair of horses for which he had been longing, paying an amateur price for them.

He was so delighted with his purchase that he immediately drove the horses in the Prater to try them. On his return home he was received by Selina with a very cross face. She had heard of his purchase, and asked about the horses.

He praised them with enthusiasm. Forgetting for the moment all the annoyances of his position, he cried, "Come and look at them!"

"No need," she made answer. "You did not ask my opinion before buying them; it is of no consequence now whether I like them or not."

He bit his lip.

"What did you pay for them?" she asked. He told her the price; she shrugged her shoulders and laughed contemptuously. "So they told me," she said. "I would not believe it!"

"When you have seen the horses you will not think the price too high," Lato said, controlling himself with difficulty.

"Oh, the price may be all right," she rejoined, sharply, "but the extravagance seems great to me. Of course, if you have it---"

Everything swam before his eyes. He turned and left the room. That very day he sold the horses, fortunately without loss. He brought the bank-notes to his wife, who was seated at her writing-table, and put them down before her. She was startled, and tried to compromise matters. He was inflexible. For half a day the apple of discord in the shape of a bundle of bank-notes lay on the writing-table, a bait for dishonest servants; then it vanished within Selina's desk.

From that moment Lato was not to be induced to use a single penny of his wife's money. He retrenched in all directions, living as well as he could upon his own small income, derived from his maternal inheritance, and paid him punctually by his father.

He was not in the least annoyed by the shabby part he was consequently obliged to play among his wealthy associates, but when he recalled how he had previously appropriated his wife's money his cheeks and ears burned furiously.

There was no longer any talk of buying an estate. Instead, Selina's mother bought one. The Treurenbergs could pass their summers there. Why squander money on an estate? One magnificent castle in the family was enough.

Shortly after Lato's estrangement from his wife his little son died of the croup. This was the annihilation of his existence; the last sunbeam upon his path faded; all around and within him was dark and cold.

He ponders all this as he rides from Komaritz to Dobrotschau. His horse's pace grows slower and slower, his bridle hangs loose. Evening has set in. Suddenly a sharp whirr rouses the lonely man. He looks up, to see a belated bird hurrying home to its nest. His dreamy gaze follows the black fluttering thing, and he wonders vaguely whether the little wanderer will find his home and be received with affection by his feathered family. The idle fancy makes him smile; but, "What is there to laugh at?" he suddenly reflects. "Good heavens! a life that warms itself beside another life, in which it finds peace and comfort,--is not this the central idea of all existence, great or small? Everything else in the world is but of secondary interest."

For him there is no human being in whom he can confide, to whom he can turn for sympathy; for him there is only cheerless solitude.

The moon is setting; above the low mountain-spur its silver crescent hovers in the liquid light green of the summer evening sky. The castle of Dobrotschau looms up in the twilight.

"What is that? Along the road, towards the belated horseman, comes a white figure. Can it be Selina? His heart beats fast; he is ready to be grateful for the smallest proof of affection, so strong is the yearning within him for a little human sympathy. No, it is not Selina; it is a tall, slender girl. She has seen him, and hastens her steps.

"Lato!" calls an anxious, familiar voice.

"Olga!" he exclaims, and, springing from his horse, he approaches her. Yes, it is Olga,--Olga in

a white dress, without hat or gloves, and with a look of anxiety in her eyes.

"Thank heaven!" she exclaims.

"My child, what is the matter?" he asks, half laughing.

"I have been so anxious," she confesses. "You are an hour and a half late for dinner, and you know how foolish I am. All sorts of fancies beset me. My imagination works swiftly."

"You are a dear child, Olga," he whispers, softly, taking her hand and kissing it twice. Then they walk together towards the castle. He leads his horse by the bridle, and listens to all the trifling matters of which she tells him.

The world is no longer dreary and empty for him. Here is at least one person who is not indifferent to his going and coming.

At Dobrotschau he finds the entire party in the garden-room. Selina and the Pole are playing a duett. Dinner is over. They could not wait for him, Selina explains, because the cook was trying to-day for the first time a soufflé of Parmesan cheese and truffles, which would have been ruined by delay. But his hospitable mother-in-law adds,--

"Your dinner is all ready in the dining-room. I gave orders that it should be served as soon as you came."

And Lato goes to the dining-hall, a magnificent oak-wainscoted room, in which the chandelier, lighted in his honour, represents a round island of light in a sea of black darkness. The soup-tureen is on the sideboard: a servant lifts the cover, and the butler ladles out a plateful of the soup and places it before Lato.

He takes a spoonful discontentedly, then motions to the butler to take the plate away. Olga suddenly appears.

"Have you left any for me?" she asks. "I am fearfully hungry, for I could not eat any dinner."

"From anxiety?" asks Lato.

"Yes," she says, laughing, "from anxiety." And she takes a seat opposite him.

"Oh, you silly girl!" says Treurenberg, watching her with satisfaction as she sips her soup. Lato himself suddenly has an access of appetite.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FRIEND'S ADVICE.

Few things in this world are more unpleasant than to be obliged to admit the excellence of a friend's advice when it runs counter to all our most secret and decided inclinations.

Harry Leskjewitsch finds himself thus disagreeably situated the evening after Lato's visit to Komaritz.

While Lato, "gens-d'armed" by two lackeys, is eating his late dinner with Olga, Harry is striding discontentedly to and fro in the steep, uneven court-yard at Komaritz, muttering between his teeth,--

"Lato is right, quite right. I am behaving unpardonably: no respectable man would play this double part. I must go away."

Yes, away; but how can he go away while he knows that Baron Wenkendorf is at Zirkow? It appears to him that he can still do something to prevent Zdena from giving ear to her elderly suitor, for such he certainly seems to be. Harry has been often at Zirkow of late,--no fewer than three times since his entanglement,--and he has consequently had opportunity to watch Zdena's behaviour. Her feeling for the man has certainly reached another stage; she conducts herself with more gravity towards him, and with more cordiality; she often turns to him with trifling questions, and seems to take a kind of pleasure in his society.

"Who knows?" Harry says to himself, clinching his hand and almost mad with jealousy, as he

paces the court-yard to and fro.

The crescent moon in the August sky creeps over the dark roof of the brew-house. The air is freshened by the fragrance of the group of walnuts; but another and more penetrating odour mingles with it,--the odour of old wood impregnated with some kind of fermenting stuff. There, against the uneven wall of the old brew-house, stands a row of huge casks.

The casks recall to Harry memories that fill him with sweet and bitter sensations. Into one of them he had crept with Zdena, during a storm, in the early years of their acquaintance. Ah, what a bewitching little creature she was then! He can see her distinctly now, with her long, golden hair; her large, brown eyes, that had so truthful a gaze; the short upper lip of the childish mouth, that seemed always on the point of asking a question; yes, even the slender, childish hands he can see, with the wide, white apron-sleeves; the short skirt and the bare little legs, usually, it must be confessed, much scratched. He recalls the short, impatient movement with which she used to pull her skirts over her knees when she sat down. In one of those casks they had taken refuge from a shower,--he and she,--and they had sat there, close together, looking out upon the world through the gray curtain of the rain. How comically she had peered out, now and then holding out her hand to make sure that it was still pouring! It would not stop. Harry can hear at this moment the rustle of the rain through the foliage of the walnuts, its drip upon the cask, and the cackling of the agitated geese in the court-yard. He had told the child stories to amuse her, and she had gone to sleep with her head on his shoulder, and finally he had taken off his jacket to wrap it about her as he carried her through the rain into the house.

Oh, what a lecture they had had from Mademoiselle, who, meanwhile, had been sending everywhere to find the children, and was half crazy with anxiety!

"I cannot conceive why you should have been anxious, mademoiselle," he had said, with all the dignity of his twelve years. "You ought to know that Zdena is well taken care of when she is with me."

Twelve years have passed since then, but it seems to him suddenly that it all happened only yesterday.

"Well taken care of," he mutters to himself,--"well taken care of. I believe that she would be well taken care of with me to-day, but--good heavens!"

His lips are dry, his throat feels contracted. Up to the present moment he has regarded his betrothal to Paula as a disagreeable temporary entanglement; never has he viewed it as a serious, enduring misfortune. Lato's words had thrown a vivid light upon his position; he sees clearly that he is no longer a free agent, and that every hour passed with Paula rivets his fetters more securely. Yes, Lato is right; he must go away. But he must see her once more before he goes,--only once.

CHAPTER XIX.

FRAU ROSA'S BIRTHDAY.

High festival is being held at Zirkow in honour of Frau Rosamunda's birthday, which is observed this year with even more ceremony than usual. Thanks to a fortunate combination of circumstances, the major has it in his power to bestow a costly gift upon his wife this year. He has lately concluded a very profitable bargain: he has sold the entire interior arrangements of the brew-house as old iron and copper to a Jew for the magnificent sum of fifteen hundred guilders. With such wealth much can be done. Nothing now prevents the devoted husband from fulfilling Frau Rosamunda's two ardent desires,--a trip to Bayreuth and the thorough repair of the much-defaced decorations on the Zirkow walls and ceilings. On her birthday-table Frau Rosamunda finds, in the midst of a tasteful arrangement of flowers, first, a kind of sign in miniature,--*i. e.*, a square black card, upon which is written, in red letters, "Good for house-decorators,"--and a large earthenware prize pig with stiff, straddling legs and a beautifully-rounded body, upon which is written, also in red letters, "A steed to carry you to Bayreuth." A bouquet of four-leaved clover (Zdena gathered it at dawn) is stuck like a green plume between the animal's projecting ears. A pin-cushion covered with a delicate imitation in needle-work of Irish guipure, the piano arrangement of 'Tristan and Isolde' and a potpourri from 'Parzifal,' both for four hands, complete the number of birthday-gifts. The Irish guipure is Zdena's work; the music comes from Wenkendorf. All these things even the house-decorator are of secondary importance to Frau Rosamunda. Her whole attention is absorbed by the pig, at which enigmatic monster she gazes in wonder.

"A steed to carry you to Bayreuth." It sounds like a poor jest, a very poor jest.

The major looks at his wife with a broad smile.

"Take up the pig and shake it a little," he says at last. Frau Rosamunda obeys. There is a clink of coin. She understands, and runs to her husband with a cry of delight.

She celebrates the remainder of her birthday by playing duets with her cousin from 'Tristan and Isolde' and 'Parzifal' alternately. The major walks about with his hands clasped behind him, deep in thought and well content, like a man who is about to carry out a carefully-devised plan.

The afternoon sun is casting long shadows, and Krupitschka, who has just finished furbishing up the silver,—in honour of the birthday six more silver dishes than usual have been brought out to-day,—is sitting on a bench at the back of the castle, refreshing himself with an examination of the foreign dictionary which he has purchased with the money for his cantharides,—and which, by the way, he finds highly unsatisfactory,—when a young officer of hussars upon an English chestnut mare with a hide like satin comes galloping into the court-yard.

At sight of the horse and its rider all clouds vanish from Krupitschka's horizon; in his opinion there is no finer sight in the world than a "handsome officer upon a handsome horse."

He is not the only one to admire Harry Leskjewitsch on his mare Frou-Frou. At one of the windows of the castle a pale, girlish face appears, and a pair of bright brown eyes look down into the court-yard, for a moment only. But Harry has seen the face, quickly as it disappears, and his heart beats fast.

"Are the ladies at home?" he asks Krupitschka, as he gives his steed in charge to a groom who hurries up, clad in a striped stable-jacket very much darned at the elbows, and a cap with a tarnished silver band.

"They are, Herr Baron." And Krupitschka shows Harry up the steps and to the door of the drawing-room, which he opens with dignity, not because such ceremony is at all necessary, but because the young man has been his favourite from childhood, and he loves to perform any service for him.

When Harry enters, Frau Rosamunda and Wenkendorf are still at the piano, working away at 'Parzifal,' and do not seem over-pleased by the interruption. The major is lying back in a rocking-chair, smoking a cigarette and upon his nephew's entrance springs up with undisguised delight and goes towards him with extended hands.

"Tell the Baroness Zdena that a visitor has arrived!" he calls out to Krupitschka; then, turning to Harry, he says, smiling, "And so you have come to congratulate?"

"Congratulate?" Harry repeats, surprised and preoccupied.

"Oh, you have forgotten, then?" the major rejoins.

Harry slaps his forehead. "Dearest aunt, forgive me! how thoughtless I am!" And he kisses Frau Rosamunda's hand.

"I do not take it at all ill of you," she assures him. "At my age people would rather have their birthday forgotten than remembered."

"Oh--ah! I have not observed that," the major declares.

"Oh, it is different for you. You may be allowed to take notice of my being each year one year older, always provided that you give me upon all my birthdays as great a pleasure as to-day."

"You cannot reckon upon that, my dear; all years are not alike," the major replies. "This was a lucky chance."

"Have you had a stroke of good fortune, uncle?" Harry asks, trying to take an interest in the matter.

"Yes," the major informs him; "I have just concluded a brilliant transaction. I have sold the iron from the interior of the brew-house."

"For how much, may I ask?"

"Fifteen hundred guilders," the major declares, triumphantly. "I would not abate one penny. The superintendent was surprised at the sum, I can tell you."

"I do not understand such matters," Harry rejoins, thinking of the enormous expense of fitting up the brew-house some years ago. His uncle's 'brilliant transaction' reminds him of the story of 'Hans in Luck.' "And in consequence your birthday-gifts have been very superior, aunt?"

"Yes."

Frau Rosamunda displays with delight the prize pig. The green plume between its ears is slightly faded, but the coins in its body clink as triumphantly as ever.

"A steed to carry you to Bayreuth," Harry reads. "I am so glad, my dear aunt, that your wish is to be fulfilled."

"Tickets for two performances besides the journey," the major proudly declares.

"And my cousin has surprised me with some delightful music which I have long wanted."

"Not worth mentioning, Rosamunda," Wenkendorf says, deprecatingly.

"My wife's birthday has really turned out a Wagner festival," the major declares. "Since ten o'clock this morning these two artists have been playing nothing but Wagner, for their own pleasure and the conversion of their hearers. Zdena ran away, but I stood my ground, and I have become quite accustomed to the noise."

"That is a good sign," Wenkendorf assures him.

"You ought to hear Wagner's compositions very often. What do you say, Roderich, to our playing for Harry some of the loveliest bits of 'Parzifal'? We are just in the mood."

"Do not let me interrupt you; pray go on; it will give me the greatest pleasure," Harry murmurs, glancing towards the door. Why does she not come?

Meanwhile, the two amateurs have begun with untiring energy.

"Kundry's Ride!" Frau Rosamunda calls out to her nephew, while her hands dash over the keys. Harry does not hear her. He has seated himself beside the major, and absently takes a cigarette from the case which his uncle offers him.

"I came to bid you good-bye," he says, in an uncertain voice.

"Indeed!" says the major, looking at him scrutinizingly. "Is your leave at an end?"

"No, but----" Harry hesitates and pulls at his moustache.

"H'm!" A sly smile quivers upon the major's broad face. "Have you quarrelled with your betrothed?"

"No, but----"

The door opens, and Zdena enters, slender and pale, dressed in a simply-fashioned linen gown. She has lost her fresh colour, and her face is much thinner, but her beauty, far from being injured thereby, is heightened by an added charm,--a sad, touching charm, that threatens to rob Harry of the remnant of reason he can still call his.

"How are you, Zdena?" he says, going to meet her, while the warmest sympathy trembles in his voice. "You look pale. Are you well?"

"The heat oppresses me," she says, with a slight forced smile, withdrawing the hand which he would fain have retained longer in his clasp than was fitting under the circumstances.

"The Balsam motif," Frau Rosamunda calls from the piano.

After a while Zdena begins:

"How are they all at Komaritz? Heda sent her congratulations to-day with some lovely flowers, but said nothing with regard to the welfare of the family."

"I wonder that Heda did not remind you of the birthday, Harry!" remarks the major.

"Oh, she rejoices over every forgetfulness in those around her," Harry observes, with some malice: "she likes to stand alone in her extreme virtue."

"Motif of the Redeemer's Sufferings," Frau Rosamunda calls out. Zdena leans forward, and seems absorbed in Wagner. Harry cannot take his eyes off her.

"What a change!" he muses. "Can she--could she be suffering on my account?"

There is an agreeable flutter of his entire nervous system: it mingles with the sense of unhappiness which he drags about with him.

"Oh, what a double-dyed fool I was!" a voice within him cries out. "How could I be so vexed with her scrap of childish worldly wisdom, instead of simply laughing at her for it, teasing her a little about it, and then, after I had set her straight, forgiving her, oh, how tenderly!"

"Zdena is not quite herself. I do not know what ails her," said the major, stroking the girl's thin cheek.

"You have long been a hypochondriac on your own account; now you are trying it for other people," says Zdena, rising and going to the window, where she busies herself with some embroidery. "I have a little headache," she adds.

"Earthly Enjoyment motif," Frau Rosamunda calls out, enthusiastically, in a raised voice.

The major bursts into Homeric laughter, in which Zdena, whose overstrained nerves dispose her for tears as well as laughter, joins. Harry alone does not laugh: his head is too full of other matters.

"Is Zdena also going to Bayreuth?" he asks.

"No," the major replies; "the finances are not equal to that."

"Tis a pity," Harry remarks: "a little change of air might do her good."

"So it seems to me," the major assents, "and I was about to propose a plan. By the way, when do you take your departure?"

"Are you going away?" asks Frau Rosamunda, rising from the piano, aglow with enthusiasm and artistic zeal, to join the trio. Wenkendorf also rises and takes a seat near the rest.

"He is going away," the major replies.

"Yes," assents Harry.

"But what does your betrothed say?"

"I have already put that question to him," said the major.

"One of my comrades has suddenly been taken ill," Harry stammers, frowning; "and so--of course it is very unpleasant just now----"

"Very, very," murmurs the major, with a hypocritical show of sympathy. "When do you start?"

"Oh, the day after to-morrow."

"That suits me remarkably well," the major remarks. "There will be a vacant room at Komaritz, and Zdena might go over for a couple of days."

Wenkendorf frowns disapprovingly. "It is a great pity that you are not going with us to Bayreuth," he says, turning to the young girl.

"That would be a fine way to cure the headache," the major observes.

"I would rather stay at home with you, uncle dear," Zdena assures him.

"That will not do. Friday evening my wife starts for Bayreuth; Saturday I expect the painters; the entire house will be turned upside-down, and I have no use for you. Therefore, since there is room for you at Komaritz----"

"There is always room at Komaritz for Zdena," Harry eagerly declares.

"Yes,--particularly after you have gone. It is decided; she is going. I shall take her over on Saturday afternoon," the major announces. "You can tell Heda."

"And who will go to Bayreuth with my aunt?" asks Harry.

"Her musical cousin Roderich. By the way, Wenkendorf, you will come back to Zirkow from Bayreuth?"

"Of course I shall escort Rosamunda upon her return."

"We shall be glad to welcome you for the hunting. I take it for granted you will give us a long visit then?"

"That will depend upon circumstances," says Wenkendorf, with a significant glance towards Zdena, which does not escape Harry.

Meanwhile, the August twilight has set in. Krupitschka brings the lamps. Harry rises.

"Will you not stay for supper?" asks Frau Rosa.

"No, thank you; I have a deal to do."

"No wonder, before leaving," says the wily major, not making the slightest effort to detain the young fellow. "You are looking for your sabre?--there it is. Ah, what a heavy thing! When I reflect upon how many years I dragged such a rattling tool about with me!"

Harry has gone. The major has accompanied him to the court-yard, and he now returns to the room, chuckling, and rubbing his hands, as if at some successful trick.

"What an idea! So sudden a journey!--and a betrothed man!" Frau Rosa remarks, thoughtfully.

"If I were his betrothed I would hurry and have the monogram embroidered on my outfit," drawls the major. "Let me come there, if you please." These last words are addressed to Wenkendorf, who is about to close the piano. The major takes his place at it, bangs away at his triumphal march with immense energy and a tolerably harmonious bass, then claps down the cover of the much-tortured instrument, locks it, and puts the key in his pocket. "There, that's enough for to-day!" he declares.

CHAPTER XX.

KOMARITZ AGAIN.

The major carried out his plan. On Saturday the painter made solemn entry into Zirkow with his train of workmen, their ladders, paint-pots, and brushes, to turn the orderly household upside-down,--whereupon Baron Paul drove Zdena to Komaritz, in the same drag in which the child of six had first been driven thither by him.

More than a dozen years had passed since that afternoon, and yet every detail of the drive was vividly present in the young girl's mind. Much had changed since then; the drag had grown far shabbier, and the fiery chestnuts had been tamed and lamed by time, but the road was just as bad, and the country around as lovely and home-like. From time to time Zdena raised her head to gaze where the stream ran cool and gray on the other side of the walnut-trees that bordered the road, or at the brown ruin of the castle, the jagged tower of which was steadily rising in the blue atmosphere against the distant horizon. And then she would pull her straw hat lower over her eyes and look only at the backs of the horses. Why did her uncle keep glancing at her with such a sly smile? He could not divine the strange mixture of joy and unrest that was filling her soul. No one must know it. Poor Zdena! All night long she had been tormented by the thought that she had yielded too readily, had acceded too willingly to her uncle's proposal to take her to Komaritz during the bustle made by the painters, and she had soothed her scruples by saying to herself, "He will not be there." And, yet, the nearer they came to Komaritz the more persistent was the joyous suggestion within her, "What if he were not yet gone!"

Click-clack! The ancient St. John, whose bead is lying at his feet precisely as it was lying so many years ago, stands gray and tall among the lindens in the pasture near the village; they have reached Komaritz. Click-clack!--the horses make an ambitious effort to end their journey with credit. The same ox, recently butchered, hangs before the butcher-shop on an old walnut; the same odour of wagon-grease and singed hoofs comes from the smithy, and before it the smith is examining the foot of the same horse, while a dozen village children stand around gazing. The same dear old Komaritz!

"If only he might be there!"

With a sudden jolt the drag rolls through the picturesque, ruinous archway of the court-yard. The chestnuts are reined in, the major's sly smile broadens expressively, and Zdena's young pulses throb with breathless delight.

Yes, he is there! standing in the door-way of the old house, an embarrassed smile on his thin, tanned face as he offers his hand to Zdena to help her down from her high seat.

"What a surprise! You here?" exclaims the old dragoon, with poorly-feigned astonishment, in which there is a slight tinge of ridicule. "I thought you would be miles away by this time. It is a good thing that you were able to postpone your departure for a few days. No, I can't stop; I must drive home again immediately. Adieu, children!"

Baron Paul turns his tired steeds, and, gaily waving his hand in token of farewell, vanishes beneath the archway.

There they stand, she and he, alone in front of the house. The old walnuts, lifting their stately crests into the blue skies along one side of the court-yard, whisper all sorts of pleasant things to them, but they have no words for each other.

At last Harry asks, taking the black leather travelling-bag from his cousin's hand, "Is this all

your luggage?"

"The milkman is to bring a small trunk," she replies, without looking at him.

"We have had your old room made ready for you."

"Ah, my old room,--how delightful!"

They cross the threshold, when Harry suddenly stands still.

"Are you not going to give me your hand?" he asks, in a tone of entreaty, whereupon she extends her hand, and then instantly withdraws it. She seems to herself to be doing wrong. As matters stand, she must not make the smallest advance to him,--no, not the smallest: she has resolved upon that. In fact, she did not expect to see him here, and she must show him that she is quite annoyed by his postponing his departure.

Yap, yap, yap! the rabble of dachshunds, multiplied considerably in the last twelve years, comes tumbling down the steps to leap about Zdena; Harry's faithful hound Hector comes and puts his paws on her shoulder; and, lastly, the ladies come down into the hall,--Heda, the Countess Zriny, Fräulein Laut,--and, surrounding Zdena, carry her off to her room. Here they stay talking with her for a while; then they withdraw, each to follow her own devices.

How glad the girl is to be alone! She is strangely moved, perplexed, and yet unaccountably happy.

It is clear that Harry intends to dissolve the engagement into which so mysterious a chain of circumstances has forced him. The difficulty of doing this Zdena does not take into consideration. Paula must see that he does not care for her; and then--then there will be nothing left for her save to release him. Thus Zdena concludes, and the world looks very bright to her.

Oh, the dear old room! she would not exchange it for a kingdom. How home-like and comfortable!--so shady and cool, with its deep window-recesses, where the sunshine filters in through the green, rustling net-work of vines; with its stiff antiquated furniture forming so odd a contrast to the wild luxuriance of extraordinary flowers with which a travelling fresco-painter ages ago decorated walls and ceiling; with its old-fashioned embroidered *prie-dieu* beneath an ancient bronze crucifix, and its little bed, so snowy white and cool, fragrant with lavender and orris!

The floor, of plain deal planks, scrubbed to a milky whiteness, is bare, except that beside the bed lies a rug upon which a very yellow tiger is rolling, and gnashing his teeth, in a very green meadow, and on the wall hangs one single picture,--a faded chromo, at which Zdena, when a child, had almost stared her eyes out.

The picture represents a young lady gazing at her reflection in a mirror. Her hair is worn in tasteless, high puffs and much powdered, her waist is unnaturally long and slim, and her skirts are bunched up about her hips. To the modern observer she is not attractive, but Zdena hails her as an old acquaintance. Beneath the picture are the words "*Lui plairai-je?*" The thing hangs in one of the window-embrasures, above a marquetric work-table, upon which has been placed a nosegay of fresh, fragrant roses.

"Who has plucked and placed them there?" Zdena asks herself. Suddenly a shrill bell rings, calling to table the inmates of Komaritz in house and garden. Zdena hurriedly picks out of the nosegay the loveliest bud, and puts it in her breast, then looks at herself in the glass,--a tall, narrow glass in a smooth black frame with brass rosettes at the corners,--and murmurs, smiling, "*Lui plairai-je?*" then blushes violently and takes out the rose from her bosom. It is a sin even to have such a thought,--under existing circumstances.

CHAPTER XXI.

"POOR LATO!"

Five hours have passed since Zdena's arrival in Komaritz. Harry has been very good; that is, he has scarcely made an appearance; perhaps because he is conscious that when he is with Zdena he can hardly take his eyes off her, which, "under existing circumstances," might strike others as, to Bay the least, extraordinary.

After dinner he goes off partridge shooting, inviting his younger brother, who is devoted to

him and whom he spoils like a mother, to accompany him. But Vips, as the family prefer to call him instead of Vladimir, although usually proud and happy to be thus distinguished by his elder brother, declines his invitation today. In fact, he has fallen desperately in love with Zdena. He is lying at her feet on the steps leading from the dwelling-room into the garden. His hair is beautifully brushed, and he has on his best coat.

The Countess Zriny is in her room, writing to her father confessor; Fräulein Laut is at the piano, practising something by Brahms, to which musical hero she is almost as much devoted as is Rosamunda to her idolized Wagner; and Heda is sitting beside her cousin on the garden-steps, manufacturing with praiseworthy diligence crocheted stars of silk.

"What do you really think of Harry's betrothal, Zdena?" she begins at last, after a long silence.

At this question the blood rushes to Zdena's cheeks; nevertheless her answer sounds quite self-possessed.

"What shall I say? I was very much surprised."

"So was I," Heda confesses. "At first I was raging, for, after all, *elle n'est pas de notre monde*. But lately so many young men of our set have married nobodies that one begins to be accustomed to it, although I must say I am by no means enchanted with it yet. One's own brother,—it comes very near; but it is best to shut one's eyes in such cases. Setting aside the *mésalliance*, there is no objection to make to Paula. She is pretty, clever, frightfully cultivated,—too cultivated: it is rather bad form,—and for the rest, if she would only dress a little better, she would be quite presentable. And then she makes such advances; it is touching. The last time I dined at Dobrotschau I found in my napkin a butterfly pendant, with little sapphires and rubies in its diamond wings. I must show it to you; 'tis delicious," she rattles on.

"And what did you find in your napkin, Vips?" asks Zdena, who seems to herself to be talking of people with whom she has not the slightest connection, so strange is the whole affair.

"I? I was not at the dinner," says the boy.

"Not invited?" Zdena rallies him.

"Not invited!" Vips draws down the corners of his mouth scornfully. "Oh, indeed! not invited! Why, they invited the entire household,—even her!" He motions disdainfully towards the open door, through which Fräulein Laut can be seen sitting at the piano. "Yes, we were even asked to bring Hector. But I stayed at home, because I cannot endure those Harfinks."

"Ah! your sentiments are also opposed to the *mésalliance*?" Zdena goes on, ironically.

"*Mésalliance!*" shouts Vips. "You know very well that I am a Liberal!"

Vips finished reading "Don Carlos" about a fortnight ago, and even before then showed signs of Liberal tendencies.

The previous winter, when he attended the representation, at a theatre in Bohemia, of a new play of strong democratic colouring, he applauded all the freethinking tirades with such vehemence that his tutor was at last obliged, to the great amusement of the public, to hold back his hands.

"Ah, indeed, you are Liberal?" says Zdena. "I am delighted to hear it."

"Of course I am; but every respectable man must be a bit of an aristocrat," Vips declares, grandly, "and I cannot endure that Harry should marry that Paula. I told him so to his face; and I am not going to his wedding. I cannot understand why he takes her, for he's in love----" He suddenly pauses. Two gentlemen are coming through the garden towards the steps,—Harry and Lato.

Lato greets Zdena cordially. Heda expresses her surprise at Harry's speedy return from his shooting, and he, who always now suspects some hidden meaning in her remarks, flushes and frowns as he replies, "I saw Treurenberg in the distance, and so I turned back. Besides, the shooting all went wrong to-day," he adds, with a compassionate glance at the large hound now stretched out at his master's feet at the bottom of the steps. "He would scarcely stir: I cannot understand it, he is usually so fresh and gay, and loves to go shooting more than all the others; to-day he was almost sullen, and lagged behind,—hey, old boy?" He stoops and strokes the creature's neck, but the dog seems ill-tempered, and snaps at him.

"What! snap—snap at me! that's something new," Harry exclaims, frowning; then, seizing the animal by the collar, he shakes it violently and hurls it from him. "Be off!" he orders, sternly. The dog, as if suddenly ashamed, looks back sadly, and then walks slowly away, with drooping ears and tail. "I don't know what is the matter with the poor fellow!" Harry says, really troubled.

"He walks strangely; he seems stiff," Vladimir remarks, looking after the dog. "It seems to hurt him."

"Some good-for-nothing boy must have thrown a stone at him and bruised his back," Harry

decides.

"You had better be careful with that dog," Heda now puts in her word. "Several dogs hereabouts have gone mad, and one roamed about the country for some time before he could be caught and killed."

"Pray, hush!" Harry exclaims, almost angrily, to his sister, with whom he is apt to disagree: "you always forebode the worst. If a fly stings one you are always sure that it has just come from an infected horse or cow."

"You have lately been so irritable, I cannot imagine what is the matter with you," lisps Hedwig.

Harry frowns.

Lato, meanwhile, has paid no heed to these remarks: he is apparently absorbed in his own thoughts, as, sitting on a lower step, he has been drawing with the handle of his riding-whip cabalistic signs in the gravel of the path. Now he looks up.

"I have a letter for you from Paula,--here it is," he observes, handing Harry a thick packet wrapped in light-blue tissue paper. While Harry, with a dubious expression of countenance, drops the packet into his coat-pocket, Lato continues: "Paula has all sorts of fancies about your absence. You have not been to Dobrotschau for two days. She is afraid you are ill, and that you are keeping it from her lest she should be anxious. She is coming over here with my wife tomorrow afternoon to look after you--I mean, to pay the ladies a visit." After Lato has given utterance to these words in a smooth monotone, his expression suddenly changes: his features betoken embarrassment, as, leaning towards Harry, he whispers, "I should like to speak with you alone. Can you give me a few minutes?"

Shortly afterwards, Harry rises and takes his friend with him to his own room, a spacious vaulted chamber next to the dining-room, which he shares with his young brother.

"Well, old fellow?" he begins, encouragingly, clapping Lato on the shoulder. Lato clears his throat, then slowly takes his seat in an arm-chair beside a table covered with a disorderly array of Greek and Latin books and scribbled sheets of paper. Harry sits opposite him, and for a while neither speaks.

The silence is disturbed only by the humming of the bees, and by the scratching at the window of an ancient apricot-tree, which seems desirous to call attention to what it has to say, but desists with a low rustle that sounds like a sigh. The tall clock strikes five; it is not late, and yet the room is dim with a gray-green light; the sunbeams have hard work to penetrate the leafy screen before the windows.

"Well?" Harry again says, at last, gently twitching his friend's sleeve.

"It is strange," Treurenberg begins; his voice has a hard, forced sound, he affects an indifference foreign to his nature, "but since my marriage I have had excellent luck at play. To speak frankly, it has been very convenient. Do not look so startled; wait until you are in my position. In the last few days, however, fortune has failed me. In my circumstances this is extremely annoying." He laughs, and flicks a grain of dust from his coat-sleeve.

Harry looks at him, surprised. "Ah! I understand. You want money. How much? If I can help you out I shall be glad to do so."

"Six hundred guilders," says Lato, curtly.

Harry can scarcely believe his ears. How can Lato come to him for such a trifle?

"I can certainly scrape together that much for you," he says, carelessly, and going to his writing-table he takes a couple of bank-notes out of a drawer. "Here!" and he offers the notes to his friend.

Lato hesitates for a moment, as if in dread of the money, then takes it, and puts it in his pocket.

"Thanks," he murmurs, hoarsely, and again there is a silence, which Lato is the first to break. "Why do you look at me so inquiringly?" he exclaims, almost angrily.

"Forgive me, Lato, we are such old friends."

"What do you want to know?"

"I was only wondering how a man in your brilliant circumstances could be embarrassed for so trifling a sum as six hundred guilders!"

"A man in my brilliant circumstances!" Lato repeats, bitterly. "Yes, you think, as does everybody else, that I am still living upon my wife's money. But you are mistaken. I tried it, indeed, for a while, but I was not made to play that part, no! It was different at first; my wife wished that I should have the disposal of her means, and I half cheated myself into the belief that

her millions belonged to me. She came to me for every farthing. I used to rally her upon her extravagance; I played at magnanimity, and forgave her, and made her costly presents--yes--good heavens, how disgusting! But that is long since past; we have separate purses at present, thank God! I am often too shabby nowadays for the grand folk at Dobrotschau, but that does not trouble me." He drums nervously upon the table.

Harry looks more and more amazed. "But then I cannot see why--" he murmurs, but lacks the courage to finish the sentence.

"I know what you wish to say," Lato continues, bitterly. "You wonder why, under these circumstances, I cannot shake off the old habit. What would you have? Hitherto I have won almost constantly; now my luck has turned, and yet I cannot control myself. Those who have not this cursed love of play in their blood cannot understand it, but play is the only thing in the world in which I can become absorbed--the only thing that can rid me of all sorts of thoughts which I never ought to entertain. There! now you know!"

He draws a deep, hoarse breath, then laughs a hard, wooden laugh. Harry is very uncomfortable: he has never before seen Lato like this. It distresses him to notice how his friend has changed in looks of late. His eyes are hollow and unnaturally bright, his lips are dry and cracked as from fever, and he is more restless than is his wont.

"Poor Lato! what fresh trouble have you had lately?" asks Harry, longing to express his sympathy.

Lato flushes crimson, then nervously curls into dog's-ears the leaves of a Greek grammar on the table, and shrugs his shoulders.

"Oh, nothing,--disagreeable domestic complications," he mutters, evasively.

"Nothing new has happened, then?" asks Harry, looking at him keenly.

Lato cannot endure his gaze. "What could have happened?" he breaks forth.

"How do you get along with your wife?"

"Not at all,--worse every day," Treurenberg says, dryly. "And now comes this cursed, meddling Polish jackanapes----"

"If the gentlemen please, the Baroness sends me to say that coffee is served." With these words Blasius makes his appearance at the door. Lato springs hastily to his feet. The conversation is at an end.

CHAPTER XXII.

HARRY'S MUSINGS.

"What are you doing there, you young donkey,--your lessons not yet learned, and wasting time in this fashion?"

These were Harry's words addressed to his young brother. The boy was standing on an old wooden bench, gazing over the garden wall.

"I am looking after the girl who was here to-day with the people from Dobrotschau."

"Whom do you mean?"

"Why, the beauty; Olga--Olga Dangeri is her name. Come here and see for yourself if it is wasting time to look after her."

With an involuntary smile at the lad's precocity, Harry mounted upon the bench beside his brother, and, through the gathering twilight, gazed after a couple--a man and a girl--slowly sauntering along the road outside the garden. The man walked with bent head and downcast look; the young girl, on the contrary, held her head proudly erect, and there was something regal in her firm gait. The man walked in silence beside his beautiful companion, who, on the other hand, never stopped talking, chattering away with easy grace, and turning towards him the while. The silhouette of her noble profile was clearly defined against the evening sky. The last golden shimmer of the setting sun touched her brown hair with a reddish gleam. She had taken

off her hat and hung it on her arm; her white gown fell in long, simple folds about her.

"There! is she not lovely?" Vips exclaimed, with boyish enthusiasm. "I cannot understand Lato: he hardly looks at her."

Harry hung his head.

"They have vanished in the walnut avenue; you can't see them now," said Vips, leaving his post of observation. "I like her; she is not only beautiful, she is clever and amiable," the boy went on. "I talked with her for quite a while, although she is not so entertaining as our Zdena--she is not half so witty. Let me tell you, there is no one in all the world like our Zdena." As he spoke, Vladimir, the keen-sighted, plucked his brother by the sleeve of his blue military blouse, and eyed him askance. "What is the matter with you, Harry?" For Harry shook the boy off rather rudely.

"Oh, hold your tongue for a while!" Harry exclaimed, angrily; "I have a headache."

Thus repulsed, Vladimir withdrew, not, however, without turning several times to look at his brother, and sighing each time thoughtfully. Meanwhile, Harry had seated himself on the old bench whence Vips had made his observations. His hands in his pockets, his legs stretched out before him, he sat wrapt in gloom, digging his spurs into the ground.

He had passed a hard day,--a day spent in deceit; there was no help for it. How mean he was in his own eyes! and yet--how could he help it? Paula had carried out her threat, and had driven over with Selina, bringing Olga and Lato, "to pay the ladies a visit." After the first greetings she had paid the ladies little further attention, but had devoted herself to her betrothed, drawing him with her into some window-recess or shady garden nook, where she could whisper loving words or lavish tender caresses, which he could not repulse without positive rudeness. Oh, how long the visit had seemed to him! Although Paula had withdrawn him from the rest of the company as far as possible, he had found opportunity to observe them. Olga, who could not drive backwards in a carriage comfortably, but with whom neither of the other ladies had offered to exchange seats, had arrived rather pale and dizzy. Zdena had immediately applied herself to restoring her, with the ready, tender sympathy that made her so charming. Vips was right: there was no one like Zdena in the world, although Olga was more beautiful, and also glowing with the charm to which no man is insensible,--the charm of a strong, passionate nature. Not even Harry, whose whole soul was filled at present with, another, and to him an infinitely more attractive, woman, could quite withstand this charm in Olga's society; it made the girl seem to him almost uncanny.

It had rather displeased Harry at first--he could not himself say why--to see how quickly a kind of intimacy established itself between Olga and Zdena. As the two girls walked arm in arm down the garden path he would fain have snatched Zdena away from her new friend, the pale beautiful Olga, whom nevertheless he so pitied.

Meanwhile, Heda had done the honours of the mansion for Selina, in which duty she was assisted by the Countess Zriny, who displayed the greatest condescension on the occasion. Then the ladies asked to see the house, and had been conducted from room to room, evidently amazed at the plainness of the furniture, but loud in their praises of everything as "so effective." Paula had begged to see Harry's room, and had rummaged among his whips, had put one of his cigars between her lips, and had even contrived, when she thought no one was looking, to kiss the tip of his ear. The Countess Zriny, however, accidentally looked round at that moment, to Harry's great confusion. Towards six o'clock the party had taken leave, with many expressions of delight and attachment.

Before they drove off, however, there had been a rather unpleasant scene. Lato had requested his wife to exchange seats with Olga, since the girl could not, without extreme discomfort, ride with her back to the horses. Selina had refused to comply with his request, asserting that to ride backwards was quite as unpleasant for her as for Olga.

Then Olga had joined in the conversation, saying she had heard that the path through the forest to Dobrotschau was very picturesque, and declaring that if Lato would accompany her she should much prefer to walk. To this Lato had made various objections, finally yielding, however, and setting out with his head hanging and his shoulders drooping, like a lamb led to the sacrifice.

Harry's thoughts dwelt upon the pale girl with the large, dark eyes. Was it possible that none of the others could read those eyes? He recalled the tall, slim figure, the long, thin, but nobly-modelled arms, the slender, rather long hands, in which a feverish longing to have and to hold somewhat seemed to thrill; he recalled the gliding melancholy of her gait, he was spellbound by the impression of her youthful personality. Where had he seen a figure expressing the same yearning enthusiasm? Why, in a picture by Botticelli,--a picture representing Spring,--a pale, sultry Spring, in whose hands the flowers faded. Something in the girl's carriage and figure reminded him of that allegorical Spring, except that Olga's face was infinitely more beautiful than the languishing, ecstatic countenance in the old picture.

Long did Harry sit on the garden bench reflecting, and his reflections became every moment more distressing. He forgot all his own troubles in this fresh anxiety.

He thought of Treurenberg's altered mien. Olga had not yet awakened to a consciousness of herself, and that was a comfort. She was not only absolutely pure,--Harry was sure of that,--but

she was entirely unaware of her own state of feeling. How long would this last, however? Passion walks, like a somnambulist, in entire security on the edge of profound abysses, so long as "sense is shut" in its eyes. But what if some rude hand, some unforeseen chance, awake it? Then--God have mercy!

Harry dug his spurs deeper into the gravel. "What will happen if her eyes should ever be opened?" he asked himself, with a shudder. "She is in no wise inclined to wanton frivolity, but she is a passionate creature without firm principles, without family ties to restrain her. And Lato? Lato will do his best to conquer himself. But can he summon up the strength of character, the tact, requisite to avoid a catastrophe and to preserve the old order of things? And if not, what then?"

Harry leaned his head on his hands and his elbows on his knees. To what it would all lead he could not tell, but he dreaded something terrible. He knew Lato well, the paralyzing weakness, as well as the subtle refinement, of his nature. Stern principle, a strict sense of duty, he lacked: how could it be otherwise, with such early training as had been his? Instead, however, he possessed an innate sense of moral beauty which must save him from moral degradation.

"A young girl, one of his home circle!" Harry murmured to himself. "No, it is inconceivable! And, yet, what can come of it?" And a sobbing breeze, carrying with it the scent of languid roses from whose cups it had drunk up the dew, rustled among the thirsty branches overhead with a sound that seemed to the young fellow like the chuckle of an exultant fiend.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ZDENA TO THE RESCUE.

But Harry ceases to muse, for the shrill clang of the bell summons him to supper. He finds the entire family assembled in the dining-room when he enters. All are laughing and talking, even Zdena, who is allowing handsome, precocious Vladimir to make love to her after more and more startling fashion. She informs Harry that Vips has just made her a proposal of marriage, which disparity of age alone prevents her from accepting, for in fact she is devoted to the lad.

"I renounce you from a sense of duty, Vips," she assures the young gentleman, gently passing her delicate forefinger over his smooth brown cheek, whereupon Vips flushes up and exclaims,--

"If you won't have me, at least promise me that I shall be best man at your wedding!"

Harry laughs heartily. "What an alternative! Either bridegroom or best man!"

"But you will promise me, Zdena, won't you?" the boy persists.

"It depends upon whom I marry," Zdena replies, with dignity. "The bridegroom will have a word to say upon the subject." As she speaks, her eyes encounter Harry's; she drops them instantly, her cheeks flush, and she pauses in confusion.

As she takes her place at table, she finds a letter beside her plate, post-marked Bayreuth, and sealed with a huge coat-of-arms. Evidently startled, she slips it into her pocket unopened.

"From whom?" asks Heda, whose curiosity is always on the alert.

"From--from Bayreuth."

"From Aunt Rosa?"

Zdena makes no reply.

"From Wenkendorf?" Harry asks, crossly.

The blood rushes to her cheeks. "Yes," she murmurs.

"How interesting!" Heda exclaims. "I really should like to hear his views as to the musical mysteries in Bayreuth. Read the letter aloud to us."

"Oh, it is sure to be tiresome," Zdena replies, heaping her plate with potatoes in her confusion.

"I wish you a good appetite!" Vladimir exclaims.

Zdena looks in dismay at the potatoes piled upon her plate.

"At least open the letter," says Heda.

"Open it, pray!" Harry repeats.

Mechanically Zdena obeys, breaks the seal, and hastily looks through the letter. Her cheeks grow redder and redder, her hands tremble.

"Come, read it to us."

Instead of complying, Zdena puts the document in her pocket again, and murmurs, much embarrassed, "There--there is nothing in it about Bayreuth."

"Ah, secrets!" Heda says, maliciously.

Zdena makes no reply, but gazes in desperation at the mound of potatoes on her plate. It never decreases in the least during the entire meal.

Jealousy, which has slept for a while in Harry's breast, springs to life again. One is not a Leskjewitsch for nothing. So she keeps up a correspondence with Wenkendorf! Ah! he may be deceived in her. Why was she so confused at the first sight of the letter? and why did she hide it away so hastily? Who knows?--she may be trifling with her old adorer, holding him in reserve as it were, because she has not quite decided as to her future. Who--who can be trusted, if that fair, angelic face can mask such guile?

Countess Zriny, as amiable and benevolent as ever,--Vips calls her "syrup diluted with holy water,"--notices that something has occurred to annoy the others, and attempts to change their train of thought.

"How is your dog, my dear Harry?" she asks her nephew across the table.

"Very ill," the young officer replies, curtly.

"Indeed? Oh, how sad! What is the matter with him?"

"I wish I knew. He drags his legs, his tail droops, and he has fever. I cannot help thinking that some one has thrown a stone at him, and I cannot imagine who could have been guilty of such cruelty."

"Poor Hector! 'Tis all up with him; he has no appetite," Vips murmurs.

"How do you know that?" Harry turns sharply upon the lad.

"I took him a piece of bread this afternoon," stammers Vips.

"Indeed?" Harry bursts forth. "Do that again and you shall suffer for it. I strictly forbade you to go near the dog!" Then, turning to the others, he explains: "I had to have the dog chained up, out of regard for the servants' nonsensical fears!"

"But, Harry," Vips begins, coaxingly, after a while, "if I must not go near the dog you ought not to have so much to do with him. You went to him several times to-day."

"That's very different; he is used to me," Harry sternly replies to his brother, who is looking at him with eyes full of anxious affection. "I have to see to him, since all the asses of servants, beginning with that old fool Blasius, are afraid of the poor brute. Moreover, he has everything now that he needs."

Vips knits his brows thoughtfully and shakes his head.

Suddenly the door of the dining-room opens, and old Blasius appears, pale as ashes, and trembling in every limb.

"What is the matter?" Harry asks, springing up.

"Herr Baron, I----" the old man stammers.

"What is the matter?"

"I told the Herr Baron how it would be," the old man declares, with the whimsical self-assertion which so often mingles with distress in the announcement of some misfortune: "Hector has gone mad."

"Nonsense! what do you know about hydrophobia? Let the dog alone!" Harry shouts, stamping his foot.

"He has broken his chain."

"Then chain him up again! Send Johann here." (Johann is Harry's special servant.)

"Johann is not at home. The Herr Baron does not know what he orders. The dog rushes at everything in its path, and tears and bites it. No one dares to go near him, not even the butcher. He must be killed."

"What, you coward!" Harry shouts; "my dog killed because of a little epilepsy, or whatever it is that ails him!" Meanwhile, Harry notices that his brother, who had vanished into the next room for a moment, is now attempting with a very resolute air to go out through the door leading into the hall. Harry seizes him by the shoulder and stops him: "Where are you going?"

Vips is mute.

"What have you in your hand?"

It is Harry's revolver.

"Is it loaded?" he asks, sternly.

"Yes," Vips replies, scarce audibly.

"Put it down there on the piano!" Harry orders, harshly. The poor boy obeys sadly, and then throws his arms around his brother.

"But you will stay here, Harry? dear Harry, you will not go near the dog?"

"You silly boy, do you suppose I am to do whatever you bid me?" Harry rejoins. And, pinning the lad's arms to his sides from behind, he lifts him up, carries him into the next room, locks him in, puts the key in his pocket, and, without another word, leaves the room. Blasius stays in the dining-room, wringing his hands, and finally engages in a wailing conversation with Vips, who is kicking violently at the door behind which he is confined. Heda, the Countess Zriny, and Fräulein Laut, their backs towards the piano, upon which lies the revolver, form an interesting group, expressing in every feature terror and helplessness.

"Perhaps he may not be mad," Countess Zriny observes, after a long silence, resolved as ever to ignore unpleasant facts. "However, I have my eau de Lourdes, at all events."

At this moment the rustle of a light garment is heard. The Countess looks round for Zdena, but she has vanished. Whither has she gone?

The dining-room has four doors,—one into the garden, another opposite leading into the hall, a third opening into Harry's room, and a fourth into the pantry. Through this last Zdena has slipped. From the pantry a narrow, dark passage leads down a couple of steps into a lumber-room, which opens on the courtyard.

Zdena, when she steps into the court-yard, closes the door behind her and looks around. Her heart beats tumultuously. She hopes to reach Harry before he meets the dog; but, look where she may, she cannot see him.

Wandering clouds veil the low moon; its light is fitful, now bright, then dim. The shadows dance and fade, and outlines blend in fantastic indistinctness. The wind has risen; it shrieks and howls, and whirls the dust into the poor girl's eyes. A frightful growling sound mingles with the noise of the blast.

Zdena's heart beats faster; she is terribly afraid. "Harry!" she calls, in an agonized tone; "Harry!" In vain. She hears his shrill whistle at the other end of the court-yard, hears him call, commandingly, "Hector, come here, sir!" He is far away. She hurries towards him. Hark! Her heart seems to stand still. Near her sounds the rattle of a chain; a pair of fierce bloodshot eyes glare at her: the dog is close at hand. He sees her, and makes ready for a spring.

It is true that the girl has a revolver in her hand, but she has no idea what to do with it; she has never fired a pistol in her life. In desperate fear she clammers swiftly upon a wood-pile against the brewery wall. The dog, in blind fury, leaps at the wood, falls back, and then runs howling in another direction. The moon emerges from the clouds, and pours its slanting beams into the court-yard. At last Zdena perceives her headstrong cousin; he is going directly towards the dog.

"Hector!" he shouts; "Hector!"

A few steps onward he comes, when Zdena slips down from her secure height. Panting, almost beside herself, the very personification of heroic self-sacrifice and desperate terror, she hurries up to Harry.

"What is it—Zdena—you?" Harry calls out. For, just at the moment when he stretches out his hand to clutch at the dog's collar, a slender figure rushes between him and the furious brute.

"Here, Harry,—the revolver!" the girl gasps, holding out the weapon. There is a sharp report: Hector turns, staggers, and falls dead!

The revolver drops from Harry's hand; he closes his eyes. For a few seconds he stands as if

turned to stone, and deadly pale. Then he feels a soft touch upon his arm, and a tremulous voice whispers,--

"Forgive me, Harry! I know how you must grieve for your poor old friend, but--but I was so frightened for you!"

He opens his eyes, and, throwing his arm around the girl, exclaims,--

"You angel! Can you for an instant imagine that at this moment I have a thought to bestow upon the dog, dearly as I loved him?"

His arm clasps her closer.

"Harry!" she gasps, distressed.

With a sigh he releases her.

In the summits of the old walnuts there soughs a wail of discontent, and the moon, which shone forth but a moment ago so brilliantly, and which takes delight in the kisses of happy lovers, veils its face in clouds before its setting, being defrauded of any such satisfaction.

"Come into the house," whispers Zdena. But walking is not so easy as she thinks. She is so dizzy that she can hardly put one foot before the other, and, whether she will or not, she must depend upon Harry to support her.

"Fool that I am!" he mutters. "Lean upon me, you poor angel! You are trembling like an aspen-leaf."

"I can hardly walk,--I was so terribly afraid," she confesses.

"On my account?" he asks.

"No, not on your account alone, but on my own, too," she replies, laughing, "for, entirely between ourselves, I am a wretched coward."

"Really? Oh, Zdena--" He presses the hand that rests on his arm.

"But, Harry," she says, very gravely this time, "I am not giddy now. I can walk very well." And she takes her hand from his arm.

He only laughs, and says, "As you please, my queen, but you need not fear me. If a man ever deserved Paradise, I did just then." He points to the spot beneath the old walnuts, where the moon had been disappointed.

A few seconds later they enter the dining-room, where are the three ladies, and the Countess Zriny advances to meet Harry with a large bottle of eau de Lourdes, a tablespoonful of which Heda is trying to heat over the flame of the lamp, while Fräulein Laut pauses in her account of a wonderful remedy for hydrophobia.

Harry impatiently cuts short all the inquiries with which he is besieged, with "The dog is dead; I shot him!" He does not relate how the deed was done. At first he had been disposed to extol Zdena's heroism, but he has thought better of it. He resolves to keep for himself alone the memory of the last few moments, to guard it in his heart like a sacred secret. As Vips is still proclaiming his presence in the next room by pounding upon the door, Harry takes the key from his pocket and smilingly releases the prisoner. The lad rushes at his brother. "Did he not bite you? Really not?" And when Harry answers, "No," he entreats, "Show me your hands, Harry,--both of them!" and then he throws his arms about the young man and clasps him close.

"Oh, you foolish fellow!" Harry exclaims, stroking the boy's brown head. "But now be sensible; don't behave like a girl. Do you hear?"

"My nerves are in such a state," sighs Heda.

Harry stamps his foot. "So are mine! I would advise you all to retire, and recover from this turmoil."

Soon afterwards the house is silent. Even Vips has been persuaded to go to bed and sleep off his fright. Harry, however, is awake. After ordering Blasius to bury the dog, and to bring him his revolver, which he now remembers to have left lying beside the animal's body, he seats himself on the flight of steps leading from the dining-room into the garden, leans his elbows on his knees and his head on his hands, and dreams. The wind has subsided, and the night seems to him lovely in spite of the misty clouds that veil the sky. The flowers are fragrant,--oh, how fair life is! Suddenly he hears a light step; he rises, goes into the corridor, and finds Zdena putting a letter into the postbag. He approaches her, and their eyes meet. In vain does she attempt to look grave. She smiles, and her smile is mirrored in his eyes.

"To whom was the letter?" he asks, going towards her. Not that there is a spark of jealousy left in his heart for the moment, but he delights to coax her secrets from her, to share in all that

concerns her.

"Is it any affair of yours?" she asks, with dignity.

"No, but I should like to know."

"I will not tell you."

"Suppose I guess?"

She shrugs her shoulders.

"To Wenkendorf," he whispers, advancing a step nearer her, as she makes no reply.

"What did he write to you?" Harry persists.

"That is no concern of yours."

"What if I guess that, too?"

"Then I hope you will keep your knowledge to yourself, and not mention your guess to any one," Zdena exclaims, eagerly.

"He proposed to you," Harry says, softly.

Zdena sighs impatiently.

"Well, yes!" she admits at last, turning to Harry a blushing face as she goes on. "But I really could not help it. I did what I could to prevent it, but men are so conceited and headstrong. If one of them takes an idea into his head there is no disabusing him of it."

"Indeed! is that the way with all men?" Harry asks, ready to burst into a laugh.

"Yes, except when they have other and worse faults,--are suspicious and bad-tempered."

"But then these last repent so bitterly, and are so ashamed of themselves."

"Oh, as for that, he will be ashamed of himself too." Then, suddenly growing grave, she adds, "I should be very sorry to have----"

"To have any one hear of his disappointed hopes," Harry interposes, with a degree of malicious triumph in his tone. "Do not fear; we will keep his secret."

"Good-night!" She takes up her candlestick, which she had put down on the table beside which they are standing, and turns towards the winding staircase.

"Zdena!" Harry whispers, softly.

"What is it?"

"Nothing: only--is there really not a regret in your heart for the wealth you have rejected?"

She shakes her head slowly, as if reflecting. "No," she replies: "what good would it have done me? I could not have enjoyed it." Then she suddenly blushes crimson, and, turning away from him, goes to the staircase.

"Zdena!" he calls again; "Zdena!" But the white figure has vanished at the turn of the steps, and he is alone. For a while he stands gazing into the darkness that has swallowed her up. "God keep you!" he murmurs, tenderly, and finally betakes himself to his room, with no thought, however, of going to bed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A SLEEPLESS NIGHT.

No, he could not sleep; he had something important to do. At last he must pluck up courage and establish his position. This wretched prevarication, this double dealing, could not go on any longer. It was ten times more disgraceful than the most brutal frankness. He seated himself at

the very table where, scarcely more than a day before, he had listened to Lato's confessions, and began a rough sketch of his letter to Paula. But at the very first word he stopped. He was going to write, "Dear Paula," but that would never do. Could he address her thus familiarly when he wanted to sever all relations with her? Impossible! "Honoured Baroness" he could not write, either; it sounded ridiculous, applied to a girl with whom he had sat for hours in the last fortnight. He decided to begin, "Dear Baroness Paula." He dipped his pen in the ink, and wrote the words in a distinct hand: "Dear Baroness Paula, I cannot express to you the difficulty I find in telling you what must, however, be told. I had hoped until now that you would discover it yourself----"

Thus far he wrote hurriedly, and as if in scorn of mortal danger. He paused now, and read over the few words. His cheeks burned. No, he could not write that to a lady: as well might he strike her in the face. It was impossible. But what should he do? At last an idea occurred to him, how strange not to have thought of it before! He must appeal to her mother. It was as clear as daylight. He took a fresh sheet of paper, having torn the other up and tossed it under the table, then dipped his pen anew in the ink. But no; it would not do. Every hour that he had spent with Paula, every caress he had allowed her to bestow upon him, was brought up before him by his conscience, which did not spare him the smallest particular. Lato's words recurred to him: "You cannot disguise from yourself the fact that you--you and Paula--produce the impression of a devoted pair of lovers."

He set his teeth. He could not deny that his conduct had been shameful. He could not sever his engagement to her without a lack of honour.

"Oh, good God! how had it ever come to pass?" What had induced him to ride over to Dobrotschau day after day? He had always been sure that an opportunity for an explanation would occur. When with Paula he had endured her advances in sullen submission, without facing the consequences; he had simply been annoyed; and now---- He shuddered.

Once more he took up the pen, but in vain; never before had he felt so utterly hopeless. Every limb ached as if laden with fetters. He tossed the pen aside: under the circumstances he could not write the letter; Paula herself must sever the tie, if it could be severed.

If it could be severed! What did that mean? He seemed to hear the words spoken aloud. Nonsense! If it could be severed! As if there were a doubt that it could be severed! But how? how?

His distress was terrible. He could see no way to extricate himself. Paula must be compelled to release him of her own accord; but how was it to be done? He devised the wildest schemes. Could he be caught flirting with a gypsy girl? or could he feign to be deeply in debt? No, no more feigning; and, besides, what would it avail? She would forgive everything.

Suddenly Vips cried out in his sleep.

"Vips!" Harry called, to waken him, going to his brother's bedside.

The lad opened his eyes, heavy with sleep, and said, "I am so glad you waked me! I was having a horrible dream that you were being torn to pieces by a furious leopard."

"You foolish boy!"

"Oh, it was no joke, I can tell you!" Then, pulling his brother down to him, he went on, "Zdena took the revolver to you, I saw her through the keyhole; not one of the others would have raised a finger for you. No, there is no one in the world like our Zdena." Vips stroked his brother's blue sleeve with his long, slender hand. "Do you know," he whispered very softly, "I have no doubt that----"

Harry frowned, and Vips blushed, shut his eyes, and turned his face to the wall.

The first gleam of morning was breaking its way through the twilight; a rosy glow illumined the eastern horizon; the stream began to glimmer, and then shone like molten gold; long shadows detached themselves from the universal gray and stretched across the garden among the dewy flower-beds. The dew lay everywhere, glistening like silvery dust on the blades of grass, and dripping in the foliage of the old apricot-tree by the open window at which Harry stood gazing sadly out into the wondrous beauty of the world. The cool morning breeze fanned his cheek; the birds began to twitter.

The young fellow was conscious of the discomfort of a night spent without sleep; but far worse than that was the hopeless misery that weighed him down.

Hark! what was that? The sound of bells, the trot of horses on the quiet road. Harry leaned forward. Who was that?

Leaning back in an open barouche, a gray travelling-cap on his head, a handsome old man was driving along the road.

"Father!" exclaimed Harry.

The old gentleman saw him from the carriage and waved his hand gaily. In a twinkling Harry was opening the house-door.

"I have surprised you, have I not?" Karl Leskjewitsch exclaimed, embracing his son. "But what's the matter with you? What ails you? I never saw you look so sallow,--you rogue!" And he shook his forefinger at the young fellow.

"Oh, nothing,--nothing, sir: we will talk of it by and by. Now come and take some rest."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE CONFESSION.

Baron Leskjewitsch was in an admirable humour. He brightened up the entire household. The Countess Zriny, to be sure, lamented to Fräulein Laut his tireless loquacity, but perhaps that was because his loquacity displayed itself principally in the utterance of anti-Catholic views.

At breakfast, on the first morning after his arrival, he cut the old canonesse to the heart. When he rallied her upon the indigestible nature of her favourite delicacy, raspberry jam with whipped cream, she replied that she could eat it with perfect impunity, since she always mixed a teaspoonful of eau de Lourdes with the jam before adding the cream.

Whereupon the Baron called this preservative "Catholic quackery," and was annoyed that she made no reply to his attack. Like a former emperor of Russia, he longed for opposition. He did what he could to rouse Countess Zriny's. After a while he asserted that she was a heathen. Catholicism in its modern form, with its picturesque ritual and its superstitious worship of the saints, was nothing more than cowled Paganism.

The Countess, to whom this rather antiquated wisdom was new, shuddered with horror, and regarded the Baron as antichrist, but nevertheless held her peace.

Then he played his last trump. He informed her that he regarded the Darwinian theory as much less irreligious than her, Countess Zriny's, paltry conception of the Deity. Then the Countess arose and left the room, to write immediately to her father confessor, expressing her anxieties with regard to her cousin's soul, and asking the priest to say a mass for his conversion.

"Poor Kathi! have I frightened her away? I didn't mean to do that," said the Baron, looking after her.

No, he had not meant to do it; he had merely desired to arouse opposition.

"A splendid subject for an essay," he exclaimed, after a pause,--"the Darwinian theory and the Catholic ritual set forth by a man of true piety.' I really must publish a pamphlet with that title. It may bring me into collision with the government, but that would not be very distressing."

Privately the Baron wished for nothing more earnestly than to be brought into collision with the government, to be concerned in some combination threatening the existence of the monarchy. But just as some women, in spite of every endeavour, never succeed in compromising themselves, so Karl Leskjewitsch had never yet succeeded in seriously embroiling himself with the government. No one took him in earnest; even when he made the most incendiary speeches, they were regarded as but the amusing babble of a political dilette.

He eagerly availed himself of any occasion to utter his paradoxes, and at this first breakfast he was so eloquent that gradually all at the table followed the example of Countess Zriny, in leaving it, except his eldest son.

He lighted a cigar, and invited Harry to go into the garden with him. Harry, who had been longing for a word with his father in private, acceded readily to his proposal.

The sun shone brightly, the flowers in the beds sparkled like diamonds. The old ruin stood brown and clear against the sky, the bees hummed, and Fräulein Laut was practising something of Brahms's. Of course she had seated herself at the piano as soon as the dining-room was deserted.

Harry walked beside his father, with bent head, vainly seeking for words in which to explain his unfortunate case. His father held his head very erect, kicked the pebbles from his path with dignity, talked very fast, and asked his son twenty questions, without waiting for an answer to

one of them.

"Have you been spending all your leave here? Does it not bore you? Why did you not take an interesting trip? Life here must be rather tiresome; Heda never added much to the general hilarity, and as for poor Kathi, do you think her entertaining? She's little more than a *mouton à l'eau bénite*. And then that sausage-chopper," with a glance in the direction whence proceeded a host of interesting dissonances. "Surely you must have found your stay here a very heavy affair. Kathi Zriny is harmless, but that Laut--ugh!--a terrible creature! Look at her hair; it looks like hay. I should like to understand the aim of creation in producing such an article; we have no use for it." He paused,--perhaps for breath.

"Father," Harry began, meekly.

"Well?"

"I should like to tell you something."

"Tell me, then, but without any preface. I detest prefaces; I never read them; in fact, a book is usually spoiled for me if I find it has a preface. What is a preface written for? Either to explain the book that follows it, or to excuse it. And why read a book that needs explanation or excuses? I told Franz Weyser, the famous orator, in the Reichsrath the other day, that----"

"Father," Harry began again, in a tone of entreaty, aware that he should have some difficulty in obtaining a hearing for his confession.

"What an infernally sentimental air you have! Aha! I begin to see. You have evidently fallen in love with Zdena. It is not to be wondered at; she's a charming creature--pretty as a picture--looks amazingly like Charlotte Buff, of Goethe memory; all that is needed is to have her hair dressed high and powdered. What can I say? In your place I should have been no wiser. Moreover, if you choose to marry poverty for love, 'tis your own affair. You must remember that Franz will undoubtedly stop your allowance. You cannot expect much from Paul; and as for myself, I can do nothing for you except give you my blessing. You know how matters stand with me; and I must think of your sister, who never can marry without a dowry. I cannot entirely deprive myself of means: a politician must preserve his independence, for, as I lately said to Fritz Böhm, in the Reichsrath----"

In vain had Harry tried to edge in a word. With a bitter smile he recalled a passage in a Vienna humorous paper which, under the heading of "A disaster prevented," set forth the peril from drowning from which the entire government had been saved by the presence of mind of the president of the Reichsrath, Herr Doctor Smolka, who had contrived just in the nick of time to put a stop to a torrent of words from Baron Karl Leskjewitsch.

Suddenly the Baron stumbled over a stone, which fortunately caused him to pause.

"It has nothing to do with Zdena!" Harry exclaimed, seizing his opportunity.

"Not? Then----"

"I have become betrothed," Harry almost shouted, for fear of not making his father hear.

"And what do you want of me?"

"You must help me to break the engagement," his son cried, in despair.

At these words Karl Leskjewitsch, who with all his confusion of ideas had managed to retain a strong sense of humour, made a grimace, and pushed back the straw hat which he wore, and which had made the ascent of Mount Vesuvius with him and had a hole in the crown, so that it nearly fell off his head.

"Ah, indeed! First of all I should like to know to whom you are betrothed,--the result, of course, of garrison life in some small town? I always maintain that for a cavalry officer----"

Harry felt the liveliest desire to summon the aid of Doctor Smolka to stem the tide of his father's eloquence, but, since this could not be, he loudly interrupted him: "I am betrothed to Paula Harfink!"

"Harfink!" exclaimed the Baron. "The Harfinks of K----?"

"Yes; they are at Dobrotschau this summer," Harry explained.

"So she is your betrothed,--the Baroness Paula? She is handsome; a little too stout, but that is a matter of taste. And you want to marry her?"

"No, no, I do not want to marry her!" Harry exclaimed, in dismay.

"Oh, indeed! you do not want to marry her?" murmured the Baron. "And why not?"

"Because--because I do not love her."

"Why did you betroth yourself to her?"

Harry briefly explained the affair to his father.

The Baron looked grave. "And what do you want me to do?" he asked, after a long, oppressive silence.

"Help me out, father. Put your veto upon this connection."

"What will my veto avail? You are of age, and can do as you choose," said the Baron, shaking his head.

"Yes, legally," Harry rejoined, impatiently, "but I never should dream of marrying against your will."

Karl Leskjewitsch found this assurance of filial submission on his son's part very amusing. He looked askance at the young fellow, and, suppressing a smile, extended his hand after a pompous theatric fashion and exclaimed, "I thank you for those words. They rejoice my paternal heart." Then, after swinging his son's hand up and down like a pump-handle, he dropped it and said, dryly, "Unfortunately, I have not the slightest objection to your betrothal to the Harfink girl. What pretext shall I make use of?"

"Well,"--Harry blushed,--"you might say you cannot consent to the *mésalliance*."

"Indeed! Thanks for the suggestion. I belong to the Liberal party, and do not feel called upon to play the part of an aristocratic Cerberus defending his prejudices." Here the Baron took out his note-book. "Aristocratic Cerberus," he murmured; "that may be useful some day in the Reichsrath. Besides," he continued, "it would just now be particularly unpleasant to quarrel with the Harfinks. If you had asked me before your betrothal whether I should like it, I should have frankly said no. The connection is a vulgar one; but, since matters have gone so far, I do not like to make a disturbance. The brother of the girl's mother, Doctor Grünbart, is one of the leaders of our party. He formerly conducted himself towards me with great reserve, suspecting that my liberal tendencies were due merely to a whim, to a fleeting caprice. I met him, however, a short time ago, on my tour through Sweden and Norway. He was travelling with his wife and daughter. We travelled together. He is a very clever man, but--between ourselves--intolerable, and with dirty nails. As for his women-folk,--good heavens!" The Baron clasped his hands. "The wife always eat the heads of the trout which I left in the dish, and the daughter travelled in a light-blue gown, with a green botany-box hanging at her back, and such teeth,--horrible! The wife is a schoolmaster's daughter, who married the old man to rid herself of a student lover. Very worthy, but intolerable. I travelled with them for six weeks, and won the Doctor's heart by my courtesy to his wife and daughter. I should have been more cautious if I had been at housekeeping in Vienna, although the most violent Austrian democrats are very reasonable in social respects, especially with regard to their women. They are flattered by attention to them on a journey, but they are not aggressive at home. This, however, is not to the point."

It did indeed seem not to the point to Harry, who bit his lip and privately clinched his fist. He was on the rack during his father's rambling discourse.

"What I wanted to say"--the Baron resumed the thread of his discourse--"is, that this democrat's pride is his elegant sister, Baroness Harfink, and the fact that she was once invited, after great exertions in some charitable undertaking, to a ball at the Princess Colloredo's--I think it was at the Colloredo's. I should like to have seen her there!" He rubbed his hands and smiled. "My democrat maintains that she looked more distinguished than the hostess. You understand that if I should wound his family pride I could not hope for his support in the Reichsrath, where I depend upon it to procure me a hearing."

Harry privately thought that it would be meritorious to avert such a calamity, but he said, "Ah, father, that democrat's support is not so necessary as you think. Depend upon it, you will be heard without it. And then a quarrel with a politician would cause you only a temporary annoyance, while the continuance of my betrothal to Paula will simply kill me. I have done my best to show her the state of my feelings towards her. She does not understand me. There is nothing for it but for you to undertake the affair." Harry clasped his hands in entreaty, like a boy. "Do it for my sake. You are the only one who can help me."

Baron Karl was touched. He promised everything that his son asked of him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BARON'S AID.

The Baron never liked to postpone what he had to do; it was against his principles and his nature. The matter must be attended to at once. As soon as the mid-day meal was over, he had the carriage brought, put on a black coat, and set out for Dobrotschau.

The fountain plashed dreamily as he drove into the castle court-yard. The afternoon sun glittered on the water, and a great dog came towards him as he alighted, and thrust his nose into his hand. He knew the old dog.

"How are you, old friend? how does the new *régime* suit you?" he said, patting the animal's head. Two footmen hurried forward in drab breeches and striped vests. To one of them Baron Karl gave his card, and then awaited the mistress of the mansion in the spacious and rather dark drawing-room into which he had been shown.

He looked about him, and was very well pleased. The tall windows of the room were draped with pale-green silk; the furniture, various in shape and style, was all convenient and handsome; vases filled with flowers stood here and there on stands and tables; and in a black ebony cabinet, behind glass doors, there was a fine collection of old porcelain. The Baron was a connoisseur in old porcelain, and had just risen to examine these specimens, when the servant returned to conduct him to the Baroness's presence.

Baron Karl's heart throbbed a little fast at the thought of his mission, and he privately anathematized "the stupid boy" who had been the cause of it.

"Since he got himself into the scrape, he might have got himself out of it," he thought, as he followed the lackey, who showed him into a small but charming boudoir, fitted up after a rural fashion with light cretonne.

"I'm in for it," the Baron thought, in English. He liked to sprinkle his soliloquies with English phrases, having a great preference for England, whence he imported his clothes, his soap, and his political ideas of reform *en gros*. In the Reichsrath they called him "Old England."

As he entered the pretty room, a lady rose from a low lounge and came towards him with outstretched hands. Those hands were small, soft, and shapely, and the rings adorning the third finger of one of them--a ruby and a large diamond, both very simply set--became them well. Baron Karl could not help carrying one of them to his lips; thus much, he thought, he owed the poor woman in view of the pain he was about to inflict upon her. Frau von Harfink said a few pleasant words of welcome, to which he replied courteously, and then, having taken his seat in a comfortable arm-chair near her favourite lounge, the conversation came to a stand-still. The Baron looked in some confusion at his hostess. There was no denying that, in spite of her fifty years, she was a pretty woman. Her features were regular, her teeth dazzling, and if there was a touch of rouge on her cheeks, that was her affair; it did not affect her general appearance. The fair hair that was parted to lie in smooth waves above her brow was still thick, and the little lace cap was very becoming. Her short, full figure was not without charm, and her gown of black *crêpe de Chine* fitted faultlessly. The Baron could not help thinking that it would be easier to give her pain if she were ugly. There was really no objection to make to her. He had hoped she would resemble his friend Doctor Grünbart, but she did not resemble him. While he pondered thus, Frau von Harfink stretched out her hand to the bell-rope.

"My daughters are both out in the park; they will be extremely glad to see you, especially Paula, who has been most impatient to know you. I will send for them immediately."

Karl Leskjewitsch prevented her from ringing. "One moment, first," he begged; "I--I am here upon very serious business."

Her eyes scanned his face keenly. Did she guess? did she choose not to understand him? Who can tell? Certain it is that no woman could have made what he had come to say more difficult to utter.

"Oh, let 'serious business' go for the present!" she exclaimed; "there is time enough for that. A mother's heart of course is full----"

In his confusion the Baron had picked up a pamphlet lying on the table between Frau von Harfink and himself. Imagine his sensations when, upon looking at it closely, he recognized his own work--a pamphlet upon "Servility among Liberals,"--a piece of political bravado upon which the author had prided himself not a little at the time of its publication, but which, like many another masterpiece, had vanished without a trace in the yearly torrent of such literature. Not only were the leaves of this pamphlet cut, but as the Baron glanced through it he saw that various passages were underscored with pencil-marks.

"You see how well known you are here, my dear Baron," said Frau von Harfink, and then, taking his hat from him, she went on, "I cannot have you pay us a formal visit: you will stay and have a cup of tea, will you not? Do you know that I am a little embarrassed in the presence of the author of that masterpiece?"

"Ah, pray, madame!--the democrat *par excellence* could not exactly bring himself to an acknowledgment of Frau von Harfink's brand-new patent of nobility,--"ah, madame, the merest trifle, a political *capriccio* with which I beguiled an idle hour; not worth mentioning."

"Great in small things, my dear Baron, great in small things," she rejoined. "No one since Schopenhauer has understood how to use the German language as you do. So admirable a style!--precise, transparent, and elegant as finely-cut glass. And what a wealth of original aphorisms! You are a little sharp here and there, almost cruel,"--she shook her forefinger at him archly,--"but the truth is always cruel."

"A remarkably clever woman!" thought Baron Karl. Of course he could not refrain from returning such courtesy. "This summer, in a little trip to the North Cape"--Leskjewitsch was wont always to refer to his travels as little trips; a journey to California he would have liked to call a picnic--"in a little trip to the North Cape, I had the pleasure of meeting your brother, Baroness," he cleared his throat before uttering the word, but he accomplished it. "We had known each other politically in the Reichsrath, but in those northern regions our acquaintance quickly ripened into friendship."

"I have heard all about it already," said the Baroness: "it was my brother who called my attention to this pearl." She pointed to the pamphlet. "Of course he had no idea of the closer relations which we are to hold with each other; he simply described to me the impression you made upon him. Ah, I must read you one of his letters."

She opened a drawer in her writing-table, and unfolded a long letter, from which she began to read, then interrupted herself, turned the sheet, and finally found the place for which she was looking:

"Baron Karl Leskjewitsch is an extremely clever individual, brilliantly gifted by nature. His misfortune has been that in forsaking the Conservatives he has failed to win the entire confidence of the Liberals. Now that I know him well, I am ready to use all my influence to support him in his career, and I do not doubt that I shall succeed in securing for him the distinguished position for which he is fitted. I see in him the future Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs."

A few minutes previously Baron Karl had been conscious of some discomfort; every trace of it had now vanished. He was fairly intoxicated. He saw himself a great statesman, and was already pondering upon what to say in his first important conference with the Chancellor of the realm.

"Pray, give my warm regards to Doctor Grünbart when you next write to him," he began, not without condescension, when suddenly a young lady hurried into the room,--tall, stout, with Titian hair and a dazzling complexion, her chest heaving, her eyes sparkling. In the Baron's present mood she seemed to him beautiful as a young goddess. "By Jove! the boy has made a hit," he thought to himself. The vague sense of discomfort returned for a moment, but vanished when Paula advanced towards him with outstretched hands. He drew her to him, and imprinted a paternal kiss upon her forehead. Selina and Fainacky now made their appearance. It was quite a domestic scene.

The Baroness rang, and the tea-equipage was brought in for afternoon tea. Olga made her appearance, but Treurenberg was absent; Selina remarked, crossly, that he was again spending the afternoon with the officers at X----. Baron Karl was throned upon roses and inhaling sweet incense, when finally the Baroness, lightly touching his arm, asked before all present,--

"And the 'serious business' you came to consult me about?" He started, and was mute, while the lady went on, archly, "What if I guess its import? You came in Harry's behalf, did you not?"

Baron Karl bowed his head in assent.

"To arrange the day, was it not?"

What could the poor man do? Before he had time to reflect, the Baroness said, "We have considered the matter already; we must be in no hurry,--no hurry. It always is a sore subject for a mother, the appointing a definite time for her separation from her daughter, and every girl, however much in love she may be,"--here the Baroness glanced at her stout Paula, who did her best to assume an air of maidenly reserve, "would like to postpone the marriage-day. But men do not like to wait; therefore, all things considered, I have thought of the 19th of October as the day. Tell Harry so from me, and scold him well for not doing his errand himself. His delicacy of sentiment is really exaggerated! An old woman may be pardoned for a little enthusiasm for a future son-in-law, may she not?"

Shortly afterwards Baron Leskjewitsch was driving home along the road by which he had come. The shadows had lengthened; a cold air ascended from the earth. Gradually the Baron's consciousness, drugged by the flattery he had received, awoke, and he felt extremely uncomfortable. What had he effected? He was going home after a fruitless visit,--no, not fruitless. Harry's affairs were in a worse condition than before. He had absolutely placed the official seal upon his son's betrothal.

What else could he have done? He could not have made a quarrel. He could not alienate

Doctor Grünbart's sister. The welfare of the government might depend upon his friendly alliance with the leader of the democratic party. His fancy spread its wings and took its flight to higher spheres,—he really had no time to trouble himself about his son's petty destiny. His ambition soared high: he saw himself about to reform the monarchy with the aid of Doctor Grünbart, whose importance, however, decreased as his own waxed great.

He drove through the ruinous archway into the courtyard. A light wagon was standing before the house. When he asked whose it was, he was told that it had come from Zirkow to take home the Baroness Zdena. He went to the dining-room, whence came the sound of gay voices and laughter. They were all at supper, and seemed very merry, so merry that they had not heard him arrive.

Twilight was already darkening the room when the Baron entered by one door at the same moment that Blasius with the lamp made his appearance at the other. The lamplight fell full upon the group about the table, and Baron Karl's eyes encountered those of his son, beaming with delight. Poor fellow! He had not entertained a doubt that everything would turn out well. Zdena, too, looked up; her lips were redder than usual, and there was a particularly tender, touching expression about her mouth, while in her eyes there was a shy delight. There was no denying it, the girl was exquisitely beautiful.

She had guessed Baron Karl's errand to Dobrotschau. She divined---

Pshaw! The Baron felt dizzy for a moment,—but, after all, such things must be borne. Such trifles must not influence the future 'Canning' of Austria.

Blasius set down the lamp. How comfortable and home-like the well-spread table looked, at the head the little army of cream-pitchers and jugs, over which the Countess Zriny was presiding.

"A cup of coffee?" the old canoness asked the newcomer.

"No, no, thanks," he said. Something in his voice told Harry everything.

The Baron tried to take his place at table, that the moment for explanation might be postponed, but Harry could not wait.

"Something has occurred to-day upon the farm about which I want to consult you, sir," he said. "Will you not come with me for a moment?" And he made a miserably unsuccessful attempt to look as if it were a matter of small importance. The two men went into the next room, where it was already so dark that they could not see each other's faces distinctly. Harry lit a candle, and placed it on the table between his father and himself.

"Well, father?"

"My dear boy, there was nothing to be done," the Baron replied, hesitating. For a moment the young man's misery made an impression upon him, but then his invincible loquacity burst forth. "There was nothing to be done, Harry," he repeated. And, with a wave of his hand implying true nobility of sentiment, he went on: "A betrothal is a contract sealed by a promise. From a promise one may be released; it cannot be broken. When the Harfinks refused to see the drift of my hints, and release you from your promise, there was nothing left for me save to acquiesce. As a man of honour, a gentleman, I could do no less; I could not possibly demand your release."

Baron Karl looked apprehensively at his son, with whose quick temper he was familiar, expecting to be overwhelmed by a torrent of reproaches, of bitter, provoking words, sure that the young man would be led into some display of violence; but nothing of the kind ensued. Harry stood perfectly quiet opposite his father, one hand leaning upon the table where burned the candle. His head drooped a little, and he was very pale, but not a finger moved when his father added, "You understand that I could do nothing further?"

He murmured, merely, "Yes, I understand." His voice sounded thin and hoarse, like the voice of a sick child; and then he fell silent again. After a pause, he said, in a still lower tone, "Uncle Paul has sent the wagon for Zdena, with a note asking me to drive her back to Zirkow. It has been waiting for an hour and a half, because Zdena did not want to leave before your return. Pray, do me the favour to drive her home in my place: I cannot."

Then the young fellow turned away and went to a window, outside of which the old apricot-trees rustled and sighed.

Baron Karl was very sorry for his son, but what else could he have done? Surely his case was a hard one. He seemed to himself a very Junius Brutus, sacrificing his son to his country. And having succeeded finally in regarding in this magnanimous light the part he had played, he felt perfectly at peace with himself again.

He left the room, promising to attend to Zdena's return to Zirkow. But Harry remained standing by the window, gazing out into the gathering gloom. The very heart within his breast seemed turning to stone. He knew now that what he had at first held to be merely a ridiculous annoyance had come to be bitter earnest,—yes, terrible earnest! No escape was possible; he could see no hope of rescue; a miracle would have to occur to release him, and he did not believe in

miracles.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BARON FRANZ.

Every year, towards the end of August, Baron Franz Leskjewitsch, the family scarecrow and Cræsus, was wont to appear at his estate, Vorhabshen, near Zirkow, to learn the condition of the harvest, to spend a few days in hunting, and to abuse everything and everybody before, at the end of a couple of weeks, vanishing as suddenly as he had appeared.

On these occasions he avoided his brother Paul with evident determination. If any of the family were at Komaritz, he invited them to dinner once or twice, at such times taking pains to make himself particularly offensive to Heda, whom he could not endure.

He had never spent any length of time at Vorhabshen since the family quarrel, and in consequence the dwelling-house, or castle, upon which, miser that he was, he never would spend a penny for repairs, had come to be tumble-down and sordid in appearance, both inside and out. It was a huge structure, with numerous windows, in which many of the sashes were sprung and some destitute of panes, never having been reglazed since the last hail-storm had worked ruin among them.

Among the family portraits, which hung in a dark, oak-wainscoted gallery, the pigeons built their nests.

Like many another Bohemian castle, the mansion at Vorhabshen was built close to the farm-yard, and its front faced an immense, light-brown manure-heap.

The inmates of this unpicturesque ruin--whose duty it was to keep it ready for its master's brief visits--were, first, the housekeeper, Lotta Papoushek; then the Baron's court-fool, the former brewer Studnecka, who at times imagined himself the prophet Elisha, and at other times a great musical genius; then the superintendent, with his underlings; and finally, any young man who might be tempted to come hither to study modern agriculture, and whose studies were generally confined to allowing himself to be pampered by the housekeeper Lotta, who had all the admiration of her class for courteous young people.

Frau Lotta had been in the Baron's service for more than forty years. Her large face was red, dotted with brown warts, and her features were hard and masculine. Although she certainly was far from attractive in appearance, there was a report that she had once been handsome, and that Baron Franz, when he received the news of his son's marriage with Marie Duval, had exclaimed, "I'll marry my housekeeper! I'll marry Lotta!" How this would have aided to re-establish the family prestige it is difficult to say, and it is doubtful whether the speech was made; but twenty years afterwards Lotta used to tell of it, and of how she had replied, "That would be too nonsensical, Herr Baron!" Notwithstanding her peculiarities and her overweening self-conceit, she was a thoroughly good creature, and devoted heart and soul to the Leskjewitsch family. Her absolute honesty induced the Baron to make her authority at Vorhabshen paramount, to the annoyance of the superintendent and his men.

It was a clear afternoon--the 1st of September; the steam thresher was at work in the farm-yard, and its dreary puffing and groaning were audible in Lotta's small sitting-room, on the ground-floor of the mansion, where she was refreshing herself with a cup of coffee, having invited the student of agriculture--a young Herr von Kraschinsky--to share her nectar.

She had been regaling him with choice bits of family history, as he lay back comfortably in an arm-chair, looking very drowsy, when, after a pause, she remarked, as if in soliloquy, "I should like to know where the master is; I have had no answer to the long letter I sent to him at Franzburg."

"Oh, you correspond with the Baron, do you?" murmured the student, too lazy to articulate distinctly.

"Of course I do. You must not forget that my position in the Leskjewitsch family is higher than that of a servant. I was once governess to our poor, dear Baron Fritz; and I have always been devoted to them."

In fact, Lotta had been Fritz's nurse; and it was true that she had always been much valued,

having been treated with great consideration on account of her absolute fidelity and her tolerably correct German.

"Yes," she went on, careless as to her companion's attention, "I wrote to the Baron about the wheat and the young calves, and I told him of Baron Harry's betrothal. I am curious to know what he will say to it. For my part, it is not at all to my taste."

"But then you are so frightfully aristocratic," said her guest.

Lotta smiled; nothing pleased her more than to be rallied upon her aristocratic tendencies, although she made haste to disclaim them. "Oh, no; I am by no means so feudal"--a favourite word of hers, learned from a circulating library to which she subscribed--"as you think. I never shall forget how I tried to bring about a reconciliation between Baron Fritz and his father; but the master was furious, called the widow and her little child, after poor Fritz's death, 'French baggage,' and threatened me with dismissal if I ever spoke of them. What could I do? I could not go near the little girl when Baron Paul brought her to Zirkow; but I have watched her from a distance, and have rejoiced to see her grow lovelier every year, and the very image of her father. And when all the country around declared that Baron Harry was in love with her, I was glad; but our master was furious, although the young things were then mere children, and declared that not one penny of his money should his nephew have if he married the child of that shop-girl. I suppose Baron Harry has taken all this into consideration." The old woman's face grew stern as she folded her arms on her flat chest and declared again, "I am curious to know what the master will think of this betrothal."

Outside in the farm-yard the steam thresher continued its monotonous task; the superintendent, a young man, something of a coxcomb, stood apart from the puffing monster, a volume of Lenau in his hand, learning by heart a poem which he intended to recite at the next meeting of the "Concordia Association," in X----. The court-fool, Studnecka, was seated at his harmonium, composing.

Suddenly a clumsy post-chaise rattled into the courtyard. The superintendent started, and thrust his Lenau into his pocket. Lotta smoothed her gray hair, and went to meet the arrival. She knew that "the master" had come. It was his habit to appear thus unexpectedly, when it was impossible to be prepared for him. His masculine employees disliked this fashion extremely. Lotta was not at all disturbed by it.

Studnecka was the last to notice that something unusual was going on. When he did so, he left the harmonium and went to the window.

In the midst of a group of servants and farm-hands stood an old man in a long green coat and a shiny, tall hat. The court-fool observed something strange in his master's appearance. Suddenly he fairly gasped.

"The world is coming to an end!" he exclaimed. "Wonders will never cease,--the Herr Baron has a new hat!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A SHORT VISIT.

Lotta, too, noticed the master's new hat, but that was not the only change she observed in him. The expression of his face was not so stern as usual. Instead of sneering at the coxcombical superintendent, he smiled at his approach; his complexion was far less sallow than it had been; and, above all, he allowed the superintendent to pay the driver of the post-chaise without an inquiry as to the fare.

After nodding right and left, he asked Lotta if his room were ready.

"Of course," the housekeeper replied, and at once conducted him to a spacious and exquisitely clean and neat apartment, rather scantily furnished with spindle-legged chairs and brass-mounted cabinets dating from the time of the First Empire. Not a speck of dust was to be seen anywhere. The Baron ordered coffee, and dismissed Lotta.

When she had gone he looked about him keenly, as if in search of somewhat, from the arm-chair into which he had thrown himself. Not finding what he sought, he arose and went into the adjoining room. Yes, there it was!

On the wall hung two portraits, in broad, tasteless gilt frames. One represented a fair, handsome woman, with bare shoulders and long, soft curls; the other a dark-browed man, in the red, gold-embroidered uniform of a court chamberlain. He smiled bitterly as he looked at this picture. "Done with!" he muttered, and turned his back upon the portraits; with those words he banished the memory of his past. A strange sensation possessed him: an anticipation of his future,--the future of a man of seventy-three! He walked about the room uncertainly, searching for something. A dark flush mounted to his cheek; he loosened his collar. At last he turned the key in the door, as if fearful of being surprised in some misdeed, and then went to his writing-table, a large and rather complicated piece of furniture, its numerous drawers decorated with brass ornaments. From one of the most secret of these he took a small portfolio containing about a dozen photographs. All represented the same person, but at various stages of existence, from earliest infancy to boyhood and manhood.

"Fritz!" murmured the old man, hoarsely; "Fritz!"

Yes, always Fritz. The father looked them through, lingering over each one with the same longing, hungry look with which we would fain call to life the images of our dead. There was Fritz with his first gun, Fritz in his school-uniform, and, at last, Fritz as a young diplomat, photographed in Paris, with a mountain view in the background.

This picture trembled in the old hands. How he had admired it! how proud he had been of his handsome son! and then---

There was a knock at the door. Buried in the past, he had not heard the bustle of preparation in the next room, and now he thrust away the pictures to take his seat at his well-furnished table, where Lotta was waiting to serve him.

"Sit down, sit down," the Baron said, with unwonted geniality, "and tell me of what is going on here."

Lotta seated herself bolt upright at a respectful distance from her master.

"Well?" began the Baron, pouring out the coffee for himself.

"I wrote all the news to the Herr Baron; nothing else has happened, except that the English sow which the Herr Baron bought at the fair littered last night,--twelve as nice fat little pigs as ever were seen."

"Indeed! very interesting. But what was in the letter? Since I never received it, it must be lying at Franzburg."

"Oh, all sorts of things,--about the short-horn calves, and the weight of the hay, and Baron Harry's betrothal; but of course the Herr Baron knew of that."

The Baron set down his cup so hastily that it came near being broken. "Not a word!" he exclaimed, doing his best to conceal the delight which would mirror itself in his face. Harry betrothed? To whom but to the golden-haired enchantress he had met in the forest, Fritz's daughter Zdena? To be sure, he had threatened to disinherit the boy if he married her, but the fellow had been quite right to set the threat at naught. The old man chuckled at the fright he would give them, and then---- Meanwhile, he tried to look indifferent.

"Indeed? And so the boy is betrothed?" he drawled. "All very fine--without asking any one's advice, hey? Of course your old heart is dancing at the thought of it, Lotta. Oh, I know you through and through."

"I don't see any reason for rejoicing at the young master's betrothal," Lotta replied, crossly, thrusting out her chin defiantly.

The old man scanned her keenly. Something in the expression of her face troubled him.

"Who is the girl?" he asked, bluntly.

"The younger of the two Harfink fräuleins; the other married Count Treurenberg."

"Harfink, do you say? Impossible!" The Baron could not believe his ears.

"So I thought too, but I was mistaken. It is officially announced. Baron Karl has been to see the mother, and there is shortly to be a betrothal festival, to which all the great people in the country round are to be invited."

"But what is the stupid boy thinking about? What do people say of him?" thundered the Baron.

"Why, what should they say? They say our young Baron had interested motives, that he is in debt----"

The Baron started up in a fury. "In debt? A fine reason!" he shouted. "Am I not here?"

Whereupon Lotta looked at him very significantly. "As if every one did not know what those

get who come to the Herr Baron for money," she murmured.

The old man's face flushed purple. "Leave the room!" he cried, pointing to the door.

Lotta arose, pushed back her chair to the wall, and walked out of the room with much dignity. She was accustomed to such conduct on her master's part: it had to be borne with. And she knew, besides, that her words had produced an impression, that he would not be angry with her long.

When the door had closed after her, the old man seated himself at his writing-table, determined to write to Harry, putting his veto upon the marriage of his nephew with the "Harfink girl;" but after the first few lines he dropped the pen.

"What affair is it of mine?" he murmured. "If he had yielded to a foolish impulse like my Fritz,"--he passed his hand over his eyes,--"why, then I might have seen things differently, and not as I did twenty years ago. But if, with love for another girl in his heart, he chooses to sell himself for money, he simply does not exist for me. Let him take the consequences. My money was not enough for him, or perhaps he was afraid he should have to wait too long for it. Well, now he can learn what it is to be married without a penny to a rich girl whom he does not love."

He pulled the bell furiously. The young gamekeeper who always filled the position of valet to the Baron upon these spasmodic visits to Vorhabshen entered.

"Harness the drag, Martin, so that I can catch the train."

That very evening he returned to Franzburg, where he sent for his lawyer to help him make a new will.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SUBMISSION.

Yes, affairs had reached a terribly grave point, and Harry now fully appreciated. He felt like a man under sentence of death whose appeal for mercy has been rejected. The day for his execution was appointed; he had given his promise, and must keep it.

The day after his father's visit to Dobrotschau the young man presented himself there, and informed the ladies that pressing business obliged him to return to Vienna; but Paula, who was perfectly aware of the duration of his leave, routed from the field every reason which he gave for the necessity for his presence in Vienna. A betrothal festival had been arranged for a day early in September; he could not possibly be absent. And Paula, the robust, whose nerves were of iron, wept and made a scene; and Harry stayed, and conscientiously paid at least three visits a week at Dobrotschau. He was changed almost past recognition: he had grown very thin, his voice had a hard, metallic sound, and his eyes had the restless brilliancy of some wild creature in a trap. He ate scarcely anything, and his hands burned with fever. His betrothed, whose passion was still on the increase, overwhelmed him with tender attentions, which he no longer strove to discourage, but which he accepted with the resignation of despair.

His bridges were burned behind him; he saw no escape; he must accept what life had in store for him. Now and then he made a pathetic attempt to blot out of his soul the pale image of the charming girl which never left him. He even made every effort to love his betrothed, to penetrate her inward consciousness, to learn to know and value her; but he brought home from every such psychological exploring trip a positive aversion, so rude and coarse, so bereft of all delicacy, were her modes of thought and feeling. He pleased her; his quixotic courtesy, his unpractical view of life, she took delight in; but her vanity alone was interested, not her heart,--that is, she valued it all as "gentlemanly accomplishment," as something aristocratic, like his seat on horseback, or the chiselling of his profile. She was an utter stranger to the best and truest part of him. And as her passion increased, what had been with him at first an impatient aversion changed to absolute loathing, something so terrible that at times he took up his revolver to put an end to it all. Such cowardice, however, was foreign to his principles; and then he was only twenty-four years old, and life might have been so fair if--- Even now at rare intervals a faint hope would arise within him, but what gave birth to it he could not tell.

Meanwhile, the days passed, and the betrothal *fête* was near at hand. Fainacky, who had installed himself as *maître de plaisir*, an office which no one seemed inclined to dispute with him, was indefatigable in his labours, and displayed great inventive faculty. Every hour he developed

some fresh idea: now it was a new garden path to be illuminated by coloured lamps, now a clump of shrubbery behind which the band of an infantry regiment in garrison in the neighbourhood was to be concealed.

"Music is the most poetic of all the arts, so long as one is spared the sight of the musician," he explained to Frau von Harfink, in view of this last arrangement. "The first condition of success for a *fête* is a concealed orchestra."

He himself composed two stirring pieces of music--a Paula galop and a Selina quadrille--to enrich the entertainment. The decoration of the garden-room was carried out by a Viennese upholsterer under his special supervision. He filled up the cards of invitation, ordered the wine for the supper, and sketched the shapes for the plaques of flowers on the table. The menus, however, constituted his masterpiece. Civilized humanity had never seen anything like them. Beside each plate there was to lie a parchment roll tied with a golden cord, from, which depended a seal stamped with the Harfink coat of arms. These gorgeous things were Fainacky's *chef-d'œuvre*. All his other devices--such as the torch dance at midnight, with congratulatory addresses from the Harfink retainers, the fireworks which were to reveal the intertwined initials of the betrothed pair shooting to the skies in characters of flame--were mere by-play. Yet, in spite of all his exertions in this line, the Pole found time to spy upon everybody, to draw his own conclusions, and to attend to his own interests.

By chance it occurred to him to devote some observation to Olga Dangeri, whom hitherto he had scarcely noticed. He found her a subject well worth further attention, and it soon became a habit of his to pursue her with his bold glance, of course when unobserved by the fair Countess Selina, with whom he continued to carry on his flirtation. Whenever, unseen and unheard, he could persecute Olga with his insolent admiration and exaggerated compliments, he did so. Consequently she did her best to avoid him. He was quite satisfied with this result, ascribing it to the agitation caused by his homage. "Poor girl!" he thought; "she does not comprehend the awakening within her of the tender passion!"

In fact, a change was perceptible in Olga. She was languid, not easily roused to exertion; her lips and cheeks burned frequently, and she was more taciturn than ever. Her beauty was invested with an even greater charm. Upon his first arrival in Dobrotschau, the Pole had suspected a mutual inclination between Treurenberg and the beautiful "player's daughter," but, since he had seen nothing to confirm his ugly suspicion, he had ceased to entertain it. Every symptom of an awakening attachment which he could observe in Olga, Ladislas Fainacky interpreted in his own favour.

CHAPTER XXX.

PERSECUTION.

September has fairly begun. The harvest is gathered in, and the wind is blowing over the stubble,--a dry, oppressive wind, calling up clouds which float across the sky in fantastic masses every morning and vanish at noon without a trace. All nature manifests languor and thirst; the dry ground shows large cracks here and there, and vegetation is losing its last tinge of green.

Nowhere in all the country around are the effects of the drought more apparent than at Dobrotschau, where the soil is very poor. Not even in the park is there any freshness of verdure. The fountains refuse to play; the sward looks like a shabby, worn carpet; the leaves are withering on the trees.

Everything is longing for a storm, and yet all feel that relief, when it comes, will bring uproar with it; something must go to ruin and be shattered in the change. The great life of nature, spellbound and withheld in this sultry languor, will awake with some convulsion, angrily demanding a victim. It is inevitable; and one must take comfort in the thought that all else will flourish, refreshed and strengthened. Anything would be preferable to this wasting and withering, this perpetual hissing wind.

To-day it seems finally lulled to rest, for the barometer is falling, and livid blue clouds are piling up on the horizon, as distinct in outline as a range of mountains, and so darkly menacing that in old times men would have regarded them with terror. Now every one says, "At last! at last!"

But they mount no higher; the air is more sultry, and not a cooling drop falls.

In the shadiest part of the park there is a pond, bordered with rushes and surrounded by a scanty growth of underbrush, in the midst of which stand the black, skeleton trunks of several dead trees. During the winters preceding the coming to Dobrotschau of the Baroness Harfink, and shortly after the purchase of the estate, some of the most ancient of the trees--trees as old as the family whose downfall necessitated the sale of Dobrotschau--had died. Their lifeless trunks still pointed to the skies, tall and grim, as if in mute protest against the new ownership of the soil.

The pond, once a shining expanse of clear water, is almost dried up, and a net-work of water-plants covers its surface. Now, when the rosebuds are falling from their stems without opening, this marshy spot is gay with many-coloured blossoms.

At the edge of the pond lies an old boat, and in it Olga is sitting, dressed in white, with a red rose in her belt, one of the few roses which the drought has spared. She is gazing dreamily, with half-shut eyes, upon the shallow water which here and there mirrors the skies. An open book lies in her lap, Turgenieff's "A First Love," but she has read only a few pages of it. Her attitude expresses languor, and from time to time she shivers slightly.

"Why is Lato so changed to me? why does he avoid me? what have I done to displease him?" These are the thoughts that occupy her mind as she sits there, with her hands clasped in her lap, gazing down into the brown swamp, not observing that Fainacky, attracted by the light colour of her dress among the trees, has followed her to the pond and has been watching her for some time from a short distance.

"She loves," he says to himself, as he notices the dreamy expression of the girl's face; and his vanity adds, "She loves me!"

He tries, by gazing fixedly at her, to force her to look up at him, but he is unsuccessful, and then has recourse to another expedient. In his thin, reedy tenor voice he begins to warble "Salve dimora casta e pura" from Gounod's "Faust."

Then she looks round at him, but her face certainly does not express pleasure. She arises, leaves the skiff, and, passing her obtrusive admirer without a word, tries to turn into the shortest path leading to the castle. He walks beside her, however, and begins in a low voice: "Fräulein Olga, I have something to say to you."

"Tome?"

"Yes, I want to explain myself, to correct some false impressions of yours, to lay bare my heart before you."

He pauses after uttering this sentence, and she also stands still, her annoyance causing a choking sensation in her throat. She would fain let him know that she is not in the least interested in having his heart laid bare before her, but how can she do this without seeming cross or angry?

"You have hitherto entirely misunderstood me," he assures her. "Oh, Olga, why can you not lay aside your distrust of me?"

"Distrust?" she repeats, almost mechanically; "I am not aware of any distrust."

"Do not deny it," he persists, clasping his hands affectedly; "do not deny it. Your distrust of me is profound. It wounds me, it pains me, and--it pains you also!"

Olga can hardly believe her ears. She stares at him without speaking, in utter dismay, almost fearing that he has suddenly lost his wits.

"You must hear me," he continues, with theatric effect. "Your distrust must cease, the distrust which has hitherto prevented you from perceiving how genuine is the admiration I feel for you. Oh, you must see how I admire you!"

Here Olga loses patience, and, with extreme *hauteur*, replies, "I have perceived your very disagreeable habit of staring at me, and of persecuting me with what I suppose you mean for compliments when you think no one is observing you."

"It was out of regard for you."

"Excuse my inability to understand you," she rejoins, still more haughtily. "I cannot appreciate regard of that description." And with head proudly erect she passes him and walks towards the castle.

For a moment he gazes after her, as if spellbound. How beautiful she is, framed in by the dark trees that arch above the pathway! "She loves! she suffers!" he murmurs. His fancy suddenly takes fire; this is no fleeting inclination, no!--he adores her!

With a bound he overtakes her. "Olga! you must not leave me thus, adorable girl that you are! I love you, Olga, love you devotedly!" He falls at her feet. "Take all that I have, my name, my life, my station,--a crown should be yours, were it mine!"

She is now thoroughly startled and dismayed. "Impossible! I cannot!" she murmurs, and tries to leave him.

But with all the obstinacy of a vain fool he detains her. "Oh, do not force those beautiful lips to utter cruel words that belie your true self. I have watched you,--you love! Olga, my star, my queen, tell me you love me!"

He seizes the girl's hands, and covers them with kisses; but with disgust in every feature she snatches them from him, just as Lato appears in the pathway.

Fainacky rises; the eyes of the two men meet. Treurenberg's express angry contempt; in those of the Pole there is intense hatred, as, biting his lip in his disappointment, he turns and walks away.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CONSOLATION.

"What is the matter? What is it?" Treurenberg asks, solicitously.

"Nothing, nothing," Olga replies; "nothing at which I ought to take offence." Then, after a short pause, she adds, "On the contrary, he did me the honour to offer to make me Countess Fainacky. The idea, it is true, seemed to occur to him rather tardily, after conducting himself impertinently."

Lato twirls his moustache nervously, and murmurs, in a dull, constrained voice, "Well, and could you not bring yourself to consent?"

"Lato!" the girl exclaims, indignantly.

The bitter expression on Lato's face makes him look quite unlike himself as he says, "A girl who sets out to marry must not be too nice, you see!"

His head is turned away from her; silence reigns around; the sultry quiet lies like a spell upon everything.

He hears a half-suppressed ejaculation, the rustle of a robe, short, quick steps, and, looking round, sees her tall figure walking rapidly away from him, offended pride and wounded feeling expressed in its every motion. He ought to let her go, but he cannot, and he hurries after her; almost before she is aware of his presence, he lightly touches her on the arm.

"Olga, my poor Olga, I did not mean this!" he exclaims, gently. "Be reasonable, my child; I did not mean to wound you, but to give you a common-sense view of the affair."

She looks away from him, and suddenly bursts into irrepressible sobs.

"You poor child! Hush, I pray you! I cannot bear this! Have I really grieved you--I--why, 'tis ridiculous--I, who would have my hand cut off to serve you? Come, be calm." And he draws her down upon a rustic bench and takes a seat beside her.

Her chest heaves as does that of a child who, although the cause of its grief has been removed, cannot stop crying at once. He takes her hand in his and strokes it gently.

A delightful sensation of content, even of happiness, steals upon him, but mingling with it comes a tormenting unrest, the dawning consciousness that he is entering upon a crooked path, that he is in danger of doing a wrong, and yet he goes on holding the girl's hand in his and gazing into her eyes.

"Why are you not always kind to me?" she asks him simply.

He is confused, and drops her hand.

"For a whole week past you have seemed scarcely to see me," she says, reproachfully. "Have you been vexed with me? Did I do anything to displease you?"

"I have had so much to worry me," he murmurs.

"Poor Lato! I thought so. If you only knew how my heart aches for you! Can you not tell me

some of your troubles? They are so much easier to bear when shared with another."

And before he can reply she takes his hand in both of hers, and presses it against her cheek.

Just at that moment he sees the Pole, who has paused in departing and turned towards the pair; the man's sallow face, seen in the distance above Olga's dark head, seems to wear a singularly malevolent expression.

As soon, however, as he becomes aware that Treurenberg has perceived him, he vanishes again.

Lato's confusion increases; he rises, saying, "And now be good, Olga; go home and bathe your eyes, that no one may see that you have been crying."

"Oh, no one will take any notice, and there is plenty of time before dinner. Take a walk with me in the park; it is not so warm as it was."

"I cannot, my child; I have a letter to write."

"As you please;" and she adds, in an undertone, "You are changed towards me."

Before he can reply, she is gone.

The path along which she has disappeared is flecked with crimson,—the petals of the rose that she had worn in her girdle.

Lato feels as if rudely awakened from unconsciousness. He walks unsteadily, and covers his eyes with his hand as if dazzled by even the tempered light of the afternoon. The terrible bliss for which he longs, of which he is afraid, seems so near that he has but to reach out his hand and grasp it. He stamps his foot in horror of himself. What! a pure young girl! his wife's relative! The very thought is impossible! He is tormented by the feverish fancies of overwrought nerves. He shakes himself as if to be rid of a burden, then turns and walks rapidly along a path leading in an opposite direction from where the scattered rose-leaves are lying on the ground.

As he passes on with eyes downcast, he almost runs against the Pole. The glances of the two men meet; involuntarily Lato averts his from Fainacky's face, and as he does so he is conscious of a slight embarrassment, which the other takes a malicious delight in noticing.

"Aha!" he begins; "your long interview with the fair Olga seems to have had a less agreeable effect upon your mood than I had anticipated."

Such a remark would usually have called forth from Lato a sharp rejoinder; to-day he would fain choose his words, to excuse himself, as it were.

"She was much agitated," he murmurs. "I had some trouble in soothing her. She--she is nervous and sensitive; her position in my mother-in-law's household is not a very pleasant one."

"Well, you certainly do your best to improve it," Fainacky says, hypocritically.

"And you to make it impossible!" Lato exclaims, angrily.

"Did the fair Olga complain of me, then?" drawls the other.

"There was no need that she should," Treurenberg goes on to say. "Do you suppose that I need anything more than eyes in my head to see how you follow her about and stare at her?"

Fainacky gives him a lowering look, and then laughs softly.

"Well, yes, I confess, I have paid her some attention; she pleases me. Yes, yes, I do not deny my sensibility to female charms. I never played the saint!"

"Indeed! At least you seem to have made an effort to-day to justify your importunity," Treurenberg rejoins, filled with contempt for the simpering specimen of humanity before him. "You have offered her your hand."

Scarcely have the words left his lips when Treurenberg is conscious that he has committed a folly in thus irritating the man.

Fainacky turns pale to the lips, and his expression is one of intense malice.

"It is true," he says, "that I so far forgot myself for a moment as to offer your youthful *protégée* my hand. Good heavens! I am not the first man of rank who, in a moment of enthusiasm and to soothe the irritated nerves of a shy beauty, has offered to marry a girl of low extraction. The obstacle, however, which bars my way to her heart appears to be of so serious a nature that I shall make no attempt to remove it."

He utters the words with a provoking smile and most malicious emphasis.

"To what obstacle do you refer?" Lato exclaims, in increasing anger.

"Can you seriously ask me that question?" the Pole murmurs, in a low voice like the hiss of a serpent.

Transported with anger, Treurenberg lifts his hand; the Pole scans him quietly.

"If you wish for a duel, there is no need to resort to so drastic a measure to provoke it. But do you seriously think it would be well for the fair fame of your--your lovely *protégée* that you should fight for her?" And, turning on his heel, Fainacky walks towards the castle.

Lato stands as if rooted to the spot, his gaze riveted on the ground.

CHAPTER XXXII.

INTERRUPTED HARMONY.

Dinner is over, and the gilt chandelier in the garden-room, where coffee is usually served, is lighted. Selina is sitting at the piano accompanying Fainacky, who is singing. Paula is in her own rooms with her mother, inspecting the latest additions to her trousseau, just arrived from Vienna. Lato has remained in the garden-room, where he endures with heroic courage the sound of Fainacky's voice as he whines forth his sentimental French songs, accentuating them in the most touching places with dramatic gestures and much maltreatment of his pocket-handkerchief. After each song he compliments Selina upon her playing. Her touch reminds him of Madame Essipoff. Selina, whose digestion is perfect so far as flattery is concerned, swallows all his compliments and looks at him as if she wished for more.

On the wide gravel path, before the glass doors of the room, Olga is pacing to and fro. The broad light from door and window reveals clearly the upper portion of her figure. Her head is slightly bent, her hands are clasped easily before her. There is a peculiar gliding grace in all her movements. With all Treurenberg's efforts to become interested in the newspaper which he holds, he cannot grasp the meaning of a single sentence. The letters flicker before his eyes like a crowd of crawling insects. Weary of such fruitless exertion, he lifts his eyes, to encounter Olga's gazing at him with a look of tenderest sympathy. He starts, and makes a fresh effort to absorb himself in the paper, but before he is aware of it she has come in from the garden and has taken her seat on a low chair beside him.

"Is anything the matter with you?" she asks.

"What could be the matter with me?" he rejoins, evasively.

"I thought you might have a headache, you look so pale," she says, with a matronly air.

"Olga, I would seriously advise you to devote yourself to the study of medicine, you are so quick to observe symptoms of illness in those about you."

She returns his sarcasm with a playful little tap upon his arm.

Fainacky turns and looks at them, a fiendish light in his green eyes, in the midst of his most effective rendering of Massenet's "*Nuits d'Espagne*."

"If you want to talk, I think you might go out in the garden, instead of disturbing us here," Selina calls out, sharply.

Lato instantly turns to his newspaper, and when he looks up from it again, Olga has vanished. He rises and goes to the open door. The sultry magic of the September night broods over the garden outside. The moon is not yet visible--it rises late--but countless stars twinkle in the blue-black heavens, shedding a pale silvery lustre upon the dark earth. Olga is nowhere to be seen; but there---- He takes a step or two forward; she is walking quickly. He pauses, looks after her until she disappears entirely among the shrubbery, and then he goes back to the garden-room.

It is Selina's turn to sing now, and she has chosen a grand aria from "Lucrezia Borgia." She is a pupil of Frau Marchesi's, and she has a fine voice--that is to say, a voice of unusual compass and power, which might perhaps have made a reputation on the stage, but which is far from agreeable in a drawing room. It is like the blowing of trumpets in the same space.

His wife's singing is the one thing in the world which Lato absolutely cannot tolerate, and

never has tolerated. Passing directly through the room, he disappears through a door opposite the one leading into the garden.

Even in the earliest years of their married life Selina always took amiss her husband's insensibility to her musical performances, and now, when she avers his indifference to her in every other respect to be a great convenience, her sensitiveness as an artist is unchanged.

Breaking off in the midst of her song, she calls after him, "Is that a protest?"

He does not hear her.

"*Continuez done, ma cousine*, I implore you," the Pole murmurs.

With redoubled energy, accompanying herself, Countess Selina sings on, only dropping her hands from the keys when she has executed a break-neck cadenza by way of final flourish. Fainacky, meanwhile, gracefully leaning against the instrument, listens ecstatically, with closed eyes.

"Selina, you are an angel!" he exclaims, when she has finished. "Were I in Treurenberg's place you should sing to me from morning until night."

"My husband takes no pleasure in my singing; at the first sound of my voice he leaves the room, as you have just seen. He has no more taste for music than my poodle."

"Extraordinary!" the Pole says, indignantly. And then, after a little pause, he adds, musingly, "I never should have thought it. The day I arrived here, you remember, I came quite unexpectedly; and, looking for some one to announce me, I strayed into this very room----" He hesitates.

"Well?--go on."

"Well, Nina, or Olga--what is your *protégée's* name?" He snaps his fingers impatiently.

"Olga! Well, what of her?"

"Nothing, nothing, only she was sitting at the piano strumming away at something, and Lato was listening as devoutly as if she----"

But Selina has risen hastily and is walking towards the door into the garden with short impatient steps, as if in need of the fresh air. Her face is flushed, and she plucks nervously at the lace about her throat.

"What have I done? Have I vexed you?" the Pole whines, clasping his hands.

"Oh, no, you have nothing to do with it!" the Countess sharply rejoins. "I cannot understand Lato's want of taste in making so much fuss about that slip of a girl."

"You ought to try to marry her off," sighs the Pole.

"Try I try!" the Countess replies, mockingly. "There is nothing to be done with that obstinate thing."

"Of course it must be difficult; her low extraction, her lack of fortune,----"

"Lack of fortune?" Selina exclaims.

"I thought Olga was entirely dependent upon your mother's generosity," Fainacky says, eagerly.

"Not at all. My father saved a very fair sum for Olga from the remains of her mother's property. She has the entire control of a fortune of three or four hundred thousand guilders,--quite enough to make her a desirable match; but the girl seems to have taken it into her head that no one save a prince of the blood is good enough for her!" And the Countess actually stamps her foot.

"Do you really imagine that it is Olga's ambition alone that prevents her from contracting a sensible marriage?" Fainacky draws, with evident significance.

"What else should it be?" Selina says, imperiously. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing, nothing; she seems to me rather exaggerated,--overstrained. Let us try this duet of Boito's."

"I do not wish to sing any more," she replies, and leaves the room.

He gazes after her, lost in thought for a moment, then snaps his fingers.

"Four hundred thousand guilders--by Jove!"

Whereupon he takes his seat at the piano, and improvises until far into the night upon the

CHAPTER XXXIII.

EARLY SUNRISE.

It is early in the morning of the day before the famous betrothal festivity. The town-clock of X-- strikes three as Treurenberg, his bridle hanging loose, is riding along the lonely road towards Dobrotschau. He has passed the night with a few officers at the rooms of the Countess Wodin, his cousin and former flame, who "threw him over" because her views of life were more practical than his,--that is to say, than his were at that period; for he soon followed her example, and was very practical too. But it does not suit every man to be so.

The assemblage at the Countess Wodin's was unusually lively. She was the only lady present, with the exception of the major's wife, an insignificant, awkward woman, who was usually endowed with the Countess's cast-off gowns. A large number of men made up the gathering,--almost the entire corps of officers, and a couple of gentlemen from the neighbourhood. The time was whiled away with cards. At first Lato did not join the players, simply looking on at one and another of the tables; but by and by he took the cards for his cousin, who, suddenly possessed by an intense desire to dance, rose from her place, "just to take a couple of turns around the room." She waltzed until she was breathless with Ensign Flammingen, Treurenberg's relative, who was apparently head over ears in love with her. An officer of dragoons meanwhile droned out the music for them upon a little drawing-room hand-organ. When the Countess again took her place at the card-table Lato had won a small fortune for her. She congratulated him upon his luck, and advised him to try it in his own behalf. He did so.

Between the games a good deal of wine had been drunk, and various questionable witticisms had been perpetrated. Treurenberg laughed louder than the rest, although all such jesting was distasteful to him, especially when women were present. But the Countess had expressly requested to be treated as a man; and the major's wife, after an unfortunate attempt to smoke a cigarette, had retired to a sofa in the adjoining room to recover from the effects of the experiment.

In the absence of this victim of an evil custom for which she was evidently unfitted, the merriment grew more and more boisterous, until suddenly young Flammingen, who had but a moment before been waltzing gaily with the hostess, fell into a most lachrymose condition. The rest tried, it is true, to regard it as only an additional amusement, but it was useless: the mirth had received a death-blow. Some one began to turn the hand-organ again, but without cheering results. All were tired. They found the air of the room suffocating; the smoke was too thick to see through. Then the unfortunate idea occurred to one of the party to open a window. The fresh air from without wafted in among the fumes of wine and cigar-smoke had a strange effect upon the guests: they suddenly fell silent, and in a very short time vanished, like ghosts at cock-crow.

Lato took his leave with the rest, disappearing from his cousin's drawing-room with the consciousness of being a winner,--that was something. He rode through the quiet town, and on between the desolate fields of rye, where not an ear was left standing, between dark stretches of freshly-ploughed land, whence came the odour of the earth with its promise of renewed fertility. The moon was high in the colourless sky; along the eastern horizon there was a faint gleam of yellow light. The dawn enveloped all nature as in a white semi-transparent veil; every outline showed indistinct; the air was cool, and mingled with it there was a sharp breath of autumn. Here and there a dead leaf fell from the trees. The temperature had grown much cooler in the last few days; there had been violent storms in the vicinity, although the drought still reigned at Dobrotschau. Treurenberg felt weary in every limb; the hand holding the bridle dropped on his horse's neck. On either side stood a row of tall poplars; he had reached the avenue where Olga's white figure had once come to meet him. The castle was at hand. He shivered; a mysterious dread bade him turn away from it.

The half-light seemed to roll away like curling smoke. Lato could clearly distinguish the landscape. The grass along the roadside was yellow and dry; blue succory bloomed everywhere among it; here and there a bunch of wild poppies hung drooping on their slender stalks. The blue flowers showed pale and sickly in the early light; the poppies looked almost black.

On a sudden everything underwent a change; broad shadows stretched across the road, and all between them glowed in magic crimson light. From a thousand twittering throats came greetings of the new-born day.

Treurenberg looked up. Solemn and grand, in a semicircle of reddish-golden mist, the sun rose on the eastern horizon.

Yes, in a moment all was transformed,—the pale empty skies were filled with light and resonant inspiration, the earth was revived.

Why languish in weary discouragement when a single moment can so transfigure the world? For him, too, the sun might rise, all might be bright within him. Then, at a sharp turn of the road, the castle of Dobrotschau appeared, interposing its mass between him and the sun. The crimson light, like a corona, played about the outlines of the castle, which stood out hard and dark against the flaming background. Treurenberg's momentary hopefulness faded at the sight,—it was folly to indulge in it: for him there was no sunrise; there was nothing before him but a dark, blank wall, shutting out light and hope, and against which he could but bruise and wound himself should he try to break through it.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

STRUGGLES.

As Lato trotted into the court-yard of the castle a window was suddenly closed, the window above his room,—Olga's. She had been awaiting his return, then. He began to shiver as in a fever-fit.

"There must be an end to this," he said to himself, as he consigned his horse to a sleepy groom and entered the castle.

His room was on the ground-floor; when he reached it he threw himself, still dressed, on the bed, in a state of intolerable agitation; by degrees he became calmer, his thoughts grew vague; without sleeping soundly he dreamed. He seemed to be swimming with Olga in his arms through a warm, fragrant lake, upon the surface of which pale water-lilies were floating. Suddenly these pale lilies turned to greedy flames, the lake glowed as with fire, and a stifling smoke filled the air. Lato started up, his heart beating, his brow damp with moisture. His fatigue tempted him to try again to rest, but he tossed about restlessly; thinking himself still awake, he listened to the ticking of his watch, and looked at Lion, who lay crouched beside his bed, when suddenly Olga stood there gazing at him, her eyes transfigured with heavenly compassion, as she murmured, "Will you not share your woe with me?" She stretched out her arms to him, he drew her towards him, his lips touched hers—he awoke with a cry. He rose, determined to dream no more, and, drawing up one of his window-shades, looked down into the courtyard. It was barely six o'clock. All was quiet, but for one of the grooms at work washing a carriage. The fountain before the St. John rippled and murmured; a few brown leaves floated in its basin. The silvery reflection from the water dazzled Lato's eyes; he turned away, and began slowly to pace the room. The motion seemed to increase his restlessness; he threw himself into an arm-chair, and took up a book. But he was not in a condition to read a line; before he knew it the volume fell from his hand, and the noise it made in falling startled him again. He shook his head in impatience with his nervousness; this state of affairs could not be longer endured, he must bring about some change; matters could not go on thus. He thought and thought. What could be patched up from the ruins of his life? He must try to stand on a better footing with his wife, to leave Dobrotschau as soon as possible. What would be his future? could he ever become reconciled to his existence? Oh! time was such a consoler, could adjust so much, perhaps it would help him to live down this misery.

Then, like an honourable merchant who sees bankruptcy imminent, he reckoned up his few possessions. His wife had certainly loved him once passionately. It was long since he had recalled her former tenderness; he now did so distinctly. "It is not possible," he thought to himself, "that so strong a feeling can have utterly died out;" the fault of their estrangement must be his, but it should all be different. If he could succeed in withdrawing her from the baleful influences that surrounded her, and in awakening all that was honest and true in her, they might help each other to support life like good friends. It was impossible to make their home in Vienna, where his sensitive nature was continually outraged and at war with her satisfied vanity. Under such circumstances irritation was unavoidable. But she had been wont to talk of buying a country-seat, and had been eloquent about, the delights of a country life. Yes, somewhere in the country, in a pretty, quiet home, forgotten by the world, they might begin life anew; here was the solution of the problem; this was the right thing to do! He thought of his dead child; perhaps God would bestow upon him another.

What would, meanwhile, become of Olga? Like a stab, the thought came to him that with her

fate he had nothing to do. Olga would miss him, but in time, yes, in time she would marry some good man. He never for an instant admitted the idea that she could share his sinful affection.

"I must let the poor girl go," he murmured to himself. "I cannot help her; all must look out for themselves." He said this over several times, nervously clasping and unclasping his hands,--hands which, long, narrow, and white, suggested a certain graceful helplessness which is apt to distinguish the particularly beautiful hands of a woman. "Yes, one must learn to control circumstances, to conquer one's self."

CHAPTER XXXV.

A SLANDERER.

The others are seated at the breakfast-table when Treurenberg enters the dining-room, all except Fainacky, who, true to his self-imposed task, is still busy with the decorations of the garden-room. That enterprising *maître de plaisir* has a deal to do, since there is to be a rehearsal, as it were, in the evening of the morrow's festivities. Various guests from far and near are expected to admire and to enhance this prelude of coming glories.

A seat beside Selina is empty. Lato goes directly towards it. Nothing about him betrays his inward agitation or the sleeplessness of the past night. Rather pale, but refreshed by a long walk, and dressed with exquisite care, he looks so distinguished and handsome in his light summer array, that Selina is struck by his appearance. He has a rose in his hand, and as, bending over his wife, he places it among her curls, and then kisses her hand by way of morning greeting, she receives him quite graciously. She is inclined to be proud to-day of her aristocratic possession, which she is shortly to have an opportunity of displaying before so many less-favoured friends. Half returning the pressure of his hand, she says, "To what do I owe these conjugal attentions?"

"The anniversary of our betrothal, Selina," he says, in the half-jesting tone in which married people of a certain social standing are wont to allude before witnesses to matters of sentiment, and then he takes his seat beside her.

"True, our anniversary!" she rejoins, in the same tone, evidently flattered. "And you remembered it? As a reward, Lato, I will butter your toast for you."

Here the Pole comes tripping into the room. "*Changement de décoration.* You have taken my place to-day, Treurenberg," he says, not without irritation. "Since when have modern couples been in the habit of sitting beside each other?"

"It is permitted now and then *en famille*," Selina informs him, placing before Lato the toast she has just prepared for him. She glances at Fainacky, and instantly averts her eyes. For the first time it occurs to her to compare this affected trifler with her husband, and the comparison is sadly to Fainacky's disadvantage. The petty elegancies of his dress and air strike her as ridiculous. He divines something of this, and it enrages him. He cares not the slightest for Selina, but, since their late encounter in the park, he has most cordially hated Lato, whom he did not like before. The friendly demeanour of the pair towards each other this morning vexes him intensely; he sees that his attempt to cast suspicion upon Lato has failed with Selina; nay, it has apparently only fanned the flame of a desire to attract her husband. It irritates him; he would be devoured by envy should a complete reconciliation between the two be established, and he be obliged to look on while Lato again entered into the full enjoyment of his wife's millions. He takes the only vacant place, and looks about him for somewhat wherewith to interrupt this mood upon the part of the pair. Finally his glance rests upon Olga, who sits opposite him, crumbling a piece of biscuit on her plate.

"No appetite yet, Fräulein Olga?" he asks.

Olga starts slightly, and lifts her teacup to her lips.

"Do you not think that Fräulein Olga has been looking ill lately?" The Pole directs this question to all present.

Every one looks at Olga, and Fainacky gloats over the girl's confusion.

Treurenberg looks also, and is startled by her pallor. "Yes, my poor child, you certainly are below par," he says, with difficulty controlling his voice. "Something must be done for your health."

"Change of air is best in such cases," observes the Pole.

"So I think," says Treurenberg; and, finding that he has himself better in hand than he had thought possible awhile ago, he adds, turning to his mother-in-law, "I think, when everything here is settled after the old fashion----"

"After the new fashion, you mean," Paula interposes, with a languishing air.

"Yes, when all the bustle is over," Treurenberg begins afresh, in some embarrassment this time, for his conscience pricks him sorely whenever Paula alludes to her betrothal.

"I understand, after my marriage," she again interposes.

"About the beginning of November," Treurenberg meekly rejoins, again addressing his mother-in-law, "you might take Olga to the south. A winter in Nice would benefit both of you."

"*Tiens! c'est une idée*," Selina remarks. "Such quantities of people whom we know are going to winter in Nice this year. Not a bad plan, Lato. Yes, we might spend a couple of months very pleasantly in Nice."

"Oh, I have other plans for ourselves, Lina," Treurenberg says, hastily.

"Ah, I begin to understand," Frau von Harfink observes: "we are to be got out of the way, Olga, you and I." And she smiles after a bitter-sweet fashion.

"But, Baroness!" Lato exclaims.

"You entirely misunderstand him, Baroness," Fainacky interposes: "he was only anxious for Fräulein Olga's health; and with reason: her want of appetite is alarming." Again he succeeds in attracting every one's attention to the girl, who is vainly endeavouring to swallow her breakfast.

"I cannot imagine what ails you," Paula exclaims, in all the pride of her position as a betrothed maiden. "If I knew of any object for your preference, I should say you were in love."

"Such suppositions are not permitted to the masculine intelligence," the Pole observes, twirling his moustache and smiling significantly, his long, pointed nose drooping most disagreeably over his upper lip.

Olga trembles from head to foot; for his life Lato cannot help trying to relieve the poor child's embarrassment.

"Nonsense!" he exclaims; "she is only a little exhausted by the heat, and rather nervous, that is all! But you must really try to eat something;" and he hands her a plate. Her hand trembles so as she takes it that she nearly lets it fall.

Frau von Harfink frowns, but says nothing, for at the moment a servant enters with a letter for Treurenberg. The man who brought it is waiting for an answer. Lato hastily opens the missive, which is addressed in a sprawling, boyish hand, and, upon reading it, changes colour and hastily leaves the room.

"From whom can it be?" Selina soliloquizes, aloud.

"H'm!" the Pole drums lightly with his fingers on the table, with the air of a man who knows more than he chooses to tell. A little while afterwards he is left alone with Selina in the dining-room.

"Have you any idea of whom the letter was from?" the Countess asks him.

"Not the least," he replies, buttoning his morning coat to the throat, an action which always in his case betokens the possession of some important secret.

"Will you be kind enough to inform me of what you are thinking?" Selina says, imperiously, and not without a certain sharpness of tone.

"You are aware, Countess, that ordinarily your wish is law for me," the Pole replies, with dignity, "but in this case it is unfortunately impossible for me to comply with your request."

"Why?"

"Because you might be offended by my communication, and it would be terrible for me were I to displease you."

"Tell me!" the Countess commands.

"If it must be, then----" He shrugs his shoulders as if to disclaim any responsibility in the matter, and, stroking his moustache affectedly, continues: "I am convinced that the letter in question has to do with Treurenberg's pecuniary embarrassments,--*voilà!*"

"Pecuniary embarrassments!" exclaims the Countess, with irritation. "How should my husband

have any such?"

She is vexed with the Pole, whose affectations begin to weary her, and she is strangely inclined to defend her husband. Her old tenderness for him seems to stir afresh within her. Fainacky perceives that his game to-day will not be easily won; nevertheless he persists.

"Then you are ignorant of the debts he contracts?"

"If you have nothing more probable to tell me, you need trouble yourself no further," the Countess angrily declares.

"Pardon me, Countess," the Pole rejoins, "I should not have told you anything of the kind were I not sure of my facts. Treurenberg has accidentally had resort to the same usurer that transacts my little affairs. For, I make no secret of it, I have debts, a necessary evil for a single man of rank. Good heavens! we gentlemen nowadays----" he waves his hand grandiloquently. "Yet, I assure you, my friendship with Abraham Goldstein is a luxury which I would gladly deny myself. I pay four per----"

"I take not the slightest interest in the percentage you pay," interposes Selina, "but I cannot understand how you venture to repeat to me a piece of gossip so manifestly false."

Her manner irritates him extremely, principally because it shows him that he stands by no means so high in her favour as he had supposed. The fair friendship, founded upon flattery, or at least upon mutual consideration for personal vanity, is in danger of a breach. Fainacky is consumed by a desire to irritate still further this insulting woman, and to do Treurenberg an injury.

"Indeed!--a manifestly false piece of gossip?" he drawls, contemptuously.

"Yes, nothing else," she declares; "apart from the fact that my husband has personal control of a considerable income,--my father made sure of that before he gave his consent to my marriage; he never would have welcomed as a son-in-law an aristocrat without independent means,--apart from this fact, of course my money is at his disposal."

"Indeed! really? I thought you kept separate purses!" says the Pole, now--thanks to his irritation--giving free rein to his impertinence.

Selina bites her lips and is silent.

Meanwhile, Fainacky continues: "I can only say that my information as to Treurenberg's financial condition comes from the most trustworthy source, from Abraham himself. That indiscreet confidant informed me one day that the husband of 'the rich Harfink'--that was his expression--owed him money. The circumstance seemed to gratify his sense of humour. He has a fine sense of humour, the old rascal!"

"I cannot understand--it is impossible. Lato cannot have so far forgotten himself!" exclaims the Countess, pale and breathless from agitation. "Moreover, his personal requirements are of the fewest. He is no spendthrift."

"No," says the Pole, with an ugly smile, "he is no spendthrift, but he is a gambler! You may perhaps be aware of this, Countess, ignorant as you seem to be of your husband's private affairs?"

"A gambler!" she breaks forth. "You are fond of big words, apparently."

"And you, apparently, have a truly feminine antipathy to the truth. Is it possible that you are not aware that even as a young man Treurenberg was a notorious gambler?"

"Since his marriage he has given up play."

"Indeed? And what carries him to X--- day after day? How does he pass his mornings there? At cards!" Selina tries to speak, but words fail her, and the Pole continues, exultantly, "Yes, he plays, and his resources are exhausted,--and so is Abraham Goldstein's patience,--so he has taken to borrowing of his friends, as I happen to know; and if I am not vastly mistaken, Countess, one of these days he will swallow his hidalgo pride and cry *peccavi* to you, turning to you to relieve his financial embarrassments; and if I were you I would not repulse him,--no, by heaven! not just now. You must do all that you can to keep your hold upon him just at this time."

"And why just at this time?" she asks, hoarsely.

"Why?" He laughs. "Have you no eyes? Were my hints, my warnings, the other evening, not sufficiently clear?"

"What do you mean? What do you presume to----" Selina's dry lips refuse to obey her; the hints which had lately glanced aside from her armour of self-confidence now go to the very core,--not of her heart, but of her vanity.

Drawing a deep breath, she recovers her voice, and goes on, angrily: "Are you insane enough

to imagine that Lato could be seriously attracted for one moment by that school-girl? The idea is absurd, I could not entertain it for an instant. I have neglected Lato, it is true, but I need only lift my finger----"

"I have said nothing," the Pole whines, repentantly,--"nothing in the world. For heaven's sake do not be so angry! Nothing has occurred, but Treurenberg has no tact, and Olga is the daughter of a play-actor, and also, as you must admit, and as every one can see, desperately in love with Lato. All I do is to point out the danger to you. Treat Treurenberg with caution, and then----"

"Hush! Go!" she gasps.

He rises and leaves the room, turning in the doorway to say, with a voice and gesture that would have won renown for the hero of a provincial theatre at the end of his fourth act, "Selina, I have ruined myself with you, I have thrown away your friendship, but I have perhaps saved your existence from shipwreck!"

Whereupon he closes the door and betakes himself to the garden-room to have a last look at the decorations there. He does not think it worth while to carry thither his heroic air of self-sacrifice; on the contrary, as he gives an order to the upholsterer, a triumphant smile hovers upon his lips. "It will surprise me if Treurenberg now succeeds in arranging his affairs in that quarter," he thinks to himself.

Meanwhile, Selina is left to herself. She does not suffer from wounded affection; no, her heart is untouched by what she has just heard. But memory, rudely awakened, recalls to her a hundred little occurrences all pointing in the same direction, and she trembles with rage at the idea that any one--that her own husband--should prefer that simpleton of a girl to her own acknowledged beauty.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

FAILURE.

The clever Pole had, however, been quite mistaken as to the contents of Lato's letter. Abraham Goldstein's patience with the husband of the "rich Harfink" was not exhausted,--it was, in fact, inexhaustible; and if, nevertheless, the letter brought home to Lato the sense of his pecuniary embarrassments, it was because a young, inexperienced friend, whom he would gladly have helped had it been possible, had appealed to him in mortal distress. His young cousin Flammingen was the writer of the letter, in which he confessed having lost at play, and entreated Lato to lend him three thousand guilders. To the poor boy this sum appeared immense; it seemed but a trifle to the husband of the "rich Harfink," but nevertheless it was a trifle which there would be great difficulty in procuring. And the lad wanted the money within twenty-four hours, to discharge gambling-debts,--debts of honour.

Treurenberg had once, when a young man, been in a like situation, and had been frightfully near vindicating his honour by a bullet through his brains. He was sorry for the young fellow, and, although his misery was good for him, he must be relieved. How? Lato turned his pockets inside out, and the most he could scrape together was twelve hundred guilders. This sum he enclosed in a short note, in which he told Flammingen that he hoped to send him the rest in the course of the afternoon, and despatched the waiting messenger with this consolation. His cousin's trouble made him cease for a while to ponder upon his own.

Although he could not have brought himself to apply to his wife for relief in his own affairs, it seemed to him comparatively easy to appeal to her for another. He did not for an instant doubt that she would comply with his request. She was not parsimonious, but hard, and he could endure that for another's sake. He went twice to her room, in hopes of finding her there, but she was still in the dining-room.

He frowned when her maid told him this, and, lighting a cigar, he went down into the garden, annoyed at the necessity of postponing his interview with his wife.

Meanwhile, Olga, out of spirits and unoccupied, had betaken herself to the library. All day she had felt as if she had lost something; she could not have told what ailed her. She took up a book to amuse herself; by chance it was the very novel of Turgenieff's which she had been about to read, seated in the old boat, when Fainacky had intruded upon her. She had left the volume in the park, whence it had been brought back to her by the gardener. She turned over the leaves, at first listlessly, then a phrase caught her eye,--she began to read. Her interest increased from

chapter to chapter; she devoured the words. Her breath came quickly, her cheeks burned. She read on to where the hero, in an access of anger, strikes Zenaide on her white arm with his riding-whip, and she calmly kisses the crimson welt made by the lash.

There the book fell from the girl's hand; she felt no indignation at Zenaide's guilty passion, no horror of the cruel rage of the hero; no, she was conscious only of a kind of fierce envy of Zenaide, who could thus forgive. On the instant there awoke within her a passionate longing for a love which could thus triumph over all disgrace, all ill usage, and bear one exultantly to its heaven!

She had become so absorbed in the book as to be insensible to what was going on around her. Now she started, and shrank involuntarily. A step advanced along the corridor; she heard a door open and shut,--the door of Selina's dressing-room.

"Who is there?" Selina's voice exclaimed.

"I." It was Treurenberg who replied.

Selina's dressing-room was separated by only a partition-wall from the library.

It was well-nigh noon, and Selina's maid was dressing her mistress's hair, when Treurenberg entered his wife's dressing-room for the first time for years without knocking. She had done her best to recover from the agitation caused her by Fainacky's words, had taken a bath, and had then rested for half an hour. Guests were expected in the afternoon, and she must impress them with her beauty, and must outshine the pale girl whom Lato had the bad taste to admire. When Treurenberg entered she was sitting before the mirror in a long, white peignoir, while her maid was brushing her hair, still long and abundant, reddish-golden in colour. Her arms gleamed full and white from out the wide sleeves of her peignoir.

"Who is it?" she asked, impatiently, hearing some one enter.

"Only I," he replied, gently.

Why does the tone of his soft, melodious voice so affect her to-day? Why, in spite of herself, does Lato seem more attractive to her than he has done for years? She is irritated by the contradictory nature of her feelings.

"What do you want?" she asks, brusquely.

"To speak with you," he replies, in French. "Send away your maid."

Instead of complying, Selina orders the girl, "Brush harder: you make me nervous with such half-work."

Treurenberg frowns impatiently, and then quietly sends the maid from the room himself. Selina makes no attempt to detain her,--under the circumstances it would be scarcely possible for her to do so,--but hardly has the door closed behind Josephine, when she turns upon Lato with flashing eyes.

"Why do you send away my servants against my express wish?"

"I told you just now that I want to speak with you," he replies, with more firmness than he has ever hitherto displayed towards her,--the firmness of very weak men in mortal peril or moral desperation. "What I have to say requires no witnesses and can bear no delay."

"Go on, then." She folds her arms. "What do you want?"

He has seated himself astride of a chair near her, and, with his arms resting on the low back and his chin in his hands, he gazes at her earnestly. Why do his attitude and his way of looking at her remind her so forcibly of the early time of their married life? Then he often used to sit thus and look on while she arranged her magnificent hair herself, for then--ah, then----! But she thrusts aside all such reflections. Why waste tenderness upon a man who is not ashamed to--who has so little taste as to----

"What do you want?" she asks, more crossly than before.

"First of all, your sympathy," he replies, gravely.

"Oh, indeed! is this what you had to tell me that could bear no delay?"

He moves his chair a little nearer to her. "Lina," he murmurs, "we have become very much estranged of late."

"Whose fault is it?" she asks, dryly.

"Partly mine," he sadly confesses.

"Only partly?" she replies, sharply. "That is a matter of opinion. The other way of stating it is that you neglected me and I put up with it."

"I left you to yourself, because--because I thought I wearied you," he stammers, conscious that he is not telling quite the truth, knowing that he had hailed the first symptoms of her indifference as a relief.

"It certainly is true that I have not grieved myself to death over your neglect. It was not my way to sue humbly for your favour. But let that go; let us speak of real things, of the matter which will not bear delay." She smiles contemptuously.

"True," he replies; "I had forgotten it in my own personal affairs. I wanted to ask a favour of you."

"Ah!" she interposes; and he goes on: "It happens that I have no ready money just now; what I have, at least, does not suffice. Will you advance me some?"

She drums exultantly upon her dressing-table, loaded with its apparatus of glass and silver. "I would have wagered that we should come to this. H'm! how much do you want?"

"Eighteen hundred guilders."

"And do you consider that a trifle?" she exclaims, provokingly. "If I remember rightly, it amounts to the entire year's pay of a captain in the army. And you want the money to--discharge a gambling-debt, do you not?"

"Not my own," he says, hoarsely. "God knows, I would rather put a bullet through my brains than ask you for money!"

"That's very easily said," she rejoins, coldly. "I am glad, however, to have you assure me that you do not want the money for yourself. To pay your debts, for the honour of the name which I bear, I should have made any sacrifice, but I have no idea of supporting the extravagancies of the garrison at X----." And Selina begins to trim her nails with a glittering little pair of scissors.

"But, Selina, you have no idea of the facts of the case!" Treurenberg exclaims. He has risen, and he takes the scissors from her and tosses them aside impatiently. "Women can hardly understand the importance of a gambling-debt. A life hangs upon its payment,--the life of a promising young fellow, who, if no help is vouchsafed him, must choose between disgrace and death. Suppose I should tell you tomorrow that he had shot himself,--what then?"

"He will not shoot himself," she says, calmly. "Moreover, it was a principle with my father never to comply with the request of any one who threatened suicide; and I agree with him."

"You are right in general; but this is an exception. This poor boy is not yet nineteen,--a child, unaccustomed to be left to himself, who has lost his head. What if you are right, and he cannot find the courage to put an end to himself,--the hand of a lad of eighteen who has condemned himself to death may well falter,--what then? Disgrace, for him, for his family; dismissal from the army; a degraded life. Have pity, Selina, for heaven's sake!"

He pleads desperately, but he might as well appeal to a wooden doll, for all the impression his words make upon her, and at last he pauses, breathless with agitation. Selina, tossing her head and with a scornful air, says, "I have little sympathy for young good-for-naughts; it lies in the nature of things that they should bear the consequences of their actions; it is no affair of mine. I might, indeed, ask how it happens that you take such an interest in this case, did I not know that you have good reason to do so,--you are a gambler yourself."

Treurenberg starts and gazes at her in dismay. "A gambler! What can make you think so? I often play to distract my mind, but a gambler!--'tis a harsh word. I am not aware that you have ever had to suffer from my love for cards."

"No; your friendship with Abraham Goldstein stands you in stead. You have spared me, if it can be called sparing a woman to cause her innocently to incur the reputation for intense miserliness!"

There is some truth in her words, some justice in her indignation. Lato casts down his eyes. Suddenly an idea occurs to him. "Fainacky has told you, then, of my relations with Abraham Goldstein?"

"Yes."

"Ah!" he exclaims; "I now understand the change in you. For heaven's sake, do not allow yourself to be influenced by that shallow, malicious coxcomb!"

"I do not allow myself to be influenced by him," the Countess replies; "but his information produced an impression upon me, for it was, since you do not deny it, correct. You are a gambler; you borrow money at a high rate of percentage from a usurer, because you are too arrogant or too obstinate to tell me of your debts. Is this not so?"

Treurenberg has gone towards the door, when he suddenly pauses and collects himself. He will make one more attempt to be reconciled with his wife, and it shall be the last. He turns towards her again.

"Yes," he admits, "I have treated you inconsiderately, and your wounding of my pride, perhaps unintentionally, does not excuse me. I have been wrong,--I have neglected you. I play,--yes, Selina, I play,--I seek the society of strangers, but only because I am far, far more of a stranger at home. Selina," he goes on, carried away by his emotion, and in a voice which expresses his utter misery, "I cannot reconcile myself to life amid your surroundings; call it want of character, weakness, sensitiveness, as you please, but I cannot. Come away with me; let us retire to any secluded corner of the earth, and I will make it a paradise for you by my gratitude and devotion; I will serve you on my knees; my life shall be yours, only come away with me!"

Poor Lato! he has wrought his own ruin. Why does he not understand that every word he speaks wounds the most sensitive part of her,--her vanity?

"You would withdraw me from my surroundings? And, pray, what society do you offer me in exchange?" she asks, bitterly. "My acquaintances are not good enough for you; I am not good enough for the atmosphere in which you used to live."

He sees his error, perceives that he has offended her, and it pains him.

"Selina," he says, softly, "there shall be no lack of good friends for you at my side; and then, after all, what need have we of other people? Can we not find our happiness in each other? What if God should bless us with an angel like the one He has taken from us?"

He kneels beside her and kisses her hand, but she withdraws it hastily.

"Do not touch me!" she exclaims; "I am not Olga!"

He starts to his feet as if stung by a serpent. "What do you mean?"

"What I say."

"I do not understand you!"

"Hypocrite!" she gasps, her jealousy gaining absolute mastery of her; "I am not blind; do you suppose I do not know upon whom you lavish kind words and caresses every day, which fall to my share only when you want some favour of me?"

It seems to him that he hears the rustle of feminine garments in the next room. "For God's sake, Selina, not so loud," he whispers.

"Ah! your first emotion is dread of injuring her; all else is indifferent to you. It does not even occur to you to repel my accusation."

"Accusation?" he murmurs, hopelessly. "I do not yet understand of what you accuse me."

"Of your relations with that creature before my very eyes!"

Transported with indignation at these words, he lifts his hand, possessed by a mad impulse to strike her, but he controls himself so far as only to grasp her by the arm.

"Creature!" he exclaims, furiously. "Creature! Are you mad? Olga!--why, Olga is pure as an angel, more spotless than a snowflake before it has touched the earth."

"I have no faith in such purity. If she has not actually fallen, her passion is plainly shown in her eyes. But there shall be no open scandal,--she must go. I will not have her in the house,--she must go!"

"She must go!" Treurenberg repeats, in horror. "You would turn her out of doors,--a young, inexperienced, beautiful girl? Selina, I will go, and the sooner the better for all I care, but she must stay."

"How you love her!" sneers the Countess.

For a moment there is silence in the room. Lato gazes at his wife as if she were something strange which he had never seen before,--gazes at her in amazement mingled with horror. His patience is at an end; he forgets everything in the wild desire to break asunder the fetters which have bound him for so long, to be rid of the self-control which has so tortured him.

"Yes," he says, raising his voice, "I love her,--love her intensely, unutterably; but this is the first time that I have admitted it even to myself, and you have brought me to do so. I have struggled against this passion night and day, have denied its existence, have done all that I could to stifle it, and I have tried to the utmost to be reconciled with you, to begin with you a new life in which I could hope to forget her. How you have seconded me you know. Of one thing, however, I can assure you,--the last word has been uttered between you and myself; it would not avail you now though you should sue for a reconciliation on your knees. A woman without tenderness or

compassion I abhor. I have a horror of you!" He turns sway, and the door closes behind him.

"Where is the Count?" Frau von Harfink asks a servant, at lunch, where Treurenberg's place is vacant.

"The Herr Count had his horse saddled some time ago," the man replies, "and left word that he should not be here at lunch, since he had urgent business in X----."

"Indeed!" the hostess says, indifferently, without expending another thought upon her son-in-law. She never suspects that within the last few hours, beneath her roof, the ruin has been completed of a human existence long since undermined.

Lunch goes on,--a hurried meal, at which it is evident that the household is in a state of preparation for coming festivities; a meal at which cold dishes are served, because the entire culinary force is absorbed in elaborating the grand dinner for the evening; a lunch at which no one talks, because each is too much occupied with his or her own thoughts to desire to inquire into those of the others.

Frau von Harfink mentally recapitulates the evening's *menu*, wondering if nothing can be added to it to reflect splendour upon the Harfink establishment.

Paula's reveries are of her coming bliss; her usually robust appetite is scarcely up to the mark. In short, the only one who seems to eat with the customary relish is the Pole, who, very temperate in drinking and smoking, is always ready for a banquet. He is also the only one who notices the want of appetite in the rest. He does not waste his interest, however, upon the Baroness or Paula, but devotes his attention exclusively to Selina and Olga.

The Countess is evidently in a very agitated state of mind, and, strange to relate of so self-satisfied a person, she is clearly discontented with herself and her surroundings. When her mother asks her whether two soups had better be served at dinner, or, since it is but a small family affair, only one, she replies that it is a matter of supreme indifference to her, and will certainly be the same to the guests, adding,--

"The people who are coming will probably have some appetite; mine was spoiled some days ago by the mere *menu*, which I have been obliged to swallow every day for the last fortnight." These are the only words spoken by her during the entire meal.

The Pole finds her mood tolerably comprehensible. She has had a scene with Treurenberg, and has gone too far,--that is what is annoying her at present. But Olga's mood puzzles him completely. The depression she has manifested of late has entirely vanished, she holds her head erect, her movements are easy, and there is a gleam in her eyes of transfiguring happiness, something like holy exultation.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A VISIT.

Meanwhile, Treurenberg is riding along the road to X----.

The landscape is dreary. Autumn is creeping over the fields, vainly seeking the summer, seeking luxuriant life to kill, or exquisite beauty to destroy. In vain; the same withering drought rests upon everything like a curse, and in the midst of the brown monotony bloom succory and field-poppies.

Treurenberg gazes to the right and left without really seeing anything. His eyes have a glassy, fixed look, and about his mouth there is a hard expression, almost wicked, and quite foreign to him. He is not the same man who an hour ago sought his wife to entreat her to begin a new life with him; not the same man who at dawn was so restless in devising schemes for a better future.

His restlessness has vanished with his last gleam of hope; sensation is benumbed, the burning pain has gone. Something has died within him. He no longer reflects upon his life,--it is ended; he has drawn a black line through it. All that he is conscious of is intense, paralyzing weariness, the same that had overcome him in the early morning, only more crushing. After the scene with his wife he had been assailed by a terrible languor, an almost irresistible desire to lie down and close his eyes, but he could not yield to it, he had something to do. That poor lad must be rescued; the

suffering the boy was enduring was wholesome, but he must be saved.

Fainacky's assertion that Treurenberg was in the habit of borrowing from his friends had been a pure fabrication; he had borrowed money of no one save of Harry, with whom he had been upon the footing of a brother from early boyhood, and of Abraham Goldstein, upon whose secrecy he had supposed he could rely. It would have wounded him to speak to any stranger of the painful circumstances of his married life. Now all this was past; Selina could thank herself that it was so. He could not let the boy go to ruin, and, since Selina would not take pity upon him, he must turn to some one else; there was no help for it.

For a moment he thought of Harry; but he reflected that Harry could hardly have so large a sum of ready money by him, and, as time was an important item in the affair, there was nothing for it but to apply for aid to Wodin, the husband of his cousin and former flame.

The trees grow scantier, their foliage rustier, and the number of ragged children on the highway greater. Now and then some young women are to be seen walking along the road, usually in couples, rather oddly dressed, evidently after the plates in the journals of fashion, and with an air of affectation. Then come a couple of low houses with blackened roofs reaching almost to the ground, manure-heaps, grunting swine wallowing in slimy green pools, hedges where pieces of linen are drying, gnarled fruit-trees smothered in dust, an inn, a carters' tavern, with a red crab painted above the door-way, whence issues the noise of drunken quarrelling, then a white wall with some trees showing above it, the town-park of X----. Lato has reached his goal. On the square before the barracks he halts. A corporal takes charge of his horse, and he hurries up the broad, dirty steps, along the still dirtier and ill-smelling corridor, where he encounters dragoons in spurs and clattering sabres, where the officers' overworked servants are brushing their masters' coats and their mistresses' habits, to the colonel's quarters, quarters the luxurious arrangement of which is in striking contrast to the passages by which they are reached. Count Wodin is not at home, but is expected shortly; the Countess, through a servant, begs Lato to await him. He resolves to do so, and pays his respects meanwhile to his cousin, whom he finds in a spacious, rather low-ceilinged apartment, half smoking-room, half drawing-room, furnished with divans covered with Oriental stuffs, pretty buhl chairs and tables, and Japanese cabinets crowded to excess with all sorts of rare porcelain. An upright piano stands against the wall between two windows; above it hangs a miniature gondola, and beside it, on the floor, is a palm in a huge copper jar evidently procured from some Venetian water-carrier. Two china pugs, the size of life, looking like degenerate chimeras, gnash their teeth at all intruders in life-like hideousness. The door-ways are draped with Eastern rugs; the walls are covered with a dark paper, and two or three English engravings representing hunting-scenes hang upon them. In the midst of these studies in black and white hangs a small copy of Titian's Venus.

The entire arrangement of the room betrays a mingling of vulgarity and refinement, of artistic taste and utter lack of it; and in the midst of it all the Countess reclines on a lounge, dressed in a very long and very rumpled morning-gown, much trimmed with yellowish Valenciennes lace. Her hair is knotted up carelessly; she looks out of humour, and is busy rummaging among a quantity of photographs. She is alone, but from the adjoining room come the sound of voices, as Treurenberg enters, and the rattle of *bézique*-counters.

The Countess gives him her hand, presses his very cordially, and says, in a weary, drawling tone, "How are you after yesterday, Lato?"

"After what?"

"Why, our little orgie. It gave me a headache." She passes her hand across her forehead. "How badly the air tastes! Could you not open another window, Lato?"

"They are all open," he says, looking round the room.

"Ah! You have poisoned the atmosphere with your wine, your cigars, your gambling excitement. I taste the day after a debauch, in the air."

He nods absently.

"I admire people who never suffer the day after," she sighs, and waves her hand towards the door of the next room, through which comes a cheerful murmur of voices. Lato moves his head a little, and can see through the same door a curious couple,—the major's wife, stout, red-cheeked, her hair parted boldly on one side, and dressed in an old gown, enlarged at every seam, of the Countess's, while opposite her sits a young man in civilian's clothes, pale, coughing from time to time, his face long and far from handsome, but aristocratic in type, his chest narrow, and his waistcoat buttoned to the throat.

"Your brother," Lato remarks, turning to the Countess.

"Yes," she rejoins, "my brother, and my certificate of respectability, which is well, for there is need of it. *À propos*, do you know that in the matter of feminine companionship I am reduced to that stout Liese?" The Countess laughs unpleasantly. "I have tried every day to bring myself to the point of returning your wife's call. I do not know why I have not done so. But the ladies at

Dobrotschau are really very amiable,--uncommonly amiable,--they have invited me to the betrothal *fête* in spite of my incivility. *À propos*, Lato, will any one be there,--any one whom one knows?"

"I have had nothing to do with the list of guests," he murmurs, listening for Wodin's step outside.

"I should like to know. It would be unpleasant to meet any of my acquaintances,--they treat me so strangely. You know how it is." Again she laughs in the same unpleasant way. "But if I could be sure of meeting no one I would go to your *fête*, I have a new gown from Worth: I should like to display it somewhere; dragging my trains through these smoky rooms becomes monotonous after a while. I think I will come."

The voices in the next room sound louder, and there is a burst of hearty laughter. Lato can see the major's wife slap her forehead in mock despair.

"Easily entertained," the Countess says, crossly. "They are playing *béziq*ue for raisins. It makes a change for my brother; his physician has sent him to the country for the benefit of the air and a regular mode of life. He has come to the right place, eh?" Again she laughs; her breath fails her; she closes her eyes and leans back, white as a corpse.

Lato shudders at the sight, he could hardly have told why. His youth rises up before him. There was a time when he loved that woman with enthusiasm, with self-devotion. That woman! He scans her now with a kind of curiosity. She is still beautiful, but the wan face has fallen away, the complexion all that can be seen of it beneath its coating of violet powder--is faded, the delicate nose is too thick at the tip, the nostrils are slightly reddened, the small mouth is constantly distorted in an affected smile, the arms from which the wide sleeves of the morning-gown have fallen back are thin, and the nails upon the long, slender hands remind one of claws. Even the white gown looks faded, crushed, as by the constant nervous movement of a restless, discontented wearer. Her entire personality is constrained, feverish.

Involuntarily Lato compares this woman with Olga. He sees with his mind's eye the young girl, tall and slender as a lily, her white gowns always so pure and fresh, sees the delicately-rounded oval of her girlish face, her clear, large eyes, the innocent tenderness of her smile. And Selina could malign that same Olga! His blood boils. As if Olga were to blame for the wretched, guilty passion in his breast! His thoughts are far away from his present surroundings.

"Seven thousand five hundred," the triumphant voice of the major's wife calls out in the next room. "If this goes on, Count Franz, I shall soon stop playing for raisins! Ah!" as, turning her head, she perceives Treurenberg; "you have a visitor, Lori."

"Yes," Countess Lori replies, "but do not disturb yourselves, nor us."

The rattle of the counters continues.

"I must speak with your husband," Lato says presently; "if you know where he is----"

"He will be here in ten minutes; you need have no fear, he is never late," Lori says. "*À propos*, do you know what I was doing when you came in? Sorting my old photographs." She hands him a picture from the pile beside her. "That is how I looked when you fell in love with me."

He gazes, not without interest, at the pale little picture, which represents a tall, slender, and yet well-developed young girl with delicate, exquisitely lovely features, and with eyes, full of gentle kindness, looking out curiously, as it were, into the world from beneath their arched eyebrows. An old dream floats through the wretched man's mind.

"It was very like," he says.

"Was it not? I was a comical-looking thing then, and how badly dressed! Look at those big sleeves and the odd skirt. It was a gown of my elder sister's made over. Good heavens! that gown had a part in my resolve to throw you over. Do you remember?"

"Yes, Lori."

"Only faintly, I think," she laughs. "And yet you seemed to take it sadly to heart then. I was greatly agitated myself. But what else was to be done? I was tired of wearing my sister's old gowns. Youth longs for splendour; it is one of its diseases, and when it has it--pshaw! you need not look so, Lato: I have no intention of throwing myself at your head. I know that old tale is told for both of us. And we never were suited for each other. It was well that I did not marry you, but, good heavens, I might have waited for some one else! It need not have been just that one--that---" with a hasty gesture of disgust she tosses aside a photograph of Count Wodin which she has just drawn from the heap. "What would you have? If a tolerably presentable man appears, and one knows that he can buy one as many gowns, diamonds, and horses as one wants, why, one forgets everything else and accepts him. What ideas of marriage one has at seventeen! And our parents take good care not to enlighten us. 'She will get used to it,' say father and mother, and the mother believes it because she wants to, and both rejoice that their daughter is provided for; and before one is aware the trap has fallen. I bore you, Lato."

"No," he replies; "you grieve me."

"Oh, it is only now and then that I feel thus," she murmurs. "Shall I tell you the cause of my wretched mood?"

"Utter fatigue, the natural consequence of yesterday's pleasures."

"Not at all. I accidentally came upon the picture of my cousin Ada to-day. Do you remember her? There she is." She hands him a photograph. "Exquisitely beautiful, is it not?"

"Yes," he says, looking at the picture; "the eyes are bewitching, and there is such womanly tenderness, such delicate refinement, about the mouth."

"Nothing could surpass Ada," says Countess Lori; "she was a saint, good, self-sacrificing, not a trace in her of frivolity or selfishness."

"And yet she married Hugo Reinsfeld, if I am not mistaken?" says Lato. "I have heard nothing of her lately. News from your world rarely reaches me."

"No one mentions her now," Lori murmurs. "She married without love; not from vanity as I did, but she sacrificed herself for her family,--sisters unprovided for, father old, no money. She was far better than I, and for a long time she honestly tried to do her duty,---and so she finally had to leave her husband!"

The Countess stops; a long pause ensues. The steps of the passers-by sound through the languid September air; an Italian hurdy-gurdy is grinding out the lullaby from "Trovatore," sleepy and sentimental. The clatter from the barracks interrupts it now and then. A sunbeam slips through the window-shade into the half-light of the room and gleams upon the buhl furniture.

"Well, she had the courage of her opinions," the Countess begins afresh at last. "She left her husband and lives with--well, with another man,--good heavens! you knew him too, Niki Gladnjik, in Switzerland; they live there for each other in perfect seclusion. He adores her; the world--our world, the one I do not want to meet at your ball--ignores Ada, but I write to her sometimes, and she to me. I have been reading over her letters to-day. She seems to be very happy, enthusiastically happy, so happy that I envy her; but I am sorry for her, for--you see, Niki really loves her, and wants to marry her--they have been waiting two years for the divorce which her husband opposes; and Niki is consumptive; you understand, if he should die before----"

Lato's heart throbs fast at his cousin's tale. At this moment the door opens, and Count Wodin enters.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AT LAST.

Flammingen's affairs are satisfactorily adjusted. Treurenberg is relieved of that anxiety. He can devote his thoughts to his own complications, as he rides back from X---- to Dobrotschau.

The dreamy lullaby from "Trovatore" still thrills his nerves, and again and again he recalls the pair living happily in Switzerland. He sees their valley in his mental vision enclosed amid lofty mountains,--walls erected by God Himself to protect that green Paradise from the intrusion and cruelty of mankind,--walls which shut out the world and reveal only the blue heavens. How happy one could be in that green seclusion, forgotten by the world! In fancy he breathes the fresh Alpine air laden with the wholesome scent of the pines; upon his ear there falls the rushing murmur of the mountain-stream. He sees a charming home on a mountain-slope, and at the door stands a lovely woman dressed in white, with large, tender eyes filled with divine sympathy. She is waiting for some one's return; whence does he come? From the nearest town, whither he is forced to go from time to time to adjust his affairs, but whither she never goes; oh, no! People pain her,--people who despise and envy her. But what matters it? He opens his arms to her, she flies to meet him; ah, what bliss, what rapture!

His horse stumbles slightly; he rouses with a start. A shudder thrills him, and, as in the morning, he is horrified at himself. Will it always be thus? Can he not relax his hold upon himself for one instant without having every thought rush in one direction, without being possessed by one intense longing? How can he thus desecrate Olga's image?

Meanwhile, the expected guests have arrived at Dobrotschau. They came an hour ago,--three carriage-loads of distinction from, Vienna, some of them decorated with feudal titles. A very aristocratic party will assemble at table in Dobrotschau to-day. Countess Weiseneck, a born Grinzing, wife of a rather disgraceful *mauvais sujet*, whose very expensive maintenance she contests paying, and from whom she has been separated for more than a year; Countess Mayenfeld, *née* Gerstel, the wife of a gentleman not quite five feet in height, who is known in Vienna by the *sobriquet* of "the numismatician." When his betrothal to the wealthy Amanda Gerstel was announced, society declared that he had chosen his bride to augment his collection of coins. His passion for collecting coins enables this knightly aristocrat to endure with philosophy the cold shoulders which his nearest relatives turned to him after his marriage; moreover, he lives upon excellent terms with his wizened little wife. One more couple with a brand-new but high-sounding title; then an unmarried countess, with short hair and a masculine passion for sport,--an acquaintance made at a watering-place; then Baron Kilarity, the cleverest business-man among Vienna aristocrats, who is always ready to eat oysters and *pâte de foie gras* at any man's table, without, however, so far forgetting himself as to require his wife and daughter to visit any one of his entertainers who is socially his inferior. The famous poet, Paul Angelico Orchys, and little Baron Königsfeld, complete the list of arrivals.

The first greetings are over; ended also is the running to and fro of lady's-maids looking for mislaid handbags, with the explanations of servants, who, having carried the trunks to the wrong rooms, are trying to make good their mistakes. All is quiet. The ladies and gentlemen are seated at small tables in a shady part of the park, drinking tea and fighting off a host of wasps that have attacked the delicacies forming part of the afternoon repast.

The castle is empty; the sound of distant voices alone falls on Lato's ear as he returns from his expedition to X--- and goes to his room, desirous only of deferring as long as possible the playing of his part in this tiresome entertainment. The first thing to meet his eyes on his writing-table is a letter addressed to himself. He picks it up; the envelope is stamped with a coronet and Selina's monogram. He tears the letter open; it encloses nothing save a package of bank-notes,--eighteen hundred guilders in Austrian currency.

Lato's first emotion is anger. What good will the wretched money do him now? How rejoiced he is that he no longer needs it, that he can return it within the hour to Selina! The address arrests his attention; there is something odd about it. Is it Selina's handwriting? At first sight he had thought it was, but now, upon a closer inspection can it be his mother-in-law's hand? Is she trying to avoid a domestic scandal by atoning thus for her daughter's harshness? He tosses the money aside in disgust. Suddenly a peculiar fragrance affects him agreeably. What is it?--a faint odour of heliotrope. Could it be---? His downcast eyes discover a tiny bunch of faded purple blossoms lying on the floor almost at his feet. He stoops, picks it up, and kisses it passionately: it is the bunch of heliotrope which Olga wore on her breast at breakfast. It is she who has cared for him, who has thought of him!

But instantly, after the first access of delight, comes the reaction. How could Olga have known? Selina, in her irritation, may have proclaimed his request to the entire household; the servants may be discussing in the kitchen Count Treurenberg's application to his wife for eighteen hundred guilders, and her angry refusal to grant them to him. He clinches his fist and bites his lip, when on a sudden he recalls the rustle of a robe in the next room, which he thought he heard at one time during his interview with Selina. The blood mounts to his forehead. Olga had been in the library; she had heard him talking with his wife. And if she had heard him ask Selina for the money, she had also heard--- Ah! He buries his face in his hands.

The afternoon tea has been enjoyed; the ladies have withdrawn to their rooms to "arm themselves for the fray," as Paul Angelico expresses it; the gentlemen have betaken themselves to the billiard-room, where they are playing a game, as they smoke the excellent cigars which Baron Kilarity has ordered a lackey to bring them.

Lato has wandered out into the park. He is not quite himself; the ground beneath his feet seems uncertain. He leans against the trunk of a tree, always pondering the same question, "What if she heard?"

He turns involuntarily into the garden-path where, but a short time since, he had soothed her agitation and dried her tears. There, on the rough birchen bench, something white gleams. Is it--
-?

He would fain flee, but he cannot; he stands as if rooted to the spot. She turns her face towards him, and recognizes him. A faint colour flushes her cheek, and in her eyes, which rest full upon him, there is a heavenly light.

"Lato!" she calls. Is that her voice sounding so full and soft? She rises and approaches him. He has never before seen her look so beautiful. Her slender figure is erect as a young fir; she carries her head like a youthful queen whose brow is crowned for the first time with the diadem. She stands beside him; her presence thrills him to his very soul.

"Olga," he murmurs at last, "was it you who left the money on my table? How did you know that I wanted it?" he asks, bluntly, almost authoritatively.

She is silent.

"Olga, Olga, were you in the library while----?"

She nods.

"And you heard all,--everything?"

"Yes."

"Olga!" His eyes are riveted upon her face in what is almost horror.

"Olga,--what now?"

"I cannot bear to see you suffer," she murmurs, scarce audibly.

Did he extend his arms to her? He could not himself tell; but what he has dreamed has happened,--he clasps her to his breast, his lips meet hers; his anguish is past; wings seem to be given him wherewith to soar to heaven.

But only for an instant is he thus beguiled; then reality in its full force bursts upon him. He unclasps the dear arms from his neck, presses one last kiss upon the girlish hand before he releases it, and then turns and walks away with a firm tread, without looking round, and in the full consciousness of the truth,--the consciousness that no wings are his, and that the heavy burden which has weighed him down is doubly heavy now.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE DINNER.

Taken altogether, Fainacky may be but a very ordinary pattern of a man, but as a *maître de plaisir* in the arrangement of a *fête* he is unrivalled. A more exquisite table than that around which the twenty people are assembled who form the rehearsing party for Harry's betrothal festival it would be difficult to imagine. The only criticism that can be made is that the guests are rather far apart; but who could have foreseen that at the last moment four people would be lacking? The Paul Leskjewitsches, with their niece, sent regrets, and Olga, just before dinner, was obliged to retire with a severe headache, to which she succumbed in spite of her aunt's exhortations to her "not to mind it." Lato is present; he is indifferent as to where his hours drag past. He is determined to prevent Olga's being made the subject of discussion, and his social training, with the numbness sure to ensue upon great mental agitation, stands him in stead; he plays his part faultlessly. Now and then the consciousness of his hopeless misery flashes upon him, then it fades again; he forgets all save the present moment, and he scans everything about him with keen observation, as if he had no part or parcel in it, but were looking at it all as at another world.

Yes, the table is charmingly decorated; anything more tasteful or more correct in every respect could not be imagined; but the people gathered about this sparkling board, never before has he seen them so clearly or judged them so severely.

His contempt is specially excited by his social equals. Fritz Mayenfeld, "the numismatician," does not long occupy his attention. In spite of his rank, he has always manifested thoroughly plebeian instincts; his greed of gain is notorious; and he looks, and is, entirely at home in the Harfink domestic atmosphere. The descent of the other aristocrats present, however,--of Kiliary, of the short-haired Countess, and of the affected Count Fermor,--is tolerably evident in their faces, and they all seem determined to assert their aristocratic prestige in the same manner,--by impertinence.

Lato is conscious of a horror of his own caste as he studies these degenerate members of it. He turns his attention to the three guests from Komaritz,--the Countess Zriny, Hedwig, and Harry. The old canoness, who is seated on his right, provokes his smile. The superb condescension with which, for love of her nephew, she treats "these people;" the formal courtesies with which she erects an insurmountable barrier between them and herself; the morsels of liberalism which she scatters here and there in her conversation for their comfort and delectation,--all are worthy of the most enthusiastic praise.

Poor old woman! How important she is in her own eyes! Her gown is the ugliest and shabbiest there (the one the sporting Countess wears was given her by Selina), but six strings of wonderful

pearls which she wears around her neck make her all right. Hedwig,--well, she is a little more affected than usual; she is flirting with little Baron Königsfeld, who took her in to dinner, playing him off against her neighbour on the other side, Count Fermor. And Harry,--with profound sympathy and intense compassion Lato's eyes rest upon his friend. Simple, without pretension or affectation, very courteous without condescension, a little formal, perhaps, withal,--as the most natural of men must be where he feels himself a stranger,--with that in his face and bearing that distinguishes him above every one present, he is the only specimen of his own caste there with whom Lato feels satisfied.

"They may abuse us as they please," he thinks to himself,--"nay, I even join them in abusing,--but if one of us gives his word he stands to it." And then he questions whether in any other rank could be found such an example of noble and manly beauty, or of such quixotic, self-annihilating, chivalrous honour. "Good heavens! why not?" he makes reply to himself. "So far as moral worth is concerned, assuredly; only in form it would probably be less refined."

Lato has had much experience of life. He has laid aside all the prejudices of his class, but the subtle caste-instinct still abides with him. He asks himself whether his family--the Harfink family--notice the difference between Harry and the other aristocrats present; whether the Harfinks will not be finally disgusted by the impertinence of these coxcombs; whether they do not feel the offensive condescension of the Countess Zriny. It would seem not. The Harfinks, mother and daughters, are quite satisfied with what is accorded them; they are overflowing with gratified vanity, and are enjoying the success of the festival. Even Selina is pleased; Olga's absence seems to have soothed her. She informs Lato, by all kinds of amiable devices,--hints which she lets fall in conversation, glances which she casts towards him,--that she is sorry for the scene of the morning, and is ready to acquiesce. She tells her neighbour at dinner, Baron Kilarity, that to-day is the anniversary of her betrothal.

Lato becomes more and more strongly impressed by the conviction that her severe attack of jealousy has aroused within her something of her old sentiment for him. The thought disgusts him profoundly; he feels for her a positive aversion.

His attention is chiefly bestowed upon Harry. How the poor fellow suffers! writhing beneath the ostentatious anxiety of his betrothed, who exhausts herself in sympathetic inquiries as to his pallor, ascribing it to every cause save the true one.

"What will become of him if he does not succeed in ridding himself of this intolerable burden?" Lato asks himself. An inexpressible dread assails him. "A candidate for suicide," he thinks, and for a moment he feels dizzy and ill.

But why should Harry die, when his life might be adjusted by one word firmly uttered? He might be saved, and then what a sunny bright future would be his! If one could but help him!

The dinner is half over; punch is being served. The tall windows of the dining-hall are wide open, the breeze has died away for the time, the night is quiet, the outlook upon the park enchanting. Coloured lamps, shaped like fantastic flowers, illumine the shrubbery, whence comes soft music.

All the anguish which had been stilled for the moment stirs within Lato's breast at sound of the sweet insinuating tones. They arouse within him an insane thirst for happiness. If it were but possible to obtain a divorce! Caressingly, dreamily, the notes of "Southern Roses" float in from the park.

"Ah! how that reminds me of my betrothal!" says Selina, moving her fan to and fro in time with the music. Involuntarily Lato glances at her.

She wears a red gown, *decoletée* as of old. Her shoulders have grown stouter, her features sharper, but she is hardly changed otherwise; many would pronounce her handsomer than she had been on that other sultry September evening when it had first occurred to him that he--loved her--no, when he lied to himself--because it seemed so easy.

He falls into a reverie, from which he is aroused by the poet Angelico Orchys, who rises, glass in hand, and in fluent verse proposes the health of the betrothed couple. Glasses are clinked, and scarcely are all seated again when Fainacky toasts the married pair who are celebrating to-day the sixth anniversary of their betrothal. Every one rises; Selina holds her glass out to Lato with a languishing glance from her half-closed eyes as she smiles at him over the brim.

He shudders. And he has dared to hope for a divorce!

The clinking of glasses has ceased; again all are seated; a fresh course of viands is in progress; there is a pause in the conversation, while the music wails and sighs outside, Fainacky from his place at table making all sorts of mysterious signs to the leader.

Treurenberg's misery has become so intense within the last few minutes that he can scarcely endure it without some outward sign of it, when suddenly a thought occurs to him, a little, gloomy thought, that slowly increases like a thunder-cloud. His breath comes quick, the cold perspiration breaks out upon his forehead, his heart beats strong and fast.

"Is anything the matter, Lato?" Selina asks, across the table; "you have grown so pale. Do you feel the draught?"

He does not answer. His heart has ceased to beat wildly; a soothing calm, a sense of relief, takes possession of him; he seems to have discovered the solution of a huge, tormenting riddle.

Presently the wine begins to take effect, and conversation drowns the tones of the music. Culinary triumphs have been discussed, there has been some political talk, anti-Semitic opinions, in very bad taste, have been expressed, and now, in spite of the presence of several young girls, various scandals are alluded to.

"Have any of you heard the latest developments in the Reinsfeld-Gladnjik case?" Kiliary asks.

Treurenberg listens.

The sporting Countess replies: "No: for two years I have seen nothing of Ada Reinsfeld--since the--well, since she left her husband; one really had to give her up. I am very lenient in such affairs, but one has no choice where the scandal is a matter of such publicity."

"I entirely agree with you, my dear Countess," says the Baroness Harfink. "So long as due respect is paid to external forms, the private weaknesses of my neighbours are no concern of mine; but external forms must be observed."

"My cousin's course throughout that business was that of a crazy woman," says "the numismatician," with his mouth full. "She was mistress of the best-ordered house in Grätz. Reinsfeld's cook was----! never in my life did I taste such salmi of partridges--except on this occasion," he adds, with an inclination towards his hostess. The next moment he motions to a servant to fill his glass, and forgets all about his cousin Ada.

"Poor Ada! She was very charming, but she became interested in all sorts of free-thinking books, and they turned her head," says the Countess Zriny. "In my opinion a woman who reads Strauss and Renan is lost."

"The remarks of the company are excessively interesting to me," Kiliary now strikes in, with an impertinent intonation in his nasal voice, "but I beg to be allowed to speak, since what I have to tell is quite sensational. You know that Countess Ada has tried in vain to induce her noble husband to consent to a divorce. Meanwhile, Gladnjik's condition culminated in galloping consumption, and two days ago he died."

"And she?" several voices asked at once.

"She?--she took poison!"

For a moment there is a hush in the brilliantly-lighted room, the soft sighing of the music in the shrubbery is again audible. Through the open windows is wafted in the beguiling charm of an Hungarian dance by Brahms.

There is a change of sentiment in the assemblage: the harshness with which but now all had judged the Countess Ada gives place to compassionate sympathy.

Countess Zriny presses her lace-trimmed handkerchief to her eyes. "Poor Ada!" she murmurs; "I can see her now; a more charming young girl there never was. Why did they force her to marry that old Reinsfeld?"

"He had so excellent a cook," sneers Kiliary, with a glance at "the numismatician," from whose armour of excellent appetite the dart falls harmless.

"Forced!" Paula interposes eagerly, in her deep, guttural tones. "As if nowadays any one with a spark of character could be forced to marry!"

Harry twirls his moustache and looks down at his plate.

"I am the last to defend a departure from duty," the old canoness goes on, "but in this case the blame really falls partly upon Ada's family. They forced her to marry; they subjected her to moral force."

"That is true," even Kiliary, heartless cynic as he is, admits. "They forced her, although they knew that she and Niki Gladnjik were attached to each other. Moreover, I must confess that, in spite of the admirable qualities which distinguish Reinsfeld,--as, for example, his excellent cook,--it must have been very difficult for a delicate-minded, refined young creature to live with the disgusting old satyr--my expressions are classically correct."

"Niki took her marriage sorely to heart," sighed the sporting Countess. "They say he ruined his health by the dissipation into which he plunged to find forgetfulness. In that direction Ada certainly was much to blame; she was carried away by compassion."

Meanwhile, Fainacky has made another sign for the music. The dreamy half-notes die away, and the loud tones of a popular march echo through the night.

All rise from table.

Treurenberg's brain spins, as with the Countess Zriny on his arm he walks into the garden-room, where the guests are to admire the decorations and to drink their coffee.

"The fair Olga is not seriously ill?" he hears Kilarity say to Selina.

"Oh, not at all," Selina replies. "You need not fear anything infectious. Olga is rather overstrained and exaggerated; you cannot imagine what a burden papa left us in the care of her. But we have settled it to-day with mamma: she must leave the house,--at least for a time. My aunt Emilie is to take her to Italy. It will be a great relief to us all."

CHAPTER XL.

A FAREWELL.

While some of the guests are contented merely to admire the decorations of the garden-room, others suggest improvements. They cannot quite agree as to where the musicians should be placed, and the band migrates from one spot to another, like a set of homeless fugitives; in one place the music is too loud, in another it is not loud enough. Hilary's nasal, arrogant voice is heard everywhere in command. At last the band is stationed just before the large western window of the room. Some one suggests trying a waltz. Kilarity waltzes with Selina. Treurenberg watches the pair. They waltz in the closest embrace, her head almost resting on his shoulder.

Once Lato might have remonstrated with his wife upon such an exhibition of herself; but to-day, ah, how indifferent he is to it all! He turns away from the crowd and noise, and walks beyond the circle of light into the park. Here a hand is laid on his shoulder. He turns: Harry has followed him.

"What is the matter, old fellow?" he asks, good-humouredly. "I do not like your looks to-day."

"I cannot get Ada Reinsfeld out of my head," Treurenberg rejoins, in a low tone.

"Did you know her?" asks Harry.

"Yes; did you?"

"Yes, but not until after her marriage. I liked her extremely; in fact, I have rarely met a more charming woman. And she seemed to me serious-minded and thoroughly sincere. The story to-day affected me profoundly."

"Did you notice that not one of the women had a good word to say for the poor thing until they knew that she was dead?" Treurenberg asks, his voice sounding hard and stern.

"Yes, I noticed it," replies Harry, scanning his friend attentively.

"They may perhaps waste a wreath of immortelles upon her coffin," Treurenberg goes on, in the same hard tone, "but not one of them would have offered her a hand while she lived."

"Well, she did not lose much in the friendship of the women present to-day," Harry observes, dryly; "but, unfortunately, I am afraid that far nobler and more generous-minded women also withdrew their friendship from poor Ada; and, in fact, we cannot blame them. We cannot require our mothers and sisters to visit without remonstrance a woman who has run away from her husband and is living with another man."

"Run away; living with another man: how vulgar that sounds!" Treurenberg exclaims, angrily.

"Our language has no other words for this case."

"I do not comprehend you; you judge as harshly as the rest."

They have walked on and have reached a rustic seat quite in the shade, beyond the light even of the coloured lamps. Harry sits down; Lato follows his example.

"How am I to judge, then?" Harry asks.

"In my eyes Ada was a martyr," Treurenberg asserts.

"So she was in mine," Harry admits.

"I have the greatest admiration for her."

"And I only the deepest compassion," Harry declares, adding, in a lower tone, "I say not a word in blame of her; Niki was the guiltier of the two. A really noble woman, when she loves, forgets to consider the consequences of her conduct, especially when pity sanctifies her passion and atones in her eyes for her sin. She sees an ideal life before her, and does not doubt that she shall attain it. Ada believed that she should certainly procure her divorce, and that all would be well. She did not see the mire through which she should have to struggle to attain her end, and that even were it attained, no power on earth could wash out the stains incurred in attaining it. Niki should have spared her that; he knew life well enough to be perfectly aware of the significance of the step she took for him."

"Yes, you are right; women never know the world; they see about them only what is fair and sacred, a young girl particularly."

"Oh, in such matters a young girl is out of the question," Harry sharply interrupts.

There is an oppressive silence. Lato shivers.

"You are cold," Harry says, with marked gentleness; "come into the house."

"No, no; stay here!"

Through the silence come the strains of a waltz of Arditi's "*La notte gia stendi suo manto stellato*," and the faint rustle of the dancers' feet.

"How is your cousin?" Lato asks, after a while.

"I do not know. I have not spoken with her since she left Komaritz," Harry replies, evasively.

"And have you not seen her?" asks Lato.

"Yes, once; I looked over the garden-wall as I rode by. She looks pale and thin, poor child."

Lato is mute. Harry goes on:

"Do you remember, Lato? is it three or four weeks ago, the last time you were with me in Komaritz? I could jest then at my--embarrassments. I daily expected my release. Now----" he shrugs his shoulders.

"You were angry with me then; angry because I would not interfere," Lato says, with hesitation.

"Oh, it would have been useless," Harry mutters.

Instead of continuing the subject, Lato restlessly snaps a twig hanging above his head. "How terribly dry everything is!" he murmurs.

"Yes," says Harry; "so long as it was warm we looked for a storm; the cool weather has come without rain, and everything is dead."

"The spring will revive it all, and the blessing of the coming year will be doubled," Lato whispers, in a low, soft tone that rings through Harry's soul for years afterwards.

"Harry! Harry! where are you? Come, try one turn with me." It is Paula's powerful voice that calls thus. She is steering directly for the spot where the friends are seated.

"Give my love to Zdena, when you see her," Lato whispers in his friend's ear as he clasps Harry's hand warmly, and then vanishes among the dark shrubbery before the young fellow is aware of it.

CHAPTER XLI.

RESOLVE.

Lato now stands in need of all the energy with which Providence has endowed him. All the

excellence and nobility that have hitherto lain dormant in his soul arouse to life, now that they can but help him to die like a man. He cannot sever the golden fetters which he himself has forged; he will not drag through the mire what is most sacred to him; well, then---

Upon reaching his room he seated himself at his writing-table and wrote several letters,--the first to his father, requesting him to see that his debts were paid; one to Paula, one to his mother-in-law, and one to Harry. The letter to Harry ran thus:

"MY DEAR GOOD OLD COMRADE,--

"When this note reaches you, you will be already freed from your fetters. I have never forgiven myself for refusing to perform the service you asked of me, and I have now retrieved my fault. I have written to Paula and to my mother-in-law, explaining your position to them, telling them the truth with brutal frankness, and leaving no course open to them save to release you. You are free. Farewell.

"Yours till death,

"LATO TREURENBERG."

He tossed the pen aside.

The others were still dancing. The sound of the music came softly from the distance. He rested his head on his hands and pondered.

He has seen clearly that it must be. He had written the letters as the first irrevocable step. But how was it to be done?

He looked for his revolver. It might all be over in a moment. He caught up the little weapon with a kind of greed. Suddenly he recalled a friend who had shot himself, and whose body he had seen lying on the bed where the deed had been done: there were ugly stains of blood upon the pillow. His nature revolted from everything ugly and unclean. And then the scene, the uproar that would ensue upon discovering the corpse. If he could only avoid all that, could only cloak the ugly deed. Meanwhile, his faithful hound came to him from a corner of the room, and, as if suspicious that all was not right with its master, laid its head upon his knee.

The way was clear,--Lato had lately frequently risen early in the morning to stalk a deer, which had escaped his gun again and again; he had but to slip out of the house for apparently the same purpose, and---- and it would be more easily done beneath God's open skies. But several hours must elapse before he could leave the castle. That was terrible. Would his resolve hold good? He began to pace the room restlessly to and fro.

Had he forgotten anything that ought to be done? He paused and listened, seeming to hear a light footfall in the room above him. Yes, it was Olga's room; he could hear her also walking to and fro, to and fro. His breath came quick; everything within him cried out for happiness, for life! He threw himself upon his bed, buried his face among the pillows, clinched his hands, and so waited, motionless.

At last the steps overhead ceased, the music was silent; there was a rustling in the corridors,--the guests were retiring to their rooms; then all was still, as still as death.

Lato arose, lit a candle, and looked at his watch,--half-past two. There was still something on his heart,--a discontent of which he would fain disburden himself before the end. He sat down again at his writing-table, and wrote a few lines to Olga, pouring out his soul to her; then, opening his letter to Harry, he added a postscript: "It would be useless to attempt any disguise with you,--you have read my heart too clearly,--and therefore I can ask a last office of friendship of you. Give Olga the enclosed note from me,--I do not wish any one here to know of this,--my farewell to her. Think no evil of her. Should any one slander her, never believe it!--never!"

He would have written more, but words failed him to express what he felt; so he enclosed his note to Olga in his letter to Harry and sealed and stamped it.

His thoughts began to wander vaguely. Old legends occurred to him. Suddenly he laughed at something that had occurred ten years before, at Komaritz,--the trick Harry had played upon Fainacky, the "braggart Sarmatian."

He heard himself laugh, and shuddered. The gray dawn began to glimmer in the east. He looked at his watch,--it was time! He drew a long, sighing breath, and left his room; the dog followed him. In the corridor he paused, possessed by a wild desire to creep to Olga's door and, kneeling before it, to kiss the threshold. He took two steps towards the staircase, then, by a supreme effort, controlled himself and turned back.

But in the park he sought the spot where he had met her yesterday, where he had kissed her for the first and only time. Here he stood still for a while, and, looking down, perceived the half-

effaced impress of a small foot upon the gravel. He stooped and pressed his lips upon it.

Now he has left the park, and the village too lies behind him; he has posted his letter to Harry in the yellow box in front of the post-office. He walks through the poplar avenue where she came to meet him scarcely three weeks ago. He can still feel the touch of her delicate hand. A bird twitters faintly above his head, and recalls to his memory how he had watched the belated little feathered vagabond hurrying home to its nest.

"A life that warms itself beside another life in which it finds peace and comfort," he murmurs to himself. An almost irresistible force stays his steps. But no; he persists, and walks on towards the forest. He will only wait for the sunrise, and then---

He waits in vain. The heavens are covered with clouds; a sharp wind sighs above the fields; the leaves tremble as if in mortal terror; for the first time in six weeks a few drops of rain fall. No splendour hails the awakening world, but along the eastern horizon there is a blood-red streak. Just in Lato's path a solitary white butterfly flutters upon the ground. The wind grows stronger, the drops fall more thickly; the pale blossoms by the roadside shiver; the red poppies do not open their cups, but hang their heads as if drunk with sleep.

CHAPTER XLII.

FOUND.

Olga had remained in her room because she could not bring herself to meet Treurenberg again. No, she could never meet him after the words, the kiss, they had exchanged,--never--until he should call her. For it did not occur to her to recall what she had said to him,--she was ready for everything for his sake. Not a thought did she bestow upon the disgrace that would attach to her in the eyes of the world. What did she care what people said or thought of her? But he,--what if she had disgraced herself in his eyes by the confession of her love? The thought tortured her.

She kept saying to herself, "He was shocked at me; I wounded his sense of delicacy. Oh, my God! and yet I could not see him suffer so,--I could not!"

When night came on she lay dressed upon her bed for hours, now and then rising to pace the room to and fro. At last she fell asleep. She was roused by hearing a door creak. She listened: it was the door of Lato's room. Again she listened. No, she must have been mistaken; it was folly to suppose that Lato would think of leaving the house at a little after three in the morning! She tried to be calm, and began to undress, when suddenly a horrible suspicion assailed her; her teeth chattered, the heart in her breast felt like lead.

"I must have been mistaken," she decided. But she could not be at rest. She went out into the corridor; all there was still. The dawn was changing from gray to white. She glided down the staircase to the door of Lato's room, where she kneeled and listened at the key-hole. She could surely hear him breathe, she thought. But how could she hear it when her own pulses were throbbing so loudly in her heart, in her temples, in her ears?

She listened with all her might: nothing, nothing could she hear. Her head sank against the door, which was ajar and yielded. She sprang up and, half dead with shame, was about to flee, when she paused. If he were in his room would not the creaking of the door upon its hinges have roused him? Again she turned and peered into the room.

At the first glance she perceived that it was empty, and that the bed had not been slept in.

With her heart throbbing as if to break, she rushed up to her room, longing to scream aloud, to rouse the household with "He has gone! he has gone! Search for him! save him!"

But how is this possible? How can she confess that she has been in his room? Her cheeks burn; half fainting in her misery, she throws wide her window to admit the fresh morning air.

What is that? A scratching at the house door below, and then a melancholy whine. Olga hurries out into the corridor again, and at first cannot tell whence the noise proceeds. It grows louder and more persistent, an impatient scratching and knocking at the door leading out into the park. She hastens down the stairs and opens it.

"Lion!" she exclaims, as the dog leaps upon her, then crouches before her on the gravel, gazes piteously into her face, and utters a long howl, hoarse and ominous. Olga stoops down to him.

Good God! what is this? His shoulder, his paws are stained with blood. The girl's heart seems to stand still. The dog seizes her dress as if to drag her away; releases it, runs leaping into the park, turns and looks at her. Shall she follow him?

Yes, she follows him, trembling, panting, through the park, through the village, out upon the highway, where the trees are vocal with the shrill twittering of birds. A clumsy peasant-cart is jolting along the road; the sleepy carter rubs his eyes and gazes after the strange figure with dishevelled hair and disordered dress, hastening towards the forest.

She has reached it at last. The dog's uneasiness increases, and he disappears among the trees. Olga stops; she cannot go on. The dog howls more loudly, and slowly, holding by the trees, she totters forward. What is it that makes the ground here so slippery? Blood? There,--there by the poacher's grave, at the foot of the rude wooden cross, she finds him.

A shriek, wild and hoarse, rings through the air. The leaves quiver and rustle with the flight of the startled birds among their branches. The heavens are filled with wailing, and the earth seems to rock beneath the girl's feet.

Then darkness receives her, and she forgets the horror of it all in unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XLIII.

COUNT HANS.

There was a dinner at Count Capriani's, and Count Hans Treurenberg, slender and erect, the embodiment of elegant frivolity, had just said something witty. One of his fellow-aristocrats, a noble slave of Capriani's, had been discoursing at length upon the new era that was dawning upon the world, and had finally proposed a toast to the union of the two greatest powers on earth, wealth and rank. All present had had their glasses ready; Count Hans alone had hesitated for a moment, and had then remarked, with his inimitable smile,--

"Well, let us, for all I care, drink to the marriage of the Golden Calf to the Chimera." And when every one stared in blank dismay, he added, thoughtfully, "What do you think, gentlemen, is it a marriage of expediency, or one of love? Capriani, it would be interesting to hear your views upon this question." Then, in spite of the lowering brow of the host, the aristocrats present burst into Homeric laughter.

At that moment a telegram was brought to the Count. Why did his hand tremble as he unfolded it? He was accustomed to receive telegraphic messages:

"There has been an accident. Lato seriously wounded while hunting.

"SELINA."

An hour afterwards he was in the railway-train.

He had never been to Dobrotschau, and did not know that the route which he had taken stopped two stations away from the estate. The Harfink carriage waited for him at an entirely different station. He had to send his servant to a neighbouring village to procure a conveyance. Meanwhile, he made inquiries of the railway officials at the station as to the accident at Dobrotschau. No one knew anything with certainty: there was but infrequent communication between this place and Dobrotschau. The old Count began to hope. If the worst had happened, the ill news would have travelled faster. Selina must have exaggerated matters. He read his telegram over and over again:

"There has been an accident. Lato seriously wounded while hunting."

It was the conventional formula used to convey information of the death of a near relative.

All around him seemed to reel as he pondered the missive in the bare little waiting-room by the light of a smoking lamp. The moisture stood in beads upon his forehead. For the first time a horrible thought occurred to him.

"An accident while hunting? What accident could possibly happen to a man hunting with a good breechloader----? If--yes, if--but that cannot be; he has never uttered a complaint!" He suddenly felt mortally ill and weak.

The servant shortly returned with a conveyance. Nor had he been able to learn anything that could be relied upon. Some one in the village had heard that there had been an accident somewhere in the vicinity, but whether it had resulted in death no one could tell.

The Count got into the vehicle, a half-open coach, smelling of damp leather and mould. The drive lasted for two hours. At first it was quite dark; nothing could be seen but two rays of light proceeding from the coach-lamps, which seemed to chase before them a mass of blackness. Once the Count dozed, worn out with emotion and physical fatigue. He was roused by the fancy that something like a cold, moist wing brushed his cheek. He looked abroad; the darkness had become less dense, the dawn was breaking faintly above the slumbering earth. Everything appeared gray, shadowy, and ghost-like. A dog began to bark in the neighbouring village; there was a sound of swiftly-rolling wheels. The Count leaned forward and saw something vague and indistinct, preceded by two streaks of light flashing along a side-road.

It was only a carriage, but he shuddered as at something supernatural. Everywhere he seemed to see signs and omens.

"Are we near Dobrotschau?" he asked the coachman.

"Almost there, your Excellency."

They drove through the village. A strange foreboding sound assailed the Count's ears,--the long-drawn whine of a dog,--and a weird, inexplicable noise like the flapping of the wings of some huge captive bird vainly striving to be free. The Count looked up. The outlines of the castle were indistinct in the twilight, and hanging from the tower, curling and swelling in the morning air, was something huge--black.

The carriage stopped. Martin came to the door, and, as he helped his former master to alight, informed him that the family had awaited the Count until past midnight, but that when the carriage returned empty from the railway-station they had retired. His Excellency's room was ready for him.

Not one word did he say of the cause of the Count's coming. He could not bring himself to speak of that. They silently ascended the staircase. Suddenly the Count paused. "It was while he was hunting?" he asked the servant, bluntly.

"Yes, your Excellency."

"When?"

"Very early yesterday morning."

"Were you with him?" The Count's voice was sharper.

"No, your Excellency; no one was with him. The Count went out alone."

There was an oppressive silence. The father had comprehended. He turned his back to the servant, and stood mute and motionless for a while. "Take me to him," he ordered at last.

The man led the way down-stairs and through a long corridor, then opened a door. "Here, your Excellency!"

They had laid the dead in his own room, where he was to remain until the magnificent preparations for his burial should be completed. Here there was no pomp of mourning. He lay there peacefully, a cross clasped in his folded hands, a larger crucifix at the head of the bed, where two wax candles were burning--that was all.

The servant retired. Count Hans kneeled beside the body, and tried to pray. But this Catholic gentleman, who until a few years previously had ardently supported every ultramontane measure of the reigning family, now discovered, for the first time, that he no longer knew his Pater Noster by heart. He could not even pray for the dead. He was possessed by a kind of indignation against himself, and for the first time he felt utterly dissatisfied with his entire life. His eyes were riveted upon the face of his dead son. "Why, why did this have to be?--just this?"

His thoughts refused to dwell upon the horrible catastrophe; they turned away, wandering hither and thither; yesterday's hunting breakfast occurred to him; he thought of his witty speech and of the laughter it had provoked, laughter which even the host's frown could not suppress. The sound of his own voice rang in his ears: "Yes, gentlemen, let us drink to the marriage of the Golden Calf to the Chimera."

Then he recalled Lato upon his first steeple-chase, on horseback, in a scarlet coat, still lanky and awkward, but handsome as a picture, glowing with enjoyment, his hunting-whip lifted for a stroke.

His eyes were dry, his tongue was parched, a fever was burning in his veins, and at each breath he seemed to be lifting some ponderous weight. A feeling like the consciousness of a horrible crime oppressed him; he shivered, and suddenly dreaded being left there alone with the corpse, beside which he could neither weep nor pray.

Slowly through the windows the morning stole into the room, while the black flag continued to flap and rustle against the castle wall, like a prisoned bird aimlessly beating its wings against the bars of its cage, and the dog whined on.

CHAPTER XLIV.

SPRING.

A few days afterwards Lato's body was consigned to the family vault of the Treurenbergs,--not, of course, without much funereal pomp at Dobrotschau.

With him vanished the last descendant of an ancient race which had once been strong and influential, and which had preserved to the last its chivalric distinction.

The day after the catastrophe Harry received a letter from Paula, in which, on the plea of a dissimilarity of tastes and interests which would be fatal to happiness in marriage, she gave him back his troth. As she remained at Dobrotschau for an entire week after the funeral, it may be presumed that she wished to give her former betrothed opportunity to remonstrate against his dismissal. But he took great care to avoid even a formal protest. A very courteous, very formal, very brief note, in which he expressed entire submission to her decree, was the only sign of life his former captor received from him.

When Paula Harfink learned that Harry had left Komaritz and had returned to his regiment in Vienna, she departed from Dobrotschau with her mother and sister, to pass several months at Nice.

In the beginning of January she returned with the Baroness Harfink to Vienna, heart-whole and with redoubled self-confidence. She was loud in her expressions of contempt for military men, especially for cavalry officers, a contempt in which even Arthur Schopenhauer could not have outdone her; she lived only for science and professors, a large number of whom she assembled about her, and among whom this young sultanness proposed with great caution and care to select one worthy to be raised to the dignity of her Prince-Consort.

Selina did not return with her mother to Vienna, but remained for the time being with a female companion in Nice. As is usual with most blondes, her widow's weeds became her well, and her luxuriant beauty with its dark crape background attracted a score of admirers, who, according to report, were not all doomed to languish hopelessly at her feet.

Fainacky, however, was never again received into favour.

Olga retired to a convent, partly to sever all ties with the world, which had misunderstood and maligned her in her relations to the part she had played in the fearful drama enacted at Dobrotschau, partly to do penance by her asceticism for Lato's suicide, which was to her deep religious sense a fearful crime, and of which she considered herself in some measure the cause.

Moreover, Lato's suicide produced a profound impression upon all his friends. Harry could hardly take any pleasure in his freedom, so dark was the shadow thrown upon his happiness by grief for the fate of his life-long friend and comrade. Under the circumstances, until, so to speak, the grass had grown over the terrible event, his betrothal to Zdena could not be thought of; the mere idea of it wounded his sense of delicacy. He contented himself, before returning to Vienna, with a farewell visit to Zirkow, when he informed the entire family of the sudden change in his position. The major, whose sense of delicacy was not so acute as his nephew's, could not refrain from smiling broadly and expressing a few sentiments not very flattering to Fräulein Paula, nor from asking Harry one or two questions which caused the young fellow extreme confusion.

The major's efforts to force a *tête-à-tête* upon the young people were quite vain. Zdena, when Harry left, accompanied the young officer openly, as she had often done, to the court-yard, where she stroked his horse before he mounted and fed him with sugar, as had ever been her wont.

"Good-bye, Zdena," Harry said, simply kissing her cold hand, just as he had often done when taking leave of her. Then, with his hand on the bridle, ready to mount, he gazed deep into her

eyes and asked, "When may I come back again, Zdena?"

She replied, "In the spring," in a voice so low and trembling that it echoed through his soul, long after he had left her, like a caress. He nodded, swung himself into the saddle, turned once in the gate-way for a farewell look at her, and was gone. She stood looking after him until the sound of his horse's hoofs died away, then went back to the house and remained invisible in her room for the rest of the forenoon.

The winter passed slowly. In the cavalry barracks in Vienna a change was observed in Harry Leskjewitsch. He began to be looked upon as a very earnest and hard-working young officer. His name stood first among those for whom a brilliant military career was prophesied. And, oddly enough, while there was a great increase in the regard in which he was held by his superior officers, there was no decrease in his popularity with his comrades.

The youngest good-for-naughts did, it is true, reproach him with having become tediously serious, and with great caution in spending his money. But when by chance the cause of his sudden economy was discovered, all discontent with his conduct ceased, especially since his purse was always at the service of a needy comrade.

When, after the Harfinks had returned from Nice, he first met Paula in the street, he was much confused, and was conscious of blushing. He felt strangely on beholding the full red lips which had so often kissed him, the form which had so often hung upon his arm. When, with some hesitation, he touched his cap, he wondered at the easy grace with which the young lady returned his salute. His wonder was still greater when, a few days afterwards, he encountered Frau von Harfink, who accosted him, and, after inquiring about his health, added, with her sweetest smile,--

"I trust that my daughter's withdrawal from her engagement to you will not prevent you from visiting us. Good heavens! it was a mistake; you were not at all suited to each other. We shall be delighted to welcome you as a friend at any time. Come soon to see us."

If Harry were changed, Zdena was not less so. She was more silent than formerly; the outbreaks of childish gaiety in which she had been wont to indulge had vanished entirely, while, on the other hand, there was never a trace of her old discontent. Indeed, there was no time for anything of the kind, she had so much to do.

She had developed a wonderful interest in household affairs; spent some time each day in the kitchen, where, engaged in the most prosaic occupations, she displayed so much grace that the major could not help peeping at her from time to time. And when her uncle praised at table some wondrous result of her labours, she would answer, eagerly, "Yes, is it not good? and it is not very expensive."

Whereupon the major would pinch her cheek and smile significantly.

Frau Rosamunda was not at all aware of what was going on about her. She frequently commended the girl's dexterity in all that her awakened interest in household affairs led her to undertake, and after informing the major of his niece's improvement, and congratulating herself in being able to hand her keys over to the girl, she would add, with a sigh, "I am so glad she never took anything into her head with regard to Roderick. I must confess that I think his sudden disappearance very odd, after all the attention he paid her."

The major would always sigh sympathetically when his wife talked thus, and would then take the earliest opportunity to leave the room to "laugh it out," as he expressed it.

Thus life went on with its usual monotony at Zirkow.

Harry's letters to the major, which came regularly twice a month, were always read aloud to the ladies with enthusiasm by the old dragoon, then shown in part to Krupitschka, and then left lying about anywhere. They invariably vanished without a trace; but once when the major wished to refer to one of these important documents and could not find it, it turned out that Zdena had picked it up--by chance.

At last the spring made its joyous appearance and stripped the earth of its white robe of snow. For a few days it lay naked and bare, ugly and brown; then the young conqueror threw over its nakedness a rich mantle of blossoms, and strode on, tossing a bridal wreath into the lap of many a hopeless maiden, and cheering with flowers many a dying mortal who had waited but for its coming.

Zdena and the major delighted in the spring; they were never weary of watching its swift work in the garden, enjoying the opening of the blossoms, the unfolding of the leaves, and the songs of the birds. The fruit-trees had donned their most festal array; but Zdena was grave and sad, for full three weeks had passed since any letter had come from Harry, who had been wont to write punctually every fortnight; and in his last he had not mentioned his spring leave of absence.

In feverish impatience the girl awaited the milkman, who always brought the mail from X---

just before afternoon tea. For days she had vainly watched her uncle as he sorted the letters. "The post brings no letter for thee, my love!" he sang, gaily.

But Zdena was not gay.

This afternoon the milkman is late. Zdena cannot wait for him quietly; she puts on an old straw hat and goes to meet him. It is nearly six o'clock; the sun is quite low, and beams pale golden through a ragged veil of fleecy clouds. A soft breeze is blowing; spring odours fill the air. The flat landscape is wondrous in colour, but it lacks the sharp contrasts of summer. Zdena walks quickly, with downcast eyes. Suddenly the sound of a horse's hoofs falls upon her ear. She looks up. Can it be? Her heart stands still, and then--why, then she finds nothing better to do than to turn and run home as fast as her feet can carry her. But he soon overtakes her. Springing from his horse, he gives the bridle to a peasant-lad passing by.

"Zdena!" he calls.

"Ah, it is you!" she replies, in a weak little voice, continuing to hurry home. Not until she has reached the old orchard does she pause, out of breath.

"Zdena!" Harry calls again, this time in a troubled voice, "what is the matter? Why are you so--so strange? You almost seem to be frightened!"

"I--I--you came so unexpectedly. We had no idea----" she stammers.

"Unexpectedly!" Harry repeats, and his look grows dark. "Unexpectedly! May I ask if you have again changed your mind?"

Her face is turned from him. Dismayed, assailed by a thousand dark fancies, he gazes at her. On a sudden he perceives that she is sobbing; and then----

Neither speaks a word, but he has clasped her to his breast, she has put both arms around his neck, and--according to the poets, who are likely to be right--the one perfect moment in the lives of two mortals is over!

The spring laughs exultantly among the trees, and rains white blossoms upon the heads of the fair young couple beneath them. Around them breathes the fragrance of freshly-awakened life, the air of a new, transfigured existence; there is a fluttering in the air above, as a cloud of birds sails over the blossom-laden orchard.

"Zdena, where are you?" calls the voice of the major. "Zdena, come quickly! Look! the swallows have come!"

The old dragoon makes his appearance from a garden-path. "Why, what is all this?" he exclaims, trying to look stern, as he comes in sight of the pair.

The young people separate hastily; Zdena blushes crimson, but Harry says, merrily,--

"Don't pretend to look surprised; you must have known long ago that I--that we loved each other." And he takes Zdena's hand and kisses it.

"Well, yes; but----" The major shrugs his shoulders.

"You mean that I ought to have made formal application to you for Zdena's hand?" asks Harry.

The old officer can contain himself no longer; his face lit up by the broadest of smiles, he goes to Zdena, pinches her ear, and asks,--

"Aha, Zdena! why must people marry because they love each other, hey?"

CHAPTER XLV.

OLD BARON FRANZ.

Old Baron Franz Leskjewitsch had changed greatly during the past winter. Those who saw most of him declared that he was either about to die or was growing insane. He moved from one to another of his various estates more restlessly than ever, appearing several times at Vorhabshen, which he never had been in the habit of visiting in winter, and not only appearing

there, but remaining longer than usual. There was even a report that on one occasion he had ordered his coachman to drive to Zirkow; and, in fact, the old tumble-down carriage of the grim Baron had been seen driving along the road to Zirkow, but just before reaching the village it had turned back.

Yes, yes, the old Baron was either about to die or was "going crazy." There was such a change in him. He bought a Newfoundland dog, which he petted immensely, he developed a love for canary-birds, and, more alarming symptom than all the rest, he was growing generous: he stood godfather to two peasant babies, and dowered the needy bride of one of his bailiffs.

In the beginning of April he appeared again at Vorhabshen, and seemed in no hurry to leave it.

The day after Harry's sudden arrival at Zirkow, the old man was sitting, just after breakfast, in a leather arm-chair, smoking a large meerschaum pipe, and listening to Studnecka's verses, when the housekeeper entered to clear the table, a duty which Lotta, the despot, always performed herself for her master, perhaps because she wanted an opportunity for a little gossip with him.

Studnecka's efforts at entertainment were promptly dispensed with, and the old Baron shortly began, "Lotta, I hear that good-for-naught Harry is in this part of the country again; is it so?"

"Yes, Herr Baron; the cow-boy met him yesterday on the road," replied Lotta, sweeping the crumbs from the table-cloth into a green lacquered tray with a crescent-shaped brush.

"What is he doing here?" the old man asked, after a pause.

"They say he has come to court the Baroness Zdena."

"Oh, indeed!" The Baron tried to put on a particularly fierce expression. "It would seem that since that money-bag at Dobrotschau has thrown him over, he wants to try it on again with the girl at Zirkow, in hopes I shall come round. Oh, we understand all that."

"The Herr Baron ought to be ashamed to say such things of our Master Harry," Lotta exclaimed, firing up. "However, the Herr Baron can question the young Herr himself; there he is," she added, attracted to the window by the sound of a horse's hoofs. "Shall I show him up? or does the Herr Baron not wish to see him?"

"Oh, send him up, send him up. I'll enlighten the fellow."

In a few moments Harry makes his appearance. "Good-morning, uncle! how are you?" he calls out, his face radiant with happiness.

The old Baron merely nods his head. Without stirring from his arm-chair, without offering his hand to his nephew, without even asking him to sit down, he scans him suspiciously.

With his hand on his sabre, Harry confronts him, somewhat surprised by this strange reception, but nowise inclined to propitiate his uncle by any flattering attentions.

"Do you want anything?"

"No."

"Indeed? You're not short of money, then?"

"On the contrary, I have saved some," Harry replies, speaking quite after his uncle's fashion.

"Ah! saved some, have you? Are you growing miserly?--a fine thing at your age! You probably learned it of your financial acquaintances," the old Baron growls.

"I have saved money because I am going to marry, and my betrothed is without means," Harry says, sharply.

"Ah! for a change you want to marry a poor girl! You display a truly edifying fickleness of character. And who is the fair creature to whom you have sacrificed your avarice?"

"I am betrothed to my cousin Zdena."

"Indeed?--to Zdena?" the Baron says, with well-feigned indignation. "Have you forgotten that in that case I shall disinherit you?"

"You will do as you choose about that," Harry replies, dryly. "I should be glad to assure my wife a pleasant and easy lot in life; but if you fancy that I have come here to sue for your favour, you are mistaken. It was my duty to inform you of my betrothal. I have done so; and that is all."

"Indeed? That is all?" thunders old Leskjewitsch. "It shall be all! Wait, you scoundrel, you good-for-naught, and we'll see if you go on carrying your head so high! I will turn the leaf: I will make Zdena my heiress,--but only upon condition that she sends you about your business. She shall choose between you--that is, between poverty--and me!"

"It will not take her long. Good-morning." With which Harry turns on his heel and leaves the room.

The old Baron sits motionless for a while. The mild spring breeze blows in through the open windows; there is a sound in the air of cooing doves, of water dripping on the stones of the paved court-yard from the roof, of the impatient pawing and neighing of a horse, and then the clatter of spurs and sabre.

The old man smiles broadly. "He shows race: the boy is a genuine Leskjewitsch," he mutters to himself,--"a good mate for the girl!" Then he goes to the window. Harry is just about to mount, when his uncle roars down to him, "Harry! Harry! The deuce take you! are you deaf? Can't you hear?"

Meanwhile, the major and his niece are walking in the garden at Zirkow. It was the major who had insisted that Harry should immediately inform his uncle of his betrothal.

Zdena has shown very little interest in the discussion as to how the cross-grained, eccentric old man would receive the news. And when her uncle suddenly looks her full in the face to ask how she can adapt herself to straitened means, she calmly lays her hand on the arm of her betrothed, and whispers, tenderly, "You shall see." Then her eyes fill with tears as she adds, "But how will you bear it, Harry?"

He kisses both her hands and replies, "Never mind, Zdena; I assure you that at this moment Conte Capriani is a beggar compared with myself."

Just at this point Frau Rosamunda plucks her spouse by the sleeve and forces him, *nolens volens*, to retire with her.

"I cannot understand you," she lectures him in their conjugal *tête-à-tête*. "You are really indelicate, standing staring at the children, when you must see that they are longing to kiss each other. Such young people must be left to themselves now and then." At first Frau Rosamunda found it very difficult to assent to this rather imprudent betrothal, but she is now interested in it heart and soul. She arranges everything systematically, even delicacy of sentiment. Her exact rules in this respect rather oppress the major, who would gladly sun himself in the light and warmth of happiness which surrounds the young couple, about whose future, however, he is seriously distressed, lamenting bitterly his own want of business capacity which has so impoverished him.

"If I could but give the poor child more of a dowry," he keeps saying to himself. "Or if Franz would but come to his senses,--yes, if he would only listen to reason, all would be well."

All this is in his thoughts, as he walks with his niece in the garden on this bright spring forenoon, while his nephew has gone to Vorhabshen to have an explanation with his uncle. Consequently he is absent-minded and does not listen to the girl's gay chatter, the outcome of intense joy in her life and her love.

The birds are twittering loudly as they build their nests in the blossom-laden trees, the grass is starred with the first dandelions.

Harry is expected at lunch. The major is burning with impatience.

"One o'clock," he remarks. "The boy ought to be back by this time. What do you say to walking a little way to meet him?"

"As you please, uncle," the girl gaily assents. They turn towards the house, whence Krupitschka comes running, breathless with haste.

"What is the matter?" the major calls out.

"Nothing, nothing, Herr Baron," the man replies; "but the Frau Baroness desires you both to come to the drawing-room; she has a visitor."

"Is that any reason why you should run yourself so out of breath that you look like a fish on dry land?" the major bawls to his old servant. "You fairly frightened me, you ass! Who is the visitor?"

"Please--I do not know," declares Krupitschka, lying brazenly, while the major frowns, saying, "There's an end to our walk," and never noticing the sly smile upon the old man's face.

Zdena runs to her room to smooth her hair, tossed by the breeze, while the major, annoyed, goes directly to the drawing-room. He opens the door and stands as if rooted to the threshold. Beside the sofa where Frau Rosamunda is enthroned, with her official hostess expression, doing the honours with a grace all her own, sits a broad-shouldered old gentleman in a loose long-tailed coat, laughing loudly at something she has just told him.

"Franz!" exclaims Paul von Leskjewitsch.

"Here I am," responds the elder brother, with hardly-maintained composure. He rises; each advances towards the other, but before they can clasp hands the elder of the two declares, "I wish, Paul, you would tell your bailiff to see to the ploughing on your land. That field near the forest is in a wretched condition,--hill and valley, the clods piled up, and wheat sown there. I have always held that no military man can ever learn anything about agriculture. You never had the faintest idea of farming." And as he speaks he clasps the major's hand and pinches Harry's ear. The young fellow has been looking on with a smile at the meeting between the brothers.

"I understand you, uncle: I am not to leave the service. I could not upon any terms," the young man assures him,--"not even if I were begged to do so."

"He's a hard-headed fellow," Baron Franz says, with a laugh; "and so is the girl. Did she tell you that she met me in the forest? We had a conversation together, she and I. At first she took me for that fool Studnecka; then she guessed who I was, and read me such a lecture! I did not care: it showed me that she was a genuine Leskjewitsch. H'm! I ought to have come here then, but--I--could not find the way; I waited for some one to show it to me." He pats Harry on the shoulder. "But where the deuce is the girl? Is she hiding from me?"

At this moment Zdena enters. The old man turns ghastly pale; his hands begin to tremble violently, as he stretches them out towards her. She gazes at him for an instant, then runs to him and throws her arms around his neck. He clasps her close, as if never to let her leave him.

The others turn away. There is a sound of hoarse sobbing. All that the strong man has hoarded up in his heart for twenty years asserts itself at this moment.

It is not long, however, before all emotion is calmed, and affairs take their natural course. The two elderly men sit beside Frau Rosamunda, still enthroned on her sofa, and the lovers stand in the recess of a window and look out upon the spring.

"So we are not to be poor, after all?" Zdena says, with a sigh.

"It seems not," Harry responds, putting his arm round her.

She does not speak for a while; then she murmurs, softly, "'Tis a pity: I took such pleasure in it!"

FOOTNOTE:

[Footnote 1](#): One of a princely family who, although subject to royal authority, is allowed to retain some sovereign privileges.

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