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Wilhelmine von Hillern**

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**ONLY A GIRL:**  
**OR**  
**A PHYSICIAN FOR THE SOUL.**

**A ROMANCE**  
**FROM THE GERMAN**  
**OF**  
**WILHELMINE VON HILLERN.**

BY  
**MRS. A. L. WISTER.**

PHILADELPHIA:  
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## **ONLY A GIRL;**

OR

## **A PHYSICIAN FOR THE SOUL.**

### **CHAPTER I.**

#### **"ONLY A GIRL."**

In a level, well-wooded country in Northern Germany, not far from an insignificant village, stood a distillery, such as is frequently to be found upon the estates of the North German nobility, and in connection with it an extensive manufactory,—the estate comprising, besides, a kitchen-garden overgrown with weeds, a few fruit-trees overshadowing the decaying remains of rustic seats long fallen to ruin, and a dwelling-house, well built, indeed, but as neglected and dirty as its guardian the lean, hungry mastiff, whose empty plate and dusty jug testified to the length of time since the poor creature had had any refreshment in the oppressive heat of this July day. No one who looked upon this picture could doubt that the interior of the house must correspond with its cheerless outside, and that the gentle, beneficent hand was wanting there that keeps a house neat and orderly, cares for the garden, and attends to the wants of even a dumb brute. Where such a hand is wanting, there is neither order nor culture, no love of the beautiful, nor sometimes even of the good,—too often, indeed, no joy, no happiness. There was no one in the court-yard or garden; nothing was stirring but a couple of cheeping chickens that were peeping around the corner of the dog's kennel, in hopes of stray crumbs from his last meal. They came on cautiously,

their little heads turning curiously from side to side, in fear lest the dog should make his appearance; but he kept in his kennel, his head resting upon his paws, and his bloodshot eyes blinking over the distant landscape. The hungry fowls, grown bolder, pecked and scratched around his plate, but vainly: there was nothing to be found but dry sand.

Beside the well stood a churn, and a bench upon which lay a roll of fresh butter, which, neglected and forgotten, was melting beneath the sun's hot rays, and dripping down upon the weeds around. Perhaps the starving dog was suddenly struck by the thought how grateful this waste would be to him were it only within his domain; for he started up and ran out as far as he could from his kennel, dragging his rattling chain behind him, as if to prove its length, then stood still, and finally bethought himself and crept back with drooping head beneath his roof. Outside of a window, upon the ground floor, stood a couple of dried cactus-plants, and several bottles of distilled herbs; the cork of one of them was gone, and its contents filled with flies and beetles. Everything, far and near, betrayed neglect and dirt; but the excuse of poverty was evidently wanting. The extensive stables and accommodations for cattle, the huge out-houses and far-stretching fields of grain testified to the wealth of the proprietor of the estate. A comfortable rolling-chair standing in the court-yard, its leathern cushions rotting in the sun, seemed to indicate the presence of an invalid or a cripple. Only the lowest and uppermost stories of the house appeared to be inhabited; the windows of the middle floor were all closed, and so thickly festooned with cobwebs that they could not have been opened for a long time. It seemed as if the swallows were the only creatures who could find comfort in such an inhospitable mansion; their nests were everywhere to be seen. The chickens looked enviously up at them, and hopped upon the low window-ledges of the lower story, as if to remind the inmates of their existence and necessities. Suddenly they fluttered down to the ground again, for from one of the open windows there came a child's scream, so piteous and shrill that the large dog pricked his ears and once more restlessly measured the length of his chain.

In a low room, the atmosphere of which was almost stifling from the heat of an ironing-stove and the steam from dampened linen, that two robust maid-servants were engaged in ironing, a little girl, about twelve years of age, was standing before an old wardrobe. She was half undressed, and the garments falling off her shoulders disclosed a little body so wasted and delicate that at sight of it a mother's eyes would have filled with tears. But there was no mother near, only an old housekeeper, whose bony fingers had apparently just been laid violently upon the child, who was crying aloud and covering one thin shoulder with her hand, while she refused to put on a dress that the woman was holding towards her.

"What is the matter now?" an angry voice called from the adjoining room. The child started in alarm. The old woman went to the door, and replied, "Ernestine is so naughty again that there is no doing anything with her. She has torn her best dress, because she says she has outgrown it, and it hurts her; but it isn't true: it fits her very well."

"How can the miserable creature have outgrown any dress?" rejoined the rough voice from within. "Put it on this moment, and go!"

The child leaned against the wardrobe, and looked obstinate and defiant.

"She won't do it, sir; she does not want to go to the children's party!" said the unfeeling attendant.

"I ordered you to go," cried the father. "When a lady like the Frau Staatsrätin does you the honour to invite you, you are to accept her invitation gratefully. I will not have it said that I make a Cinderella of my daughter!"

Little Ernestine made no reply, but looked at the housekeeper with such an expression in her large, sunken eyes, that the woman was transported with rage; it seemed scarcely possible that so much contempt and hate should find place in the bosom of a child. The housekeeper clasped her hands. "No, you bad, naughty child! You ought to see how she is looking at me now, Herr von Hartwich!"

With these words she tried again to throw the dress over Ernestine's head; but the girl tore it away, threw it on the ground and trampled upon it, crying in a transport of rage, interrupted by bursts of tears, "I will not put it on, and I will not go among strangers! I will not be treated so! You are a bad, wicked woman! I will not mind you!"

"Oh, goodness gracious! was ever such a naughty child seen!" exclaimed the housekeeper, looking with a secret sensation of fear at the little fury who stood before her with dishevelled hair and heaving chest.

"When are you going to stop that noise out there?" roared the father. "Must I, wretched man that I am, hear nothing, all day long, but children's and servants' squabbles? Ernestine, come in here to me!"

At this command, the little girl began to tremble violently; she knew what was in store for her, and moved slowly towards the door. "Are you coming?" called the invalid.

Ernestine entered the room, and stood as far as possible from the bed where he was lying. "Now, come here!" he cried, beckoning her towards him with his right hand,--his left was

crippled,--and continuing, as Ernestine hesitated: "You good-for-nothing, obstinate child! you have never caused a throb of pleasure to any one since you came into the world; not even to your mother, for your birth cost her her life. In you God has heaped upon me all the sorrows but none of the joys that a son might afford his father; you have the waywardness and self-will of a boy, with the frail, puny body of a girl! What is to be done with such a wretched creature, that can do nothing but scream and cry?"

At these words the child burst into a fresh flood of tears, and was hurrying out, when she was recalled by a thundering "Stop! you have not had your punishment yet!"

Ernestine knew then what was coming, and begged hard. "Do not strike me, father! Oh, do not strike me again!" But her entreaties were of no avail.

With lips tightly compressed, and her little hands convulsively clasped together, she approached the bed. The sick man raised his broad hard hand, and a heavy blow fell upon the transparent cheek of the child, who staggered and fell on the floor. "Now will you obey, or have you not had enough yet?" the father asked.

"I will obey," sobbed the little girl, as she rose from the floor.

"But first ask Frau Gedike's pardon!" ordered the angry man.

"No!" cried Ernestine firmly. "That I will not do!"

"How! is your obstinacy not yet conquered? Disobey at your peril!"

"Though you should kill me, I will not do it," answered the child, with a strange gleam in her eyes, as her father, endeavouring to raise himself in his bed, stretched put his hand towards her.

"Oh, fie! are you crazy?" suddenly said a melodious voice, just behind Ernestine. "Is that the way for a man of sense to reason with a naughty child,--playing lion-tamer with a sick kitten!"

Then the speaker turned to the little girl and said kindly, "Go, my child, and be dressed; you will enjoy yourself with all those pretty little girls."

Ernestine's long black eyelashes fell, and she obeyed silently.

The strange intercessor for the tormented child was a tall, slender, almost handsome man, with delicate features and a certain air of repose which might rather be called impassibility, but which was so refined in its expression that it could not but produce a favourable impression. His tone of voice was soft, melodious, and grave; his pronunciation faultlessly pure. An atmosphere of culture which seemed to surround him gave him an air of superiority. His dress was simple, but in good taste, his step light, his manner and bearing supple and insinuating. It would have struck the common observer as condescending, but the closer student of human nature would have found it ironical and treacherous.

In moments of passion such human reptiles exercise a soothing influence upon heated minds, and check their violent outbreaks, as ice-bandages will arrest a flow of blood. Upon his entrance the invalid became quiet, almost submissive; the room seemed to him suddenly to become cooler; he was, he thought, conscious of a pleasant draught of air as the tall figure approached the bed and sank into the arm-chair beside his pillow.

"It would be no wonder if I did become crazy!" Herr von Hartwich excused himself. "The child exasperates me. When a man suffers tortures for months at a time, and is crippled and confined to bed, how can he help being irritable? He cannot be as patient as a man in full health, who can get out of the way of such provoking scenes whenever he pleases!"

"You could easily do that if you chose, by keeping the child in the rooms above, which have been empty for years. Then you might be quiet, and people would not be able to say that the rich Hartwich's delicate child had to sit in the ironing-room in such hot weather,--it is worse than unjust; I think it unwise!"

"What!" Hartwich suddenly interrupted him, "shall I leave the child and the servants to their own devices above-stairs, whilst I lie here alone and neglected? Or shall I hire an expensive nurse, and make every one think I am dying, and let the factory-hands suppose themselves without a master?"

"That last cannot happen, for they long ago ceased to regard you as their master; they know that I am the ruling spirit of the whole business. As for your talk about the expense of a nurse, such folly can only be explained on the score of your incredibly avarice, which has become a mania with you of late. For whom are you hoarding your wealth? Not for your child; you will leave her no more than what the law compels you to leave her; still less for me, for you have always been a genuine step-brother, and have bequeathed me your property only because I would not communicate to you the secrets of my discoveries without remuneration; and you would rather give away all your wealth at your death than any part of it during your lifetime. And I assure you that if I am to be your heir, which perhaps may never be, I would far rather go without a few thousand thalers than witness such outrageous neglect of a child's education!"

The invalid listened earnestly. "You are talking very frankly to me to-day, and are, it seems to me, reckoning very confidently upon my not altering my last will and testament," he said, in an irritated tone of menace.

Without a change of feature, the other continued: "With all your faults and eccentricities, you are too upright in character to punish my candour in the way at which you hint. You know well that I mean kindly by you, and that I am an honest man. I might have required large sums of money from you. Upon the strength of the increase of income accruing from my exertions, I might have insisted upon your constituting me your partner, and much else besides; but I have contented myself with the modest position of superintendent, and with the certainty that by your will (God grant you length of days!) a brilliant future may be prepared for my child when I am no more. These proofs of disinterestedness, I think, give me a right to speak frankly to you!"

"What is all this circumlocution to lead to?" asked Hartwich, who had grown strikingly languid, while his speech was becoming thick. "Be quick, for I am sleepy."

"Simply to this,--that you either remove Ernestine to the upper story, or, what would be better still, away from the house."

"Away from the house! Where to?"

"Why, to some institution where she may be so educated that it need be no disgrace hereafter to have to own her as a relative. The child will be ruined with no society but that of servant-maids, grooms, and village children."

"Bah!" growled the invalid, "what does it matter?"

"If you are indifferent as to what becomes of your daughter, I am by no means indifferent as to my niece, or as to the influence that, if she lives, she may exercise upon my own daughter. As Ernestine now is, the thought that in a year or two she may be my child's playmate gives me great anxiety. Should she remain here, I must send my little girl from home, or she will be ruined also. But, setting all this aside, I wish her sent away for your sake. You cannot control yourself towards the obstinate, neglected child; and, as long as she is with you, such scenes as have just occurred are unavoidable. And I have learned to-day that the whole village resounds with your 'cruel treatment' of your own child. This throws rather a bad light upon your character, just when you wish our new neighbours to think well of you."

"That's all nonsense; if they think the factory worth fifty thousand thalers, they'll buy it, whether they think me a rogue or an honest man," said Hartwich.

"Think the factory worth--yes, that's just it," the silken-smooth man continued; "but that they may think it worth so much, much may be necessary,--among other things, some degree of confidence in the present proprietor."

"And you have the sale very near at heart, because you would far rather put the fifteen thousand thalers profit, that I have insured to you, into your pocket than win your bread by honest labour," said the invalid with sarcasm. "'Tis a fine gift for me to throw into your lap!"

"A gift?" his brother asked--"an indemnification for the loss of income that the sale of the factory will occasion me, and without which indemnification I shall certainly prevent any such sale. You are always representing our business transactions as generous on your part. I require no generosity at your hands. You pay me for my services: I serve you because you pay me. Why pretend to a feeling that would be unnatural between us?--we are step-brothers; it would be preposterous sentimentality to try to love each other."

"Most certainly you take no pains to attach me to you," the invalid remarked.

"Why should I?" his brother replied with a smile. "There must be some reason for everything in the world--there would be none in that. You would not give me a farthing for my amiability; whatever I get from you must be earned by services very different from brotherly affection."

"You are a downright fiend, that no man, made of flesh and blood, could possibly love! You always were so from a child: how you tormented my poor mother! You know nothing of human feeling. In the warmest weather your hands are always damp and cold, and your heart, too, is never warm. I am cross and irritable, but I am not as utterly heartless as you are, God forbid! You are one of those beings at discord with all natural laws, who cast no shadow in the sunshine." The sick man closed his eyes, exhausted, and large drops of moisture stood upon his brow.

His brother took a handkerchief and carefully wiped them away. "Only see how you excite yourself, and all for nothing!" he said in the gentlest, kindest voice. "Because I have no sympathy with fictitious sentiment and exaggerated outbursts, you call me unfeeling. Because I am quiet by nature, not easily aroused, you picture me in your feverish dreams as a vampire. I will leave you now, or I shall excite you. Lay to heart what I have said about the child; for if the present course is persevered in, it will bring disgrace upon us, and that would be to me unendurable!"

Hartwich made no reply; he had turned his face to the wall, and did not look around until his

brother had noiselessly left the room.

During this conversation little Ernestine had allowed her dress to be put on. When this was done, the housekeeper left the room, and the child busied herself with lacing upon her feet an old pair of boots that were really too small for her.

"That's right, Ernestine," one of the maid-servants whispered. "Frau Gedike is a bad woman: none of us can bear her--it is good for her to be vexed, and we are glad of it!"

"I do not want to vex her, but I hate her--and my father, too--he is cruel to me," said the child, with the bitterness with which a defenceless human being, when ill used, seeks to revenge itself.

"Indeed he is a dreadful father," Rieka, the elder of the maids, whispered softly to her companion, but Ernestine heard all that she said perfectly well. "He always wanted a son, and talked forever of what he would do for his boy when he had one. And when the child was born, and was not a boy after all, he was quite beside himself, and cried furiously, 'Only a girl! only a girl!' and rushed out of the house, banging the door after him so that the whole house shook. The young mother--she was a delicate lady--fell into convulsions with sorrow and fright, and took the fever, and died on the third day. Then he was sorry enough, and raved and tore his hair over the corpse, but he could not bring her to life again. He has been well punished since he had his stroke, and perhaps it was to punish him that Ernestine has grown so ugly; but he ought at least to show his repentance for what he did, by kindness to the sickly little thing, instead of abusing her. It isn't the child's fault that she's not a boy."

Ernestine listened to all this with a beating heart, and now slipped out gently that the maid might not know she had overheard her. Outside she stopped to stroke the dog, but the poor thirsty brute growled at her. She saw that he had no water, and took his can to the well and filled it. When she saw the water gushing so sparkling from the pipe, she could not resist the temptation to let it run upon her burning head.

"Ernestine, what mischief are you about now?" the housekeeper screamed from the window; but the water was already dripping down from the child's long hair upon her shoulders, breast, and back.

"The sun will dry it before I get to the Frau Staatsrätin's, she thought, and carried the dog his drink; but when she attempted to pat him, he growled again, because he did not wish to be disturbed while drinking.

"Even the dog does not like me," she thought, and crept away. "Only a girl! And my father is so cross to me because I am not a boy." And as she went on she repeated the phrase to herself, and her step kept time to it as to a tune, "Only a girl--only a girl!"

From the window of the upper story her uncle and his wife looked after her. The wife presented an utter contrast to her husband. She was uncommonly stout, and her jolly face was so flushed that if her husband had really been a vampire she might have afforded him nourishment for a long term of ghostly existence. But he was no such monster, although his meagre body seemed to bask in his wife's warm fulness of life as some puny, starving wretch does in the heat of a huge stove. Any more poetical comparison is impossible in connection with Frau Leuthold; for, in spite of her massive beauty, her thick bushy eyebrows, her sparkling black eyes, her thick waves of dark hair, the whole expression of her large face, with its double chin and pouting mouth, was coarsely sensual. Yet there was something in this expression that showed that, however great the dissimilarity between the husband and wife in mind and body, there was still one thing in which they were alike: it was the heart,--in his case ossified, in hers overgrown with fat.

There are some persons whose mental organization can be excellently well described by the medical term "fat-hearted." They are no longer capable of any healthy moral activity, because an indolent sensuality has taken possession of them, crippling their energies like fat accumulating around the heart. Although the natures of husband and wife were radically dissimilar, still in the results of their modes of thought there was enough similarity to produce that sort of harmony which is maintained between the receiver and the thief. The stout brunette was a worthy accomplice of her slender, fair husband; and that she possessed the art of sweetening existence for him after a fashion, to which no one possessing nerves of taste and smell is altogether insensible, a table, upon which were delicious fruits, biscuits, and a bowl of iced sherbet, bore ample testimony. Thus the refined thinker endured the narrowness and coarseness of his better half for the sake of material qualifications, and of the ease with which she entered into his projects for selfish aggrandizement. As a cook she possessed his entire approbation, and the union between these utterly different natures was universally considered a happy one.

"She's an ugly thing, that Ernestine," said the affectionate aunt, looking after her pale little niece, who was walking slowly along with drooping head. "Kind as I may be to her, she will have nothing to say to me. They say dogs and children always know who likes them and who does not; so I suppose the child knows I can't abide her."

"Whether you like her or not is not the question," replied her husband. "You have not attached

her to you, and that is a mistake; for it makes us sharers in the common report of Hartwich's cruelty to the child. She is considered in the village as the victim of unfeeling treatment. The pastor thinks her a martyr, whose cause he is bound to adopt; the schoolmaster talks about her clear head; and who can tell that all this nonsense may not waken the conscience of my fool of a brother, and induce him at the eleventh hour to make, Heaven only knows what changes for her advantage! That would be a blow--such people easily fall from one extreme into the other. Therefore the child must be separated from him. If I cannot succeed in having her sent away, we must manage somehow to attach her to us, and so stop people's mouths." An involuntary sigh from his wife interrupted him. "I know it is troublesome, up-hill work; but, Heaven willing, it cannot last long. Hartwich is failing. He may live a year; but, if he should have another stroke, he may go off at any moment; then, for all I care, you may be rid of the disagreeable duty at once, and send Ernestine to boarding-school. Still, appearances must be kept up, my dear. You know how much I would sacrifice for the sake of my reputation. I cannot bear a shabby dress or to dine off a soiled table-cloth; and just so I cannot endure a stain upon my name."

While speaking, he had seated himself at the table and filled a goblet of sherbet from the fragrant bowl. As he was sipping it delicately, with his lips almost closed, his wife threw herself down upon the sofa by his side with such clumsy violence that the springs creaked, and her husband was so jolted that he lost his balance, and the contents of his glass were spilled upon his immaculate shirt-front. Much annoyed, he carefully dried his dripping garment with his napkin. "Now I shall have to dress again," he said in a tone of vexation.

"To spill your glass over you just in the midst of such a conversation as this means no good," said his superstitious wife.

"It means that you never will learn to conduct yourself like a lady," was the quiet reply.

"Indeed!" she cried with a laugh. "So I must learn aristocratic manners that I may do more credit to your brother, who has drunk himself into an apoplexy! A fine aristocrat he is!"

"Just because he disgraces his standing I will respect mine; and you should assist me to do so, instead of laughing. And when his estate is ours, I will show the world that it is not necessary to be born in an aristocratic cradle in order to be an aristocrat. The dismissed Marburg professor will yet play a part among the *élite* of the scientific and fashionable world that a prince might envy him. Wealth is all-powerful; and where there is wealth with brains, men are caught like flies upon a limed twig."

"Ah, how fine it will be!" cried his wife, excited by this view of the subject; and she hastily filled a glass from the bowl and drank it greedily.

"It is indeed such good fortune that a man less self-controlled than myself might well-nigh lose his senses at the thought of it!" her husband rejoined. And there was a dreamy look in his light-blue eyes.

"Then we can keep a carriage, and I shall drive out shopping, with footmen to attend me, and Gretchen shall have a French *bonne*, and shall be always dressed in white and sky-blue. We will live in the capital, and you, Leuthold, need never do another day's work,--you can amuse yourself in any way that pleases you."

And the wife tossed her head proudly, as though already lolling upon the soft cushions of her carriage.

"Do you suppose I could ever be a robber of time?" he asked her with a sharp glance. "No, most certainly not. If I had made the ten commandments, the seventh should have been, 'Thou shalt not steal a day from the Lord.' He who steals a day seems to me the most contemptible of all thieves."

Ills wife laughed and displayed a double row of fine white teeth, whose strength she was just proving by cracking hazel-nuts.

"Do you suppose," continued Leuthold, "that I should ever be content with the reputation of a merely wealthy man? No; I long for other honours. As soon as the means are in my power, I will resume my old scientific labours, and will soon distance the miserable drudges who daily lecture in our schools. I will have such a chemical and physiological laboratory as few universities can boast. Ah! when I am once free from all the hated servitude, the miserable toil day after day, in that detestable factory, I will bathe in the clear, fresh stream of science, and make a name for myself that shall rank among the first of our time."

"Is that all the happiness you propose to yourself?" asked his wife with a sneer.

"There is no greater happiness than to play a great part in the world through one's own ability; and if my poverty has hitherto prevented my doing so, my wealth, in making me independent, shall help me to my goal. Make a man independent, and he has free play for the exercise of his talents; while the hard necessity of earning his daily bread has crushed many a budding genius before his powers were fully developed. It is glorious to be able to work at what we love!--as glorious as it is miserable to be forced to work at what we hate." He smoothed with his hand his thin, glossy hair, and murmured with a sigh, "No wonder it is growing gray; I wonder



it is not snow-white, since for ten years this miserable fate has been mine. It is enough to destroy the very marrow in one's bones, and dry up the blood in the veins."

His wife stared at him with surprise. "Why, Leuthold, think what good dinners I have always cooked for you!"

Leuthold looked up as if awakening from a dream, and then, with the ironical expression which his unsuspecting fellow-men interpreted as pure benevolence, he said, "You are right, Bertha! Your first principle is 'eat and drink;' mine is 'think and work.' That yours is much the more practical can be mathematically proved!" He glanced with a smile at his wife's portly figure.

"Only wait until we are settled in the capital, and see what I will do for you. Then you shall have dinners indeed!" said Bertha.

"Your skill will be needed, for we shall have plenty of guests. Men are like dogs: they gather where there is a chance of a good dinner, and the host is sure of many friends devoted to him through their palates. 'Tis true, such friends last only as long as the fine dinners last; we can have them while we need them, and throw them overboard, like useless ballast, when they can no longer serve our turn."

"Yes, you are right; what a knowing fellow you are!" cried Bertha. "Heavens!" she added, clapping her hands with childlike naïveté, "if he would only die soon!"

Her husband looked at her sternly. "I trust that in case of the event, which will be as welcome to me as to you, no human eye will be able to discern anything but grief in your countenance. Should you be too awkward to simulate sorrow, I must invent some method for making you really feel it; for appearances must be preserved at all costs! Remember that!"

Bertha clasped her hands in dismay. "Mercy on me! I really believe you would do anything to torment me into seeming sorry. It would be just like you; for what people say of you,--or 'appearances,' as you call it, are dearer to you than wife or child, or anything else in the world."

She sprang up, and her breath came quick and angrily. Leuthold contemplated her with a kind of satisfaction as she stood before him with flashing eyes and curling lip. She displayed some emotion,--only the emotion of anger, 'tis true; but as enthusiasm is always passionate, so passion will sometimes seem enthusiasm, and lend a kind of nimbus to insignificance.

"I like to see you so!" said Leuthold, drawing her down beside him and laying his cool hand upon her shoulder.

Just then the cry of a child was heard in the adjoining apartment. "Gretchen is awake," cried Bertha, forgetting her anger, and leaving the room so quickly that the boards creaked beneath her heavy tread, and the sofa upon which her husband was seated shook. She soon returned, with a pretty child of three years of age in her arms. After tossing it, notwithstanding its size and strength, up and down like an india-rubber ball, she threw it with maternal pride into her husband's lap. He caressed the little thing tenderly, and a ray shot from his eyes like the gleam of a wintry sun across a snowy landscape. For, though there was no genuine paternal love in his heart, there was at least in its place,--what is hardly to be distinguished from it,--fatherly pride.

"How strange to think," said the mother, "that that should be your child!"

"Why?" asked Leuthold with surprise.

"It is so odd that such a slim, delicate-looking man as you are should have such a healthy, chubby little daughter. It is just as if a wheat-stalk should bear penny rolls instead of wheat-ears." She laughed immoderately at the idea, without perceiving that her husband was far from flattered by the comparison. "They say," she continued, "'long waited for is good at last,' and we waited long for the little thing, and she is good." And she put up the child's plump little hand to her mouth as though she would bite it. The little girl shouted with glee, and the sound so sweet to maternal ears did not fail to awaken a return. Bertha shouted too, until her husband's ears tingled. "If Ernestine had only been a boy, she could have married Gretchen, and our child would have been all provided for," she said, after a pause.

"Do not talk such nonsense," said Leuthold. "Hartwich would have loved a son as thoroughly as he detests his daughter, and would have bequeathed to him all his property. We owe our inheritance there to the happy chance that made his child a girl. But even supposing that she were a boy, with the inheritance still ours, do you think I would mate her so unworthily? No! our Gretchen, lovely and rich as she will be, can never marry a simple Herr von Hartwich. She will one day make me father-in-law to some great statesman, some illustrious scholar, or, at least, to some count!"

"And me mother to a countess!" cried his wife with glee.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE STORY OF THE UGLY DUCKLING.

In the mean time Ernestine had pursued her way. She walked slowly on through the extensive fields in the glare of the four-o'clock sun, whose rays were broken by no friendly tree or shrub. The waist of the dress which she had outgrown was so tight that she was frequently obliged to stand still and recover her breath. The perspiration rolled down her poor worn little face. The sunbeams felt like dagger-points upon her weary head; but she could not go back: fear of her father was more powerful than the torments she was enduring. Better to be pierced by the sun's rays than struck by her father's hard hand. Still, she could not help weeping bitterly that every one seemed so unkind to her. What had she done, that her father should hate her so? It was not her fault that she was so ugly and not a boy. "Ah, why am I a girl?" she sobbed, and sat down upon the hard, sun-baked clods of earth among the brown, dried potato-plants. She clasped her knees with her arms, and pondered why boys were better than girls, wondering whether she could not learn to do all that boys could. The schoolmaster had often told her that she had more sense and learned her lessons better than the boys. What was it that she needed, then? Strength, boldness, courage! Yes, that was a good deal, to be sure; but could she not make them hers in time? She thought and thought. She would exercise her strength. She had once read of a man who carried a calf about in his arms daily, and was so accustomed to his burden that he never noticed how the calf increased in size and weight, until at last he bore a huge ox in his arms. She would do so too; she would accustom herself at first to the weight of little burdens, and go on increasing them until at last she could carry the very heaviest. And she could be bold too, if she only dared, and if her shyness would only wear off. Then, she hoped, her father would be quite content with her. She sprang to her feet comforted and walked on. Her mind was made up. She would be just like a boy.

At the end of an hour Ernestine reached a beautiful and extensive grove, through which she passed, and entered a garden, at the end of which stood a charming country-house. Upon the wide lawn in front, a merry throng of children were running and leaping hither and thither, and from the fresh green a sparkling fountain tossed into the air a crystal ball. At the open doors of a room leading out into the garden sat a company of elegantly-dressed ladies and gentlemen, and servants in rich liveries were handing around refreshments upon silver salvers. Ernestine stood as if dazzled by all this pomp and splendour. She dared not approach. How could she? To whom could she turn? No one came towards her; no one spoke to her. Her embarrassment was indescribable, when suddenly the beautiful, gaily-dressed children on the lawn broke off their play and looked towards her with astonishment. Ernestine saw how the little girls nudged each other and pointed at her. She distinctly heard some say to the others, "What does she want?" She was almost on the point of turning round to run away, when she was observed by the group of ladies and gentlemen, and a servant was dispatched to ask whom she was looking for. Everything swam before her eyes as the tall man with such a distinguished air stepped up to her and asked sharply, "What do you want here?"

"Nothing," replied Ernestine; "I would not have come if I had known!"

"Who are you, then?" asked the servant

"I am Ernestine Hartwich."

"Ah, indeed!" he said, with a slight bow; "that's another affair; you are invited. Permit me." With these words he conducted the passive child to the ladies, and announced, "Fräulein von Hartwich!"

The looks that were now fastened upon Ernestine were more piercing and burning, she thought, than the sun's rays. Those people never dreamed that the quiet little creature standing before them was possessed of a goal so delicate in its organization, so finely strung, that every breath of contempt that swept across it created a shrill discord, a painful confusion; they only looked with the careless disapproval, which would have been all very well with ordinary children, at the straight, black, dishevelled hair, the sunken cheeks, the wizened, sharp features of the pale face, the deep dark eyes, with their shy, uncertain glances, the lips tightly closed in embarrassment, and last, the emaciated figure in its faded short dress, and the long, narrow feet and hands. In the minds of most, an ugly exterior excites more disgust than sympathy; and, to excuse this feeling to one's self, one is apt to declare that the child or person in question has an "unpleasant expression," thus hinting at moral responsibility in the matter of the exterior, as if it were the result of an ugliness of soul which would, in a measure, excuse one's disgust. This was the case with all who were now looking at this strange child. It seemed as though they were drinking in with their eyes the poison that had wasted Ernestine's little body,—the poison of hatred which her being had imbibed from her father and her unnatural surroundings, and as if this poison reacted from them upon herself. The little girl felt this instinctively without comprehending it, and as she met, one after another, those loveless glances, it was as though a wound in her flesh were ruthlessly probed. She could not understand what the ladies whispered

to each other in French, but their tones intimated displeasure and contempt. She suddenly saw herself as in a mirror through their eyes, and she saw, what she had never seen before, that she was very ugly and awkward,—that she was meanly dressed; and shame for her poor innocent self flushed her cheeks crimson. In that single minute she ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,—that fruit which has driven thousands, sooner or later, from the Eden of childlike unconsciousness. She had entered upon that stage of life where a human being is self-accused for being unloved, unsought,—despises herself because others despise her,—finds herself ugly because she gives pleasure to none. Hitherto, whatever she had suffered, she had been at peace with herself; now she was at enmity with herself and the world. She felt suffocated; everything swam before her sight, and hot tears gushed from her eyes. Just then a tall, stately woman came out of the drawing-room. "Frau Staatsrätin," one of the ladies called to her in a tone of contempt, "a new guest has arrived!"

"Is that little Ernestine Hartwich?" asked the hostess, evidently endeavouring to conceal behind a kindly tone and manner her amazement at the child's appearance. She held out her hand: "Good day, my child; I am glad you have come. Will you not take some refreshment? You seem heated. You have not walked all the way? Yes? Oh, that is too much in such hot weather! Such a delicate child!" she said with a look of sympathy. She sprinkled sugar over some strawberries and placed Ernestine on a seat where she could eat them, but the rest all stared at her so she could not move a finger; she could scarcely hold the plate. How could she eat while all these people were looking on? She trembled so that she could not carry the spoon to her lips.

She choked down the rising tears as well as she could, for she was ashamed to cry, and said softly, "I would like to go home!"

"To go home?" cried the Staatsrätin. "Oh, no, my child; you have had no time to rest, and you are so tired! Come, my dear little girl, I will take you to a cool room, where you can take a little nap before you play with the other children." She took Ernestine by the hand and led her into the house and through several elegant rooms to a smaller apartment, with half-closed shutters and green damask furniture and hangings, where it was as quiet, fresh, and cool as in a grove. The air was fragrant, too; for there was a basket of magnificent roses upon the table.

Ernestine was speechless with admiration at all the beauty around her here. She had never seen such a beautiful room in her life, never breathed within-doors so pure an atmosphere. The Staatsrätin told her to lie down upon a green damask couch, which she hesitated to do, until at last she took off her dusty boots, heedless that she thereby exposed stockings full of holes, and when the Staatsrätin, with a kindly "Take a good nap, my child," left her, and she was alone, a flood of novel sensations overpowered her. The pain of the last few moments, gratitude for the kindness of the Staatsrätin, the enchantment that wealth and splendour cast around, every childish imagination,—all combined to confuse her thoughts. But the solitude of the cool room soon had a soothing effect upon her. The green twilight was good for her eyes, weary with weeping and the glare of the sun; she felt so far away from those mocking, prying glances; everything was so calm and quiet here that she seemed to hear the flowing of her own blood through her veins. She thought of the ironing-room and her father's gloomy chamber at home. What a difference there was! Oh, if she could only stay here forever! How can people ever be unkind who have such a lovely home! How can they laugh at a poor child who has nothing of all this!

But the Frau Staatsrätin, whose room this was, was kind. Ah, how kind! Yet so different from every one at home—so—what? So distinguished! Yes, every one at home seemed common compared with her, and Ernestine herself was common, although the lady had not treated her as if she were; she felt it herself; and was ashamed. What if the lady could have seen how naughty she had been to-day, how she had torn off her dress and stamped upon it, and scolded Frau Gedike?

She blushed at these thoughts, and resolved never again to conduct herself so that she should be ashamed to have the Frau Staatsrätin see her. A new sense was suddenly awakened in the child; but it fluttered hither and thither like a timid bird, terrified by her late surroundings, and not yet accustomed to all that was so novel about her.

The child never dreamed of the innate refinement that distinguished her from thousands of ordinary children; she was only crushed as she compared herself with the gentle lady and the gaily-dressed children upon the lawn; and this very feeling of shame, this disgust at herself, was a proof how foreign to her youthful mind was the absence of beauty in her exterior. In the midst of all these new, confusing thoughts, sleep overpowered her; she stretched herself out comfortably upon the soft couch. The beating of her heart, the painful pressure upon her brain, and the singing in her ears, grew fainter and weaker, and soothed her to slumber like a cradle-song.

On the lawn, in the mean time, nothing was talked of but the child, and her family. It was thought inconceivable that a Freiherr von Hartwich should allow his daughter to be so neglected. But then he had never been a genuine aristocrat; for his mother was of low extraction, as was proved by her return to her own rank of life after the death of her husband Von Hartwich. She soon after married the widower Gleissert, thus giving her son a master-manufacturer for a father, then purchased her husband's heavily encumbered factory, which she had bequeathed to her son with the condition that he should continue to keep it up,—a condition most distasteful to the heir.

Gleissert had a son by his first marriage, named Leuthold, who had studied, but had not been much of a credit to his brother, with whom he was living at present.

The conversation was interrupted by the arrival of an elderly gentleman, who drove up in a very elegant but very dusty carriage. The number of orders upon his breast testified to his high position, and the haste with which the hostess went forward to receive him, and the trembling of the hand which she extended towards him, showed of what importance his arrival was to her.

"Vivat!" he cried out to her. "Your Johannes takes the first rank--a splendid examination--there has not been such another for ten years!"

"Thank God!" said the Staatsrätthin, with a long sigh of relief.

"Yes, yes!" the kindly voice continued. "A superb fellow! I congratulate you upon such a son--not a question missed--not one! And answered with such ease and confidence, yet without the slightest particle of conceit. Deuce take it!--I wish I had married and had such a son. Come," he said, turning to a boy of about fourteen years of age, who had arrived with him, "perhaps you may one day be such another,--keep your eyes steadily upon Johannes. Permit me, dear madam, to present to you the son of my late friend, Ferdinand Hilsborn. He lost his mother a few months ago, and is now my adopted son."

The Staatsrätthin held out her hand to the boy, and said with emotion, "Although I never knew your mother, it pains me deeply to know that she left this world before she could enjoy such a moment as your adopted father has just given me by his tidings."

The gentle boy's eyes filled with tears as she spoke.

"Only think, my dear friends," said the Staatsrätthin, turning to the company, "Johannes never told me that this was his examination-day, that he might surprise me. I only learned it this afternoon from a few thoughtless words of my brother's. Our kind Geheimrath Heim has just brought me the tidings of his promotion."

The guests, with sympathy and congratulations, crowded around the proud mother, whose heart was too full to do anything but reply mechanically to their kind speeches.

"But, dear Frau Möllner," a Frau Landrätthin remarked maliciously, "was it not a little strange that your Johannes should not have told you of his examination-day?--certainly a mother has a sacred right to share such hours with her son."

"When a mother's claims are held as sacred as are mine by my son," replied the Staatsrätthin, with dignified composure, "he may well be left to do as seems to him best in such a matter. He wished to spare me hours of anxiety; and I thank him."

"The woman is blindly devoted to her son," the Landrätthin whispered to a friend.

"She is growing perfectly childish with maternal vanity," remarked another.

"But how can any one as wealthy as the Staatsrätthin allow her son to study?" said the Landrätthin.

"Yes, yes!" several others joined in, "he certainly need never earn his living in such a way. Why did she not buy him a commission? 'Tis too bad for such a handsome young man!"

"Yes, yes!" the old Geheimrath called out to the ladies, as if he had heard only their last words, "Johannes is a man,--a man, although hardly twenty years old! Only such a mother could have such a son!" And he laid his hand kindly upon the Staatsrätthin's arm.

"I wish every woman, left alone in the world, had such a friend as you are," she said, holding out her hand to him gratefully. "You are the best legacy left me by my dear husband. But where is Johannes? Why did he not come with you?"

"He sent me before to announce his arrival in the evening," replied the old gentleman. "He was obliged to make a few visits this afternoon. Ah," he sighed, as the Staatsrätthin handed him some refreshments, "it is a hot journey hither from town,--and a tedious one too,--but it is all the cooler and more delightful when you get here." He wiped his forehead and looked around the circle with the kindly, penetrating glance of a man who sees through the weaknesses of his fellow-men, but judges them with the gentleness of a superior nature. "Well, ladies," he asked good-humouredly, "did the old doctor interrupt a most interesting conversation? I cannot believe that sitting here so silent and serious is your normal condition. What were you talking of when I arrived?"

"Of nothing very pleasant, Herr Geheimrath," said the Landrätthin venomously; "we were only speaking of Herr von Hartwich and of his brother, who went wrong some years ago,--we don't know exactly how."

"I can tell you all about it, ladies," said the Geheimrath.

All instantly entreated him, "Oh, tell us; pray tell us!"

The Geheimrath began: "I was professor of medicine at Marburg when that strange occurrence took place. It was about ten years ago. Gleissert was then Extraordinarius in the university, and a young man of great ability. By his diligence and insinuating manners, he had won for himself the good-will of every one; and one of my colleagues, Hilsborn, the father of the boy whom I brought with me to-day, was his intimate friend. Their *spécialité* was the same, and Hilsborn filled the professorial chair which was the object of Gleissert's desire. Both were physiologists, but Hilsborn had the chair of special physiology, and Gleissert, as Extraordinarius, was occupied only with physiological chemistry. One day Hilsborn confided to me that he was upon the track of a new discovery. It would be of great importance to science if he could only succeed in carrying it out and establishing it upon a firm foundation. The difficulty in doing so lay principally in the procuring of the necessary material for his experiments,--a species of fish found only at Trieste, and which he could not procure alive. Hilsborn, a poor widow's son, lamented his want of means to travel thither and prove his hypothesis. I promised to obtain for him from my friend the minister, by the next vacation, a sufficient sum to meet his expenses, and I did so; but there was the same delay in the matter that is usual in such cases, and the necessary sum came so late that the journey had to be postponed until the following vacation, Hilsborn comforting himself with the thought that, although he must wait another six months, nothing but time would be lost. Suddenly Herr Gleissert married the daughter of a wealthy innkeeper, and begged for leave of absence for his wedding-trip. It was granted, and he was absent for four weeks. Strangely enough, his friend never heard from him during all that time; and, when he returned, we all noticed that he was unwilling to let us know where he had been. We thought he had private grounds for such unwillingness, and did not question him further. The term was over at last, and Hilsborn set off for Trieste. There he worked night and day with superhuman diligence. The result of his investigations was perfectly satisfactory, and he came back with the materials for a work which was sure to establish his fame and fortune. One day--I shall never forget it--he was in my room when the publisher sent me several new scientific papers. Hilsborn was looking through them carelessly, when suddenly he grew ashy pale. Among the pamphlets was one by Gleissert, embodying Hilsborn's idea. I was as shocked and astounded as he was. It could not be chance which led two men at the same time to so novel an idea, especially as Gleissert's course of study could not have directed him to such investigations as Hilsborn's. After a long and evident struggle with himself, Hilsborn confessed to me that he had communicated his ideas to Gleissert, and had frequently from the beginning discussed the matter thoroughly with him, without Gleissert's ever hinting even that the subject had occurred to him before. On the contrary, he was at work upon a paper upon a chemical subject, a paper which had never appeared. Difficult as it was for my high-minded friend to bring himself to it, the conviction was unavoidable that his friend had basely deceived him; for we discovered, upon close inquiry, that Gleissert's wedding-trip had been to Trieste, where he had pursued the investigations proposed by Hilsborn, and hurried on the printing of their results with the greatest haste. All outside proof of his contemptible treachery was perfect, and we were all morally convinced that he had *stolen* Hilsborn's idea. As pro-rector, I called him to a strict account. His defence was cunning, but not convincing. He did not attempt to deny the principal accusation brought forward, namely, the suspicious fact that he had induced Hilsborn to promise him not to impart his discovery to any one else, 'lest it should be used to his disadvantage.' He wished to be the sole depository of the secret, that there might be no witnesses to Hilsborn's proprietorship of the stolen idea. I ask this worthy assemblage," the old gentleman here interrupted himself with indignation, "if there can be any doubt of the baseness of the man in the matter?"

"No, most certainly not, Herr Geheimrath, most certainly not," was the unanimous reply.

"Well," the narrator continued, "so we thought. We, one and all, determined to avenge poor Hilsborn, thus deprived of all his fair hopes. It is true we had no legal weapon at our disposal. Our stupid laws punish forgers and counterfeiters, but they cannot recognize the theft of the coinage of the brain. There are jails for the hungry beggar who steals a loaf; but the rogue who robs a man of his thought, the painfully-begotten fruit of his mind after years of labour, goes free. We professors undertook to do what the law does not. We published the matter far and wide in the scientific periodicals, and all handed in our resignations to the government, stating that we held it inconsistent with our honour to remain the colleagues of such a man. Of course Gleissert was instantly dismissed in disgrace, and an academic career closed to him forever. I was called away from Marburg soon after; and, since I have lived in the capital as royal physician, I have lost sight of my former colleagues. Hilsborn died after some years, and his son is now my adopted child. What became of Gleissert I do not know."

"I can tell you," said a fine-looking man, whose resemblance to the Staatsrätthin declared him her brother. "I have informed myself about matters here, because I propose to purchase Hartwich's factories for my son. According to the schoolmaster, the fellow is playing a double part here also. It cannot be denied that under his guidance, and owing to his chemical discoveries, the factories have doubled in value since his arrival, for Hartwich is a very narrow-minded man, incapable, from his wretched avarice, of venturing upon any important speculation; but the way in which his brother contrives to be paid for his services is, to say the least, striking. For five years he contented himself with the salary of an overseer and free lodging--he bided his time. It came at last. One day Herr von Hartwich had a paralytic stroke, and the physicians declared that he had but few years to live. Gleissert made use of this time of helplessness, and threatened to leave the factory immediately and dispose of his discoveries elsewhere if Hartwich did not appoint him his heir. Hartwich, who of course stood more in need of him than ever, accepted his conditions, set aside that poor little girl as far as the law would allow it, and made a

will in Gleissert's favour."

"He's a thorough scoundrel, that Gleissert,--a legacy-hunter, then, besides. I should like to know what the fellow holds sacred?"

"Let us ask the child about him," cried one of the ladies.

"Yes, yes," joined in several others. "It would be so interesting. Pray, dear Staatsrätthin, bring the little girl here."

The Staatsrätthin looked at her watch, and, finding that Ernestine had slept nearly an hour, went to fetch her. She soon returned with her, and again the child had to run the gauntlet of those piercing glances. But her rest had refreshed her, and she was not so timid.

She heard the old Geheimrath whisper to his next neighbour, "How did that stupid Hartwich ever come to have such a clever child? Look--what a remarkable head. Pity the little thing is not a boy! something might be made of her!"

His words struck to her very soul. Again she heard the same phrase,--this time from a perfect stranger, "Pity she's not a boy!"

She straightened herself, as though she had suddenly grown an inch taller, and looked up at the thoughtless speaker as if to say, "Something shall be made of me!" Then she glanced wistfully at the children who were playing ball; if she were only among them now, she would show that she could be like a boy. The Landrätthin took her hand and said, "Well, my dear child, tell us something of your father. How is he now?"

Ernestine seemed surprised at the question.--"I did not ask him."

The ladies looked significantly at each other.

"Have you not seen him to-day?"

"Yes," she answered briefly.

"Do you not love your father very dearly?" the Landrätthin asked further.

Ernestine paused, and then said quietly and firmly, "No!"

Her interrogator dropped the child's hand as if stung by an insect. "An affectionate daughter!" she sneered, while the rest shook their heads. "Whom do you love, then?--your uncle?"

"I love no one at home; but I like my uncle better than my father--he never strikes me!" Ernestine answered.

"Like likes like, as it seems," one of the ladies observed; the rest nodded assent, and all turned away from Ernestine.

"She is an unfortunate child," said the Staatsrätthin; and arose to lead her to the children. "Angelika, here is Ernestine von Hartwich," she cried to her own little daughter, who was about nine years old; "take good care of her,--remember you are hostess!"

The children, towards whom the Staatsrätthin led her protégé, scattered like a flock of birds at the approach of a paper kite. Collecting then in single groups, they whispered together, and stared at the stranger. Ernestine found herself alone, avoided by all the gay crowd which she had just so fervently admired. She played the part of a scarecrow, but with the melancholy superiority that she was conscious that she was one. She knew that she had scattered the gay circle, that she had chased away the children, that they all avoided her; and again she felt as if she should sink into the ground, her feeble limbs trembled beneath the burden of derision and contempt that she was forced to bear. The Staatsrätthin cast a stern glance--which Ernestine noticed--at little Angelika, and said, "Give your hand to your new friend!"

Two of the larger girls giggled, and Ernestine heard them whisper, "A lovely friend!"

Angelika now approached Ernestine, and held out her soft little hand, but instantly withdrew it, stood mute before her for a moment, looking at the old brown straw hat that Ernestine held in her hand, then ventured one look into her eyes, and nestled confused and shy against her mother, who spoke seriously but kindly to the pretty child. She spoke in French, and Angelika answered in the same language. Ernestine was amazed. The little girl understood a strange tongue, and yet she was smaller than herself! She, who wanted to be as clever as a boy, did not even know as much as the little girl. And she had to endure their speaking before her as if she were not present; there she stupidly stood, well knowing that they were saying nothing good of her or they would have said it in German. She was weighed down by a double disgrace, that of her ignorance, and of knowing that they were speaking of her as if she were not there.

"Frau Staatsrätthin," she said in a quivering voice, "I will not stay here; the children do not like me; I am too bad for them!" She turned away, and would really have gone, but little Angelika's good heart conquered.

She ran after her and held her fast: "No, no, dear Ernestine; you are not too bad for us; you are only odd--different from the rest of us. Come, we will play with you!"

Then the Staatsrätthin took Angelika in her arms, and kissed her, saying, "That's right; now you are my little Angelika again, my good sweet child."

Ernestine looked on at this caress with amazement, and hot tears rose to her eyes. No one had ever been so kind to her. What happiness it must be to be so embraced and kissed! But it could never happen to her. Why not? Why did no one love her? Angelika, too, was only a girl: why was she not blamed for it? But she was so lovely, so beautiful; who could help loving her? Then her heart gave a throb as though it had been stabbed with a knife. "So beautiful," she repeated: "that is why every one pets and fondles her. It is not only that I am a girl; I am an ugly girl,--that is why no one loves me."

"Come," said Angelika. "Why do you look so? Come to the others." She led her to the fountain, around which the little company had gathered meanwhile. The children were amusing themselves with throwing stones at the ball of glass which the water tossed up and down. No girl or boy could hit it; the ball could only be struck while it was dancing on the top of the spray, and always fell before it was reached. The children laughed merrily at each other, and even the parents and grown people were interested and drew near. Ernestine looked on after her usual brooding fashion. She soon divined where the mistake lay. The stone was longer in reaching its aim than the ball lingered in the air. She quickly concluded that if a stone were aimed at the top of the fountain while the ball was still below, the latter in ascending would strike the stone. Hilsborn, the boy fourteen years old, had just declared that he could not understand why they could not strike it. Ambition took possession of her,--if she was ugly, she would show them that she was clever,--if she was only a girl, she would show them that she had force and skill. Involuntarily she looked across to the old Geheimrath, to ascertain if he saw her, and, as this seemed to be the case, she stooped down and hastily picked up a larger stone than the others, to insure success,--took the attitude which she had often observed in the village boys, and, with her feet planted firmly wide apart, swung her arm round three times to take sure aim, and hurled the stone with all her force towards the point in the air which the fountain reached in its leaping. Fate was cruel enough to favour her; the stone met the ascending ball, and so exactly that the latter was hurled out of the column of water, and, flying over the heads of the nearest bystanders, fell upon the head of a child, and the thin glass was shattered in pieces. The child screamed, more from fright than pain,--a commotion ensued,--the mother of the sufferer rushed towards her darling with frantic gestures,--the "wound" was examined, embroidered handkerchiefs were dipped in the basin of the fountain and bound around the head, while like a dark cloud there hovered over the sympathetic crowd a fear lest "some fragment of glass should have penetrated the skull." Ernestine stood there like a culprit; she felt convicted of murder, and when she heard from all sides, "What unfeminine conduct! How savage and rude! How can they bring up the girl to be such a tom-boy?" she was utterly confounded. She had been like a boy, and it was all wrong,--what should she do to please people and make them like her a little? Then the old Geheimrath approached her and unclasped the hands which she was silently but convulsively wringing. "Be comforted, you pale little girl,--there is no great harm done. In future you must leave such exploits to boys." Then he left her and examined the wound, and declared laughingly that he needed a microscope to see it. The mothers of the party, however, showed all the more sympathy and anxiety in the matter that they were chagrined that Ernestine had displayed more skill than their own children.

Ernestine's delicate instinct surmised all this. She looked at the buzzing throng of her enemies with aversion, as at a swarm of wasps that she had disturbed. She listened to the noise that was made about the slight accident with infinite bitterness, and thought how at home, when her father's blows had bruised her, no one cared anything about it. When a few days before she had fallen and cut her forehead, she had had to wash it herself at the brook. And even the old gentleman had said that she should leave such exploits to boys. Then must she not contend even with boys if she could? Why not? Why were they so superior? It was unjust! She clenched her little fists. When she grew up she would show people how great the injustice was! That she was resolved upon.

Then little Angelika came running up, calling the children together for a game. "Come, Ernestine," she cried. "You did not mean to do it,--come, play blindman's buff with us."

Ernestine did not venture to make any objection; she was so cowed that she did just as they told her, and let them make her "blind man," and tie the handkerchief over her eyes. She never complained, although when they were tying on the bandage they pulled her hair so that she ground her teeth with pain. And then they all began to tease her. One pulled at one of her long locks; another terrified her by putting beetles and caterpillars upon her neck,--the usual tricks of the game, that are easily borne when they are understood among little friends, but enough to drive a shy child, that does not know how to defend herself, to despair. No one would be caught by the ugly stranger, who had only been admitted to the game at the express desire of the hostess, and all felt themselves justified in playing all manner of tricks upon her. Ernestine caught no one, and ran hither and thither in vain. She was too conscientious to raise the handkerchief a little that she might see where she was,--that would have been acting a falsehood, and she never told falsehoods. Suddenly a hand seized her straw hat, and the worn old brim gave way, and fell upon her shoulders like a collar, to the great delight of the rest. It was a terrible loss for the poor child; for she knew that she should get no other hat at home, but would be

punished for her carelessness. She grasped after her tormentor, and seized her by the skirt; but she was one of the larger girls, and tore herself away, leaving a piece of her elegant summer dress in Ernestine's hands, which had clutched it tightly. She could not see how the girl ran to her mother, bewailing the injury to her dress; the bandage over her eyes beneficently shielded her from perceiving the angry looks of the ladies, and absorbed the tears which she was silently shedding for her straw hat. She stood motionless in the middle of the lawn, and did not know what to do,--for no children seemed to be near,--the game appeared to be interrupted. Suddenly she received a sound box on the ear. The younger brother of the aggrieved young lady had stolen up and avenged his sister. Then the tormented child was filled with indignation and rage that almost deprived her of reason. She seized the boy as he tried to pass her, and began to straggle with him. He forced her backwards, step by step. She could not free her hands to untie the bandage; she did not know where she was; she would not let go her enemy, for her sufferings had filled her little heart with hate and fury. There was a scream, and at the same instant she stumbled over something and fell; she kept her hold of her foe, but she felt that she was up to her knees in water,--she had stumbled into the basin of the fountain. The guests hurried up. First seizing the boy, who was still in Ernestine's grasp, they placed him in safety, and then they helped out the trembling child, who stood there with torn, dripping clothes, an object of terror and disgust to herself and to everybody else.

What mischief the horrible creature had done! She had almost fractured one child's skull, she had torn the expensive dress of another, and had tried to drown a third!

"Pray, my dear Staatsrätin, have my carriage ordered," said one of the injured mothers; "one's life is not safe here!"

"Supper is ready," replied the Staatsrätin. "Let me entreat you all to go into the house. I will answer for the lives of your children as long as they are my guests," she added with a slight smile.

The ladies all called their sons and daughters to them, to protect them from the little monster, who still stood there, bewildered and crushed, upon the lawn, looking on with a bleeding heart, as the children, laughing and joking, clung to their parents, whom they kissed and caressed with affectionate freedom. Every child there had a mother or a father who fondled it. She--she alone was thrust out and forsaken,--no one remembered that she was tired and wet through,--no one cared for her. The charming little Angelika was everywhere in requisition, and could not come to her,--the Staatsrätin was entreating her guests to pardon her for inviting a child whom she did not know; how could she possibly suppose that Herr von Hartwich had a daughter so neglected? Ernestine heard it all. She could no longer stand,--she fell upon her knees, and, sobbing violently, hid her face in her hands. The Staatsrätin was now free to come to her, and hastily approached.

"Oh, you poor little thing, you are wet through, and no one has thought of you," she cried kindly, at sight of Ernestine. "Go into the house quickly, and put on a pair of my little girl's shoes and stockings; my room is just to the right of the drawing-room. Go immediately,--do you hear? I cannot stay away from my guests."

"Forgive me,--it is not my fault!" stammered Ernestine.

"Indeed it is not, my dear child," said the Staatsrätin gravely. "I only pity you,--I am not angry with you! But hurry now and take off your dress,--I will send you your supper to my room. I know you would rather eat it alone."

And she hastened away to her guests just as a vehicle drove up and a strikingly handsome young man about twenty years old sprang out and hurried up to her. "My dear boy," she cried, "is it you? I did not expect you yet!"

The youth kissed her hand and bowed courteously to the rest. The Staatsrätin's eyes rested upon him with the pride with which a woman during her life regards two men only,--a lover and a darling son. The guests surrounded him with congratulations upon the day's success; Angelika danced around him, and the other children all wanted a hand or a kiss. There was quite a little uproar of delight.

Suddenly the Staatsrätin cried out in a startled tone, "Little Ernestine has gone! Heavens, that poor child wet through in the cool evening air! I cannot allow it! Johannes, my dear son, run quickly, bring her back."

"Who,--what?" he asked in amazement.

"But, my dearest Staatsrätin," said the mother of the boy whom Ernestine's shot had wounded, "how can you worry yourself about the little witch? she is tougher than our children."

The Staatsrätin glanced at her contemptuously, and, turning to Johannes, continued: "She is a pale, meanly-clad little girl, eleven or twelve years of age; you cannot miss her if you take the path to Hartwich's estate; she is his daughter. Hasten, Johannes, hasten!" He obeyed, while she conducted her guests to their sumptuous repast.

Meanwhile Ernestine ran through the grove as quickly as she could, and began to breathe freely as she lost sight of the house where she had undergone so much. But her strength soon



failed her. Her wet shoes and stockings clung like heavy lumps of lead to her weary feet and impeded her steps; she was conscious of gnawing hunger, and the first care for the future that she had yet felt in her short life assailed her,—she was afraid that it would be too late for her to get anything to eat when she reached home; it was growing dark, and it would be ten o'clock; Frau Gedike would be in bed. And that was not the worst that she had to look forward to; the straw hat, whose brim was still having around her neck,—the heavy, torn straw hat, would certainly bring her a severe chastisement. She sat down upon a mound on the borders of the grove, and took off the brim to see if she could contrive some way of fastening it to the crown, which she carried in her hand. The tree above her shook its boughs compassionately and threw down its leaves upon her dishevelled locks. She never heeded them,—the conviction lay heavy upon her childish heart that she could not possibly mend the hat before Frau Gedike would see it. Tear after tear dropped upon the fragments, and her large, swimming eyes glimmered in the moonlight from out her pale face like glow-worms in a lily-cup. Suddenly she started violently, for some one stood before her, and she recognized the young man whose arrival had just enabled her to make her escape. He looked at her silently for a while, and then said, "Are you the little girl who came to us to-day, and then ran away secretly?"

"Yes," stammered Ernestine.

"Why have you done so?" he asked further.

Ernestine made no reply. She was more ashamed before Johannes than before all the rest of the company. He was very different from every one else there,—so proud and strong,—he would despise her more than the others had done, for he was much handsomer and finer than they, and worth more than all of them. She did not venture to look up at him; she was afraid of meeting another of those glances that had so tortured her. Then the young man took her hand and said kindly, "Well, you pale little dryad, can you not speak? Will you go with me, or would you rather spend the night in your tree?"

"I want to go home!" said Ernestine.

"I cannot let you go home. I must take you to my mother. She is afraid you will take cold. Come!"

Ernestine shrunk back. "I cannot go there any more!"

"Why not? What have they done to you?"

"They laughed at me, and jeered me," cried the irritated child; "they despised me; and I will not be despised! I will not!"

The young man looked at her thoughtfully.

"Even if I am ugly," she continued, "and poor, and badly taught, and awkward, I will not be treated like a dog!" There was a tone of despair in her voice, her chest panted within her narrow dress, her teeth chattered with cold and excitement.

"Poor child!" said Johannes; "they must have used you ill,—but my mother was surely kind to you?"

"Yes, she was kind, but she was vexed with me at last; I heard her blaming me to the others. And I do not want to see her again,—not until I am grown up and can be as dignified and gentle as she is."

"Are you so certain, then, that you will one day be as gentle and dignified?" asked Johannes smiling.

"Yes, the schoolmaster says, and the old gentleman said too, that if I were a boy something might be made of me. Oh, something shall be made of me,—if I am only a girl. I will not always have boys held up to me; when I am grown up, they shall see that a girl is as good as a boy; all these bad, unkind people shall respect me; if they do not, I would rather die!"

"You queer child!" laughed Johannes, "it would be hard to tame you. But see, if you stay any longer here with me in the night air, you will take cold, and then you may die before you have carried out all your resolutions; think how bad that will be!"

With these words he attempted to lead the child away with him, but she snatched her hand from him and clung to the tree beneath which she had been sitting. "No, no," she breathlessly entreated, "dear sir, let me go—do not take me back again—please, please, not there!"

"Obstinate little thing, you must come," laughed Johannes. "Do you suppose I can go back without you, after having been sent to find you like a stray lamb? My mother would shut me up for three days upon bread and water if I did not bring you back; you would not like that, would you?"

"Ah, you are laughing at me. I will not go back with you, I will not," sobbed Ernestine.

"Will not? What is the use of such words from a weak little girl who can be easily carried in

arms?" With these words Johannes good-humouredly lifted Ernestine from the ground and placed her on his shoulder to take her back to the castle. But she succeeded in grasping an overhanging branch of the oak-tree just above her, and, before Johannes could prevent it, she had swung herself up by it, and was clambering like a squirrel from bough to bough.

"This is delightful!" cried Johannes, much amused; "you are really, then, a dryad in disguise? Such a prize must not escape; to be sure, I never dreamed to-day, when I passed my examination, that the new Herr Doctor's first feat would be to climb a tree after a wayward little girl; but the episode is much more poetic than marching up and down stairs, making my best bow to my old examiners." Daring this soliloquy he had taken off his coat and climbed into the tree.

But when he tried to seize Ernestine, she retreated to the extremity of the bough upon, which she was sitting, and was quite out of his reach; he could not follow her, for the slender branch creaked and drooped so, even beneath the child's light weight, that he momentarily expected it to break. The jest had become earnest indeed: if the little girl fell, she would fall a double distance,--the height of the tree and of the hill which the tree crowned. Quick as thought the young man swung himself down to the ground, and took his station where he might, if possible, receive Ernestine in his arms if she fell. For the first time he now saw how high she was perched, and a cloud before the moon just at the moment prevented his perceiving the exact direction that she must take in falling. His anxiety was intense. The responsibility of a human life was suddenly thrust upon him. If he did not succeed in catching the falling child, she would shortly lie before him, if not a corpse, at least with broken limbs. The steep hill, too, made it almost impossible for him to maintain a firm footing; wherever he planted his feet, they slipped continually. The blood rushed to his face; his heart beat audibly; with outstretched arms he gazed up at the child, who sat above him, all unconscious of her danger.

"Little one," he cried breathlessly, "the branch where you are sitting will not bear you! scramble back again, or you will fall!"

"I will not come down until you promise me not to carry me back! I shall not fall," she panted, and snatched at a stronger bough above her, but it sprang back from her grasp, leaving only a few twigs in her hand.

"I will promise anything that you want," cried Johannes in deadly terror, "only go back quickly to the trunk--quickly--quickly!"

The bough cracked, just as the child swung herself towards the trunk, and it fell to the ground,--leaving her clinging to the stump where it grew from the trunk; and when Johannes climbed up to her and she could at last reach his shoulder, she was trembling so with fright that she willingly clasped her thin arms around his neck. With difficulty he reached the ground again with his burden, his hands scratched and bleeding and his shirt-sleeve torn. He put down Ernestine, and, stepping back a pace or two, regarded her gravely; then, after wiping the moisture from his brow, he began in a serious tone of voice, "Do you know what I would do if I were your father?"

Ernestine looked up at him inquiringly.

"I would give you a taste of the rod, that you might learn not to frighten people so just for your own wayward whims!"

These words, prompted by the young man's irritation at the anxiety to which he had been subjected, had a fearful effect upon the child. She gave a piercing cry, and threw herself upon the ground. "Oh, nothing but blows, blows--he too, he too! Who will not strike me and abuse me? who is there to take pity upon me?" and she sobbed uncontrollably.

"Good heavens," said Johannes, half compassionately and half annoyed, "was there ever such a child! First you climb into a tree at peril of your life, just that you may gratify your self-will, and then a single word of blame crushes you to the earth. I never saw anything like it!" Saying this, he lifted her up and held her out before him in the moonlight, regarding her as one would some rare animal or natural curiosity.

"Here is a thing," he said, more to himself than to Ernestine, "so frail and delicate that you could crush it in your grasp, but there is such strength of will in the little frame that one is forced to yield to it, and such a wildly throbbing heart in the little breast that one is carried away by it in spite of one's self. I should like to know what odd combinations have produced this strange piece of humanity. Do not cry any more, little one; I will not harm you--what eyes the creature has! You are a remarkable child, but I would not like to have the charge of you--you would puzzle one well, and force and blows would have no effect upon you!"

With these words he put her down upon the ground again and picked up his coat to put it on. As he did so, he felt something hard in the pocket; he looked to see what it was, and drew out a book in a splendid binding.

"Ah," he cried gaily, "I had forgotten this. Can you read?"

Ernestine nodded. She was glad that she had not to say no; how ashamed she would have been!

"Come, that's right!" said the young man; and Ernestine was very proud of those first words of commendation, and determined instantly to be doubly diligent, that she might some time hear just such another "That's right!"

Johannes put the book into her hand. "There, you shall have that, that you may carry something pleasant home with you after such a dreary day. The stories are charming. I brought it out for my little sister Angelika, but I could not give it to her because I had to run after you. Now I am glad that I have it still and can give it to you."

"Yes--but Angelika?" Ernestine asked hesitatingly.

"She shall have another to-morrow. Take it, and read the story of the Ugly Duckling; that will comfort you when people are cross to you. Take it--why do you hesitate?"

The child took the book as carefully and timidly as if it were in reality a fairy book and would vanish at her touch. When she had it in her hands and it did not disappear, and she could really believe in her happiness in receiving such a present, she uttered a scarcely audible "Thank you very much!" but the look that accompanied the words touched Johannes.

"You do not often have presents?" he asked.

"Never!"

"Oh! you seem not to be very affectionately treated. Does not your mother ever give you anything?"

"I have no mother. She died because I was not a boy."

"A most remarkable cause of death," observed Johannes, half dryly, half compassionately.

"Ah, if I had a mother, everything would be different." And the large tears rolled down over her cheeks.

"Listen, little one," said Johannes kindly, after a pause. "I have a dear mother, and I will share her with you--half a mother's heart is better than none at all. Come home with me. You shall be my little sister, and you will be gentle enough when you know us better."

Ernestine shook her head decidedly. The thought of returning to the castle again filled her with dismay. "No, no, never!" she cried in terror. "Your mother would not love me--she could not! You promised me a minute ago not to force me to anything, and if you think now that I ought to do as you please, because you have given me the book, I would rather not have it. There, take it--I will not have it!"

Johannes rejected the offered book with some vexation. "Keep it," he said. "I gave it to you unconditionally. I only thought that my kindness had made you gentler and more docile, but I was wrong. You are not to be moved by kindness either. Sad to see a heart so early hardened!"

Ernestine stood motionless, with downcast eyes--she scarcely breathed; the emotions that agitated her were so novel, so different from anything she had hitherto experienced, that she struggled in vain to give utterance to them; her childish lips had no words to express them. She was pained, and yet her pain, although deeper than any she had already suffered, had no bitterness in it. She did not hate him who had caused it--she could have kissed his hand, and, falling at his feet, begged him to forgive her--but she did not dare to do so.

"Well," he asked, after a moment's silence, "shall I go home with you?"

Ernestine shook her head.

"Not that, either? Will you go alone?" he asked impatiently.

Ernestine nodded.

"Well, I have promised to do as you pleased, and I shall keep my promise, although I do not think it right to leave you to go home alone so late at night. Let me at least go with you across the fields? Are you grown dumb?"

Ernestine lifted to his her large melancholy eyes so beseechingly that he lost his composure. "You are enough to drive one insane, you enigmatical little creature! Who taught you that look--the look of an angel imprisoned by some evil magician in the body of a kobold? God knows what will become of you! You will not let me come, then? No? Are you not afraid? Nothing to be got out of you but a shake of the head! Well, go! I cannot force you. Good-night, then!" He held out his hand; she seized it, pressed it with passionate energy, and then ran across the fields as fast as her feet could carry her. Johannes let her run for some minutes, and then followed her at a distance; he could not allow the helpless child to go home without watching over her safety. She ran as if she had wings, without once looking round; but Johannes noticed that she kissed the book several times, and pressed it to her heart, as if it had been some living thing. When at last he came in sight of Ernestine's home, he stopped. "Heaven be merciful to the man who will one day take her for a wife!" he thought, and slowly turned away.

Ernestine entered the garden of her dreary home with a throbbing heart. A grumbling maid-servant opened the door for her. "You are late," she scolded. "That is just like you--first you wouldn't go, and then you don't want to come home. You always want to do something else than what you should."

Ernestine made no reply. "Can I have something to eat?" she asked briefly.

"To eat! Likely, indeed! Am I to go to the stable at ten o'clock at night and milk a cow for you? for there is nothing else that I can get. You know well enough that I have no keys!"

"Is Frau Gedike in bed, then?"

"If you were not so stupid, you might know that!"

"But I am hungry!"

"That serves you right; you should have eaten enough at the party. Of course they gave you something to eat?"

Ernestine was silent, and followed the maid into the room, where she hastily concealed her torn hat in the wardrobe. "My feet are wet," she said, shivering. "Give me some dry stockings."

"Of course you have been dragging through all the puddles, and then want dry stockings at this hour of the night! Get into bed as soon as you can; you will have no other stockings to-night. Good-night--I am going to bed myself." And the servant left the room, taking with her the dim tallow candle that she had in her hand, and Ernestine was left alone in the apartment, into which the moon shone brightly. Suppressed rage at the servant's coarse harshness burrowed and gnawed in the child's heart like a hidden mole. Everything that had lately happened vanished at this rude contact. Her soul had expanded at the first touch of a large, kindly nature, like a bud in the air of spring--the frost that now fell upon it was doubly painful. She was again the same forsaken, abused child whose vital energies were consumed by impotent hate of her tormentors. Had she really lived the last hour! Had any one really spoken so kindly to her--one, too, better and handsomer than all the others?

She caught up her book as if it were a talisman; it was real; it had not vanished; it was all true, then. And yet she had been so self-willed and cross to the kind, kind gentleman, and had not even told him how grateful she was; how he must despise her! He could not do otherwise. She understood now how different she must be before she could hope to win the liking of such a man as Johannes. How should she do it? She could not tell; but something stirred within her that exalted her above herself. She looked up to heaven in childlike entreaty, and prayed, "Dear God, make me good!" Then she pressed the book to her heart; it was her most precious possession, her first friend; and the desire took hold of her to see now what this friend would tell her. But she could not read by moonlight, and she dared not get a candle, for she slept next to Frau Gedike, who allowed no reading at night. She stood hesitating and looked sorrowfully at the beautiful binding, with its gay arabesques. Suddenly it occurred to her that there was always a night-lamp burning in her father's room; it was a happy thought. She drew off her wet boots with difficulty, and crept softly into Hartwich's apartment. The invalid was lying upon his back, sound asleep. He breathed and snored so loudly that the child was almost terrified; but she was determined to proceed, and slipped past the bed. She seated herself cautiously, opened the book in a state of feverish expectation, and of course turned to the story that Johannes had mentioned to her. The book contained the charming, touching tales of Hans Andersen. Ernestine, greatly moved, read the story of the Ugly Duckling. She read how it was abused and maltreated by all because it was so different from the other ducks, and how at last it came to be a magnificent swan, far finer and more beautiful than the insignificant fowls who had despised it. The impression made upon her by this story is not to be described. The poor duckling's woes were hers also, and as if upon swan's pinions the promise of a fair future hovered above her from the page that she was reading. "Shall I ever be such a swan?" she asked again and again. Her heart overflowed with new emotions of joy and pain, she covered her eyes with her thin hands and sobbed as if she would, as the saying is, "cry her soul out." Then her father awoke, and called out, "Who is there?" Ernestine hastened to him and fell on her knees at his bedside. She seized his hand and would have kissed it; he snatched it angrily away, but the tears that she had shed had melted her very heart. "Father, dear father!" she cried, "I have been very naughty and self-willed. Forgive, and love me only a little, and I will love you dearly!"

Hartwich turned his face to the wall, and growled, "Why did you wake me? Where's the use of slipping in here at this hour? Do you think I had rather listen to your stupid whining than sleep?"

"Father," cried Ernestine, taking his lame hand that he could not withdraw from her. "Father, do not send me away from you. I will be good,--help me to be so. I cannot be good if you are always harsh to me. I saw to-day how all the children have parents who love them. I only am disliked by every one, and yet I have a heart too, and would love to see kind looks and hear kind words. I will not cry ever any more, if you will not make me cry, and I will try my best to be just like a boy, that you may not be sorry any more that I am a girl. Ah, father, it seems to-day as if the dear God in heaven had told me what I long for. Love, father, love,--ah, give me some, and take pity upon your poor ugly child!"

The invalid had turned towards the child again, and was staring at her in amazement, with lack-lustre eyes; it seemed as if some unbidden feeling were struggling for utterance from the depths of his moral and physical degradation; his breath came quick, he tried to speak. Ernestine did not venture to look at him; a strong odour of brandy told her that her father's face was near her own, but this odour was so utterly disgusting to her that she involuntarily recoiled, and thus avoided the lips that would perhaps have bestowed upon her the first kiss that she had ever in her life received from them. The invalid must have known this, for he turned away again, muttering something unintelligible. After a long pause, he felt for a tumbler that stood on a table beside his bed, but it was empty. "I'm thirsty!" he said peevishly. "Shall I bring you some water, father?" asked Ernestine. The sick man made a gesture of disgust "No! but you can go up to your uncle and tell him to send me that medicine that he spoke of; he will know what I want. But ask him only,--do you hear?--him only. And tell no one that I sent you, or you shall suffer for it, I promise you. And now go quickly: I'm tortured with thirst!"

Ernestine arose from her knees, and looked at her father with the grief that we feel when we have lavished our best, our most sacred emotions upon an unworthy object. Hitherto she had required nothing of him; to-day, for the first time, as she looked around for some one to whose love, in her loneliness, she possessed a right, it had occurred to her that she had a father. She had turned to him with an overflowing heart, and had found a drunkard, who had resigned all claims to respect, both as a man and a father. Mute and crushed alike physically and mentally, she slipped out and up the stairs to her uncle. She was to bring brandy to the sick man, although she remembered that the physician had forbidden all heating drinks; but she must fulfil her father's commands, or receive the cruellest treatment at his hands. She entered her uncle's room, slowly and timidly; she was afraid of his wife. But Bertha had gone to bed; there was no one in the room but Leuthold, who was standing by the open window, to the frame of which he had screwed a long tube.

"Ah, little Ernestine, have you come so late to see your uncle?" he said kindly.

"Uncle, what is that?" asked Ernestine, forgetting her errand in her wonder at the strange instrument.

"That is a telescope," her uncle informed her.

"What are you doing with it?" she asked further.

"I am looking into the moon, my child."

"Ah! can you do that?" she cried, in the greatest amazement.

"Certainly I can. Would you like to look through it?"

"Ah, yes; if I only might!" whispered Ernestine, enchanted at the offer.

Leuthold lifted her upon the window-sill and adjusted the telescope for her. She was half frightened when she suddenly found the shining sphere, which she had always seen hovering so far above her in the sky, brought so near to her eyes. Her breast expanded to receive such an inconceivable miracle. She gazed and gazed, looking, breathless with the desire of knowledge, at the mountains, valleys, and jagged craters that were so magically revealed. The warm night air fanned her burning brow. Everything around her faded and was forgotten as the tired heart of the child throbbed with fervent longing for the peace of that new, distant world.

## **CHAPTER III.**

### **ATONEMENT.**

The day began slowly to dawn, for a dim, cloudy sky usurped the throne of departing night. Drops of rain fell here and there,--it was a cheerless morning. Not a cock crowed--not a bird was stirring. The dog remained hidden in his kennel.

Now and then an early labourer, with his spade upon his shoulder, would pass along the fence encircling Hartwich's estate, and would look over it with surprise at the strange bustle prevailing in house and court-yard. Doors were opened and shut; servant-maids, with eyes heavy with sleep, were running hither and thither; water was brought from the well; no questions or answers were exchanged. It was as if every one avoided speaking of what had occurred. A groom brought a saddled horse from the stable, mounted, and galloped furiously in the direction of the estate of the Staatsrätin. "Is there a fire anywhere?" a couple of peasants shouted after him, but he made no reply. Without a word, he galloped across field and moor, never drawing rein until he reached

the garden of the Staatsrätin. He tugged violently at the bell until a sleepy servant came to the door and asked him angrily what he wanted.

"Wake up the Geheimrath Heim, he is here on a visit. The village doctor sent me,--a human life is at stake!"

The servant opened his eyes wide, and stared inquiringly at the groom.

"Yes, yes; quick, be quick! Hartwich has beaten his child so, we think she is dying. The barber says perhaps the Geheimrath can save her."

"Good gracious, that is terrible!" cried the horrified servant, and ran to call the old gentleman.

The Geheimrath was up in a moment; without losing time by a single word, he dressed himself, mounted the groom's horse, and rushed off to the scene of the disaster.

Before the door of the house, awaiting his arrival, stood the village barber-surgeon, who received him with the deepest reverence. "Herr Geheimrath, I pray you to excuse me,--but, as I knew you were in the neighbourhood, I conceived it my duty to entreat your assistance before sending for the physician, who lives three leagues off. The case seems to me a serious one."

"Never excuse yourself," said Heim, taking off his hat and coat in the hall; "it is my duty to aid wherever I can. But, in Heaven's name, how did it happen? Where is the child injured?"

"She has a wound in her head, and I fear the skull is fractured," replied the barber, opening the door of the room leading to Hartwich's apartment. The Geheimrath heard a loud sobbing as soon as the door was opened. He entered, and before him lay the invalid, weeping and wailing like a maniac, with the child stretched out stiff and corpse-like upon the bed; her eyes were closed and deep-sunk in their large sockets; her pale lips were slightly parted,--it was a sorry sight. Hartwich supported her bandaged head upon his arm, and, weeping loudly, pressed kiss after kiss upon her white brow.

"Ah, Herr Geheimrath!" he shrieked, "come here! I am a wicked, miserable father. I have killed my child! I am a man given over to the worst of all vices,--drunkenness; it is my only excuse. Accuse me; have me sent, crippled as I am, to jail,--I care not; but bring my child to life, or the sting of conscience will drive me mad!"

The Geheimrath took the passive hand of the child and felt the pulse. "It is greatly to be regretted that your conscience was not as active before the deed as it appears to be now that it is committed," he said coldly and sternly, as he removed the bandage from the child's head.

"Oh, oh," wailed Hartwich, shutting his eyes, "do not do that here! I cannot see the blood; I cannot see the wound; it will kill me!"

"What! you could make the wound and cannot look at it!" said the Geheimrath inexorably, beginning to probe the wound. "It is a most serious case," he said. "Has the child moved at all?"

"Yes, yes; oh, heavens, yes; until she grew so rigid!" gasped Hartwich, seizing Ernestine's hand to kiss it. Then he looked up at the physician in mortal terror. "How is it? must she--oh, Christ! must she die?" And again he broke out into the loud childish weeping peculiar to persons unnerved by sickness or drink.

"Control yourself," ordered the Geheimrath. "I cannot come to any decision yet. The injury to the skull is not fatal; what the effect of the concussion will be, I cannot tell. But, with the child's delicate constitution----" He shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah, you give me no hope," moaned Hartwich. "Ernestine, wake up! only look once at your father, your cruel, wicked father! Ah, Herr Geheimrath, I disliked the child because she was so weak and ugly. If she had only been a fine, healthy girl, I might perhaps have been reconciled to having no son; but I was ashamed of her, and silenced the voice of my heart. Oh, these hands, poor little hands, and these pale, thin cheeks!--how could I ever strike them! God be merciful to me, miserable sinner that I am!" And he beat his breast fiercely.

The Geheimrath looked at him and shook his head. "Do not excite yourself so. It does your daughter no good, and only injures yourself."

"My daughter! my daughter!" repeated Hartwich. "Oh, I have never treated her as such. She seemed to me a changeling, left in her cradle by some spiteful witch in place of the boy I so coveted. Now, when I am in danger of losing her, I feel that she is my child indeed."

"The truth is as old as the world, that nature avenges the transgression of the least of her laws," replied the physician. "You have sinned grievously against the mighty law of paternal affection, and now it demands its rights with resistless authority. Let me entreat you to testify your repentance by the tenderest care of the sick child, and permit me to call some one to put her to bed,--it should have been done long ago."

"Ah, must she be separated from me?" moaned Hartwich. "I long to beg her forgiveness when she comes to herself."

"You will hardly be able to do that very soon," said the Geheimrath, ringing the bell.

Frau Gedike made her appearance, as gentle and submissive as she had previously been harsh and overbearing to Ernestine.

"Assist me in carrying this child to her bed," said Heim, carefully placing his arm beneath the rigid little body to raise it up.

"Oh, I beg of you, Herr Geheimrath, do not trouble yourself," cried Frau Gedike, evidently greatly humbled. "I can carry the poor child without help."

Heim glanced at her keenly, and then quietly directed her to show him the way.

Frau Gedike ran as quickly as she could across the hall to the door of a back room. "Permit me," she said, and tried to slip past the Geheimrath into the apartment. "Excuse me for one moment, that I may put things a little to rights. Everything is in disorder, I rose so early this morning."

But Heim said authoritatively, "Follow me!" and stepped past her into the chamber, carrying his silent burden. Here he stood still in astonishment. It was a kind of wash-room,--at least there was a huge pile of soiled linen in one corner. Broken furniture and household utensils were scattered about; there were no curtains to the windows; hundreds of flies were buzzing about the dirty panes; the air of the close room was stifling. In one corner stood a child's crib, which must have dated from Ernestine's fifth or sixth year. It contained an old straw bed, a dirty pillow, and a heavy, tawdry coverlet. Frau Gedike bustled about, endeavouring to conceal as well as she could the miserable condition of the room from the penetrating eye of the Geheimrath, but in vain.

"Am I to lay the wounded child in this bed? Is she to be nursed in this hole?" he asked in a tone which boded no good to the housekeeper.

"Gracious me!--we have no other room and no other bed. I have often pitied the dear child, but Herr Hartwich is so saving--he never buys anything new," she declared.

The Geheimrath went towards a half-open door leading into another and larger apartment. Here the air was pure, the furniture decent, and there was a comfortable bed in the corner.

"Is this your room?" asked the Geheimrath sharply.

"It is, Herr Geheimrath. It is just as my predecessor left it."

"Make up the bed instantly with clean linen."

Frau Gedike stared in surprise.

"Instantly!" repeated the Geheimrath, in a way that admitted of no remonstrance, and seated himself, that he might more conveniently hold his poor little charge. Frau Gedike brought clean sheets and made up the bed.

"Where shall I sleep?" she asked with suppressed rage: "there is no other sleeping-room in the whole house!"

"You can try Ernestine's bed, and see what it is to lie cramped up upon a rack!" replied the old gentleman dryly. Then he wrinkled his bushy brows sternly, and continued: "I doubt whether you will need a bed here, for I will do my best to have you leave this house before night."

"Oh, Lord, have mercy on me! Herr Geheimrath, what have I done? What fault can you find with me?" whined Frau Gedike as she smoothed the pillows.

Heim arose, and, as he laid the lifeless little body carefully upon the bed, said quietly, "Look at the room which you have allowed this frail child to occupy, the bed in which you have cramped her poor little limbs, and then say whether anybody of the least humanity could fail to condemn you!" He then left her, and called the barber-surgeon that he might take the necessary steps for providing careful attendance for the child.

Frau Gedike ran out crying, and the Geheimrath continued to provide for his patient's comfort with the quiet decision of an experienced physician and the gentleness of a tender-hearted man.

After half an hour, Ernestine began to show signs of life; but she did not return to consciousness. She cast a vague, wandering glance around, then closed her eyes and muttered broken, unintelligible words. At last she sank anew into a state of stupor resembling slumber. The Geheimrath left the surgeon with her and went to Hartwich, who, in the mean while, had been visited by Leuthold. Leuthold had been wakened at last by the unwonted bustle in the house, and had stolen from his bed to see if his brother were perhaps dying,--a piece of news which would have been a grateful morning greeting to his wife. He was disappointed. The only comfort was that all this excitement would inevitably accelerate Hartwich's death; Ernestine's fate was a matter of perfect indifference to him, but he was greatly disturbed by the intelligence that Heim had been called in. He could not bear the man, whose presence brought out clear and distinct, as with some chemical preparation, the stains upon his name that had apparently faded away. He

therefore determined to leave home for a few days, in order to avoid a meeting with the witness of his disgrace; but he would leave his wife on guard in the lower story, under the pretence of helping to nurse Ernestine. Her presence would naturally hinder the physician from saying anything to Hartwich to his, Leuthold's, detriment. He slipped up-stairs to bid his wife arise quickly; but the indolent woman was too long about it for his wishes or his plans.

Scarcely had he left Hartwich when Heim entered the room. "What news do you bring me?" Hartwich cried out.

"Nothing hopeful as yet. She showed signs of life when we applied ice-bandages; but the lethargy into which she fell immediately is alarming. I cannot give you any hope before the end of three days."

Hartwich struck his damp forehead in despair. "It will kill me! it will kill me!"

The Geheimrath seated himself by his bedside, took a pinch of snuff from a golden box adorned with a miniature of the king, and calmly regarded the unhappy man. "Now tell me, Herr von Hartwich, how it all occurred. I should like to know. Besides the wound on the head, the child has bruises on her shoulders and arms that are by no means fresh. She seems to have been most cruelly treated!"

The invalid was silent for awhile, and then said, "Yes,--ah, yes, we have all abused her; but God knows I never intended this last! I was sound asleep yesterday evening when Ernestine came home and crept in to me here and waked me with her sobs."

"Poor child! she had cause to weep," the Geheimrath interrupted him.

"Yes, yes,--but I did not understand that yesterday. When I awoke, I was thirsty, and sent her up to my brother to bring me a little--a little--a few drops----"

"To bring you liquor," the Geheimrath completed the sentence.

"Yes, I confess it," Hartwich continued; "but in her uncle's room there was a telescope, and she looked through it and forgot her father's errand. I waited and waited, with my throat on fire, but she did not come. I grew more and more impatient; and when, at the end of a full half-hour, she came down without what I had sent her for, I seized hold of her to beat her; she clung to my lame arm so that the pain made me wild,--and in my senseless rage I flung her off and hurled her away with my healthy arm;--may it be crippled forever! She fell backward, and struck the back of her head first against the marble top of my wash-stand,--you can see the blood there still,--and then upon the floor, where she lay like one dead. Everything grew black before my eyes, as it did when I had the stroke. I rang for my people; no one came. I could not move,--could not leave my bed to go to the child. I saw her blood flow, I heard her gasp as if in the death-agony, and I lay here a miserable cripple, thinking that I had killed my child. Oh, Herr Geheimrath, at such a time our inmost selves are revealed to us; in such agony one learns to pray. At last, after repeated ringing and calling, my good-for-nothing servants made their appearance. Herr Geheimrath, I cannot tell you how I felt when they laid the child upon my bed,--my poor, beaten child. As the little bleeding head lay on my arm, it seemed as if my heart opened wide with the gaping wound, and, for the first time, real, warm, paternal affection gushed from it. Before, when I chastised the child, she was all defiance and stubbornness; then I did not care if I hurt her; but now, as she lay mute and crushed before me, she spoke to me in a language that recalled me to myself. And, Herr Geheimrath, I have not been myself,--I have drunk myself down to the level of a brute; and the poor victim of my fury has recalled me from my degradation."

The Geheimrath listened to the speaker with growing sympathy. When he had finished, he took his hand. "You are right, Herr von Hartwich, to be frank with me. Men who are not evil by nature can best excuse their evil deeds by frankness, for their intentions are seldom as bad as their actions. Compose yourself,--your condition is indeed worthy of compassion. If the physician might be allowed to usurp in a measure the confessor's chair at such a time as the present, I would say for your consolation, in the event of the worst termination to the child's illness, that your irresponsible condition, which rendered you incapable of appreciating the consequences of your act, and which would excuse you before an earthly tribunal, should have some weight with your inward judge. Besides, you have certainly acted paternally towards the child in one respect," he added with significance. "You have accumulated a fine property for her. That will enable her to occupy such a position in the world as will make her life, if it is spared, a happy one."

Hartwich seized Heim's hand and whispered quickly and anxiously "Ah, my dear sir, I have not done this; it now lies heavy on my soul that I have not been a father to the child in any way!"

"What do you mean?" cried Heim with apparent surprise. "You have not set Ernestine aside in favour of another?"

Hartwich looked anxiously towards the door. The Geheimrath understood his look, and opened it,--no listener was near. Hartwich then confessed all to the Geheimrath that the latter already knew. Heim shook his head. "It is incredible that a father should do so by his own child; but, now that your sense of duty is aroused, you will of course atone for your injustice?"

"Ah, Herr Geheimrath, if I only could, how gladly would I do so! If my poor Ernestine recovers,



I would gladly make over to her the whole estate during my lifetime. Tell me, how shall I begin to make amends? how shall I begin to atone to the child for all the misery I have caused her? I will do anything, everything, if I only can. Assist me, advise me!"

"I think," began the Geheimrath with quiet decision, "that the case is very simple. You can make a new will and declare the other void. If Ernestine recovers, it is very doubtful whether she will be anything more than a poor, sickly invalid during her entire lifetime. Such an unfortunate being needs money,--a great deal of money; for sickness is an expensive affair. The child was naturally healthy. She has been weakened by neglect and harsh treatment. You left her to a worthless housekeeper, who denied her everything that a child should have in order to be strong, and in her weakened condition you have dealt her a death-blow from which she can hardly recover. You must be conscious that, since you have almost destroyed Ernestine's life, you ought at least to provide her with the means of making her invalid existence as endurable as possible, and indemnify her for a neglected childhood by every enjoyment that wealth can procure."

Again Hartwich broke out into loud lamentations. "Yes, yes, you are right,--you are a man of honour, Herr Geheimrath. But how can I set aside my will without encountering Leuthold's bitterest hate? Ah, you do not know what a dangerous enemy he is."

"I know, I know," Heim interrupted him, nodding his head; "he is a bad fellow; but tell me, Herr von Hartwich, what do you fear from him? Will not the curse of your unfortunate child, if she lives, be harder to bear than the hate of such a miserable wretch as your step-brother?"

Hartwich writhed and turned in his bed. "If I had only sold the factory! If he should learn that I had disinherited him, he is quite capable of preventing the sale out of sheer revenge, ruining the whole business for me, and then the poor child would be deprived of half of her property!"

The Geheimrath held his snuff-box in one hand, clasped the other over it, and looked at Hartwich with a smile.

"If that is why you hesitate, there is no cause for fear. The factory is as good as sold; for Herr Neuenstein, the brother of the Staatsrätin Möllner, is most anxious to purchase it for his son, who is a chemist;--he knows your brother, and would easily see through his wiles. Besides, Gleissert need know nothing about it for the present. Make the will secretly. I will give you pen and ink when I have written a prescription for Ernestine. Send your housekeeper off immediately, that we may have no spies about; for I believe her to be capable of any treachery, and Ernestine must not be left in her charge. This afternoon I shall come again, and you can put the document into my hands, where it will be safe. Well--how does the plan please you?"

"Yes, yes," cried Hartwich passionately. "That is right. That I can do. Ah, it is all that is left for me to do for my child, and it shall be done. Send Gedike away;--get me pen, ink, and paper,--it must not be delayed an hour longer than is necessary. I feel I may die at any moment. Remove this burden from my soul, and I shall die more peacefully!"

Heim went instantly to procure writing-materials, for he knew better than the invalid himself that there must be no delay in the matter. The servants brought him what he wanted, and he looked in upon Ernestine for a moment, while the surgeon went for more ice for the bandages. She was lying there moaning and groaning restlessly. He looked at her lovingly, and said to himself, "Poor child! There are better days in store for you." Then he repaired to Frau Gedike, whom he informed of her dismissal, and appointed Rieka, the elder of the maid-servants,--a girl whose face pleased him,--Ernestine's attendant.

When he returned to Hartwich, he found him in a state of great excitement. His face was purple, the veins greatly swollen.

"Where have you been so long?" he cried out as the Geheimrath entered. "I was in agony for fear I should have another stroke. I felt just as I did before! There, give me the writing-materials--it would be terrible if I were to die now, before I had atoned for my crime. Pray help me up, Herr Geheimrath,--but do not touch my lame arm,--oh, this pain! There, there,--thank you. Now the pen. I have thought it all over while you were away. I will arrange it so that he cannot say I broke my word to him, and he cannot harm Ernestine if I should die shortly. Ah, air!--Herr Geheimrath,--open a window! After I have written--I shall be easier. Then my mind will be relieved."

He spoke in breathless haste, while the perspiration stood in beads upon his forehead.

"Be calm, be calm!" said the Geheimrath soothingly. "You are not going to die now, but you will make yourself ill with this excitement."

"Ah, you are kind,--you wish to console me;--but I feel that last night will be my death--there is no time to lose!"

He dipped the pen in the ink, and looked towards the door. "If only Leuthold does not come,--all is lost if he does. Bolt it, I pray, that he may not surprise us. Tell me, will it not be best to make him Ernestine's heir? Then I shall not be quite false to my promise,--it is, alas, alas, more likely that the poor little lamb will die than that she will recover; then all will be as it was, and the property will be his,--and, if she lives, he must have a good legacy."

"Yes, yes," said the Geheimrath good-humouredly, "give the fellow what you think you owe him. But remember that he inherits from Ernestine only in case of her dying unmarried; for if it be God's will that she lives, marries, and has children, you must not deprive those children of the property. That might make her very unhappy."

"Yes, you are right,--I will insert that clause. But the guardianship,--what do you think? I must make Leuthold her guardian, or he will be terribly angry!"

The Geheimrath shook his head. "I would not do that!"

"Oh, yes, Herr Geheimrath. It would look too ugly, and the child will be in no kind of danger. He always liked Ernestine, and stood up for her; and he will be afraid, too, not to fill his post of guardian conscientiously, for he will be under the supervision of the orphans' court."

"Then make her minority as short as possible. For my satisfaction, have it expressly stated that she shall be of age at eighteen. Such precaution is necessary with men of Gleissert's stamp. According to our laws, a father can declare his child of age at eighteen. Her property can remain in the orphans' court until then, when it can be placed at her own disposal."

"Yes, yes, I agree to all that,--then it is all settled! God be thanked!" Hartwich drew a long sigh of relief, and dipped the pen in the ink. But scarcely had he attempted the first stroke when he dropped the pen in despair and cried out, "Merciful Heaven! I cannot form a letter!"

The startled Geheimrath looked at the paper. The letters were entirely illegible.

For one moment the old gentleman lost all hope,--while Hartwich sobbed and groaned like a child. Was he to fail thus, just when the goal was reached? The Geheimrath regarded the invalid thoughtfully, pondering how long a delay his condition would permit. Then he made up his mind, and said with composure, "I will arrange it all; do not be at all anxious. I will drive to the nearest town and procure the services of a couple of lawyers, and you shall dictate your will. I will be back again in two hours. Tell me when Leuthold is used to be away from home, that he may know nothing of our plans."

"At the time of your return he will be at the factory. If you go on foot as far as the corner of the wood, he will not see you. Herr Geheimrath, you are a true man,--my child's benefactor and mine. How shall I ever thank you?"

"There is no need of thanks,--no need at all! I am only doing my duty as a man and a Christian." And the prudent old physician concealed the writing-materials and hurried out.

Hartwich cast his blood-shot eyes upward and prayed, "Let me live until it is complete, O God,--only until then!" These words he repeated again and again, while his heart beat more wildly and irregularly, and his veins grew blue and swollen. It was the mortal agony of a doomed wretch who feels that a short time will bring him to the bar of an inexorable judge, and who longs to throw off at least a part of his burden of guilt. Of course such anguish would hasten his death.

Frau Bertha came down soon after the Geheimrath's departure, and would have stayed in Hartwich's room, but his state terrified her. She saw that the end was near, and she had not the courage to look on at the death-agony. In her heart she felt herself a murderess, because she had so ardently desired his death. Indeed, fate often makes us by our silent desires accomplices in its severity, and we are stricken with vain remorse when our secret hostility to another suddenly takes form and shape in events. Who has not at some time in his life secretly nourished a selfish desire, and, after it has been crushed down, fervently thanked Heaven for not cursing him with a granted prayer? Or, if the evil has been permitted, who has not in his remorse half believed that his secret desire helped to work the mischief that has been done? Frau Bertha's perceptions were not very delicate. She wished for Hartwich's death that she might enjoy his wealth, and thanked Heaven that it would shortly be hers; but she was too much of a woman not to shudder at the moment of the fulfilment of her evil desires and see an avenging demon in Hartwich's dying form. She resolved, therefore, to disobey her lord and master, and avoid the death-bed. The cogent reasons that Leuthold had for enjoining constant watchfulness she could not comprehend; and therefore, as soon as Leuthold left for the factory, she betook herself to her apartments again.

Hartwich was now left upon his burning couch, devoured by anxiety. The minutes crept slowly on; every quarter of an hour, news of Ernestine was brought him; there was no change for an hour, and then Rieka came in suddenly and cried, "Ah, sir, Ernestine is awake and wants some book; we cannot understand what one, or what she means, she speaks so indistinctly, and whatever we get her is wrong. What is to be done?"

"Send a servant into town to buy every child's-book that is to be had,--let her want for nothing,--do you hear? for nothing! Has she not mentioned me?"

"Oh, no," replied the servant; "she is not herself,--she is continually moaning for her book!"

"Then get her what she wants, as quickly as possible,--only be quick!"

The servant left the room, and the sick man was left to his brooding thoughts again. It worried and tormented him that Ernestine would have to wait several hours for what she wanted. In a few

moments he rang again for the maid, who reiterated that the child was still asking for her book. The invalid grew still more restless, and at last sent for the surgeon, who was still with Ernestine.

"Lederer," he called out upon his entrance, "bleed me! Don't you remember how much good it did me?"

"Not for worlds, sir!" said Lederer. "I could not do it without a physician's orders. There seems no reason at all at present for such an extreme remedy!"

"What do you know about it?" cried Hartwich angrily. "I tell you I know I need it. There is a perfect hammering going on inside my head. You must bleed me, or I shall have another stroke!"

"Ah, sir, believe me, you are needlessly alarmed," said the barber. "Have some compassion upon a poor man like myself, who cannot take upon himself such a responsibility with a patient of your importance. I would gladly do it if I could! Have patience, I pray you, until the Geheimrath comes back!"

"You are a miserable coward!" screamed Hartwich, foaming with rage.

"For Heaven's sake compose yourself, sir," the terrified surgeon interrupted him; "I will obey you, but I must first go home and fetch my bandages. Perhaps by the time I get back the Geheimrath will be here!"

"Then go," muttered Hartwich, who already repented his violence, which he feared might prove an injury to him. "But first lift me up a little. Ah! if I could only put my feet out of bed I should certainly feel easier. Try if you cannot lift them out; take out the lame leg first--so--that's right--oh, it's hard. 'Tis better to have wooden legs--they can be unstrapped and taken off--but to have to drag about everywhere a dead, useless limb is horrible! 'tis a dog's life, and I care not how soon it is over, but not just yet--I must do my duty first. Now go, Lederer, and come back soon."

The barber had helped him so that he was sitting upright in bed, with his lame foot upon a cushion. He looked around the room, and noticed Ernestine's book upon the table. "What is that?" he asked. Lederer handed it to him. He turned over the leaves, and his face suddenly brightened. "That must be the book that Ernestine is asking for--some one must have given it to her yesterday at the party. Good heavens! now I understand why the poor little thing crept in here so late last night; she wanted to read by my lamp! Ah, how dearly she paid for her innocent pleasure! Go, my good Lederer, and take the book to the child. Tell Rieka to come and let me know what she says to it, and then you will get the bandages--will you not?"

"Most certainly, sir, as soon as possible!" said Lederer, and hurried away with the book.

A clock struck nine. Hartwich sighed profoundly. "Only nine. Heim cannot come for an hour yet. The lawyers will need time for preparation. O God--Thou wilt not punish that poor, innocent child so severely as to let me die before her rights are secured--Thou wilt not!" He tried in vain to fold his hands, and at last dropped them wearily upon his crippled knees.

Suddenly he imagined that his right hand also was stiffening. His incapacity to write could not have resulted merely from want of habit. He moved his arm up and down to try it--whether in imagination or reality, it certainly felt heavier. It was not the effect of gout, as was the case with his left hand; this could only proceed from an effusion of blood upon the brain. Cold drops of moisture stood upon his forehead; he tried to wipe them away with his right hand; in vain, he could not lift it so high. Thus he sat helpless and alone, every limb crippled. He thought of his child's thin, white hands; how blest he should be if they could now supply the place of his own to him, wipe his damp brow and hand him refreshing drink! He thought how forsaken and alone he sat there awaiting death, and that it was all his own fault; and again he sobbed convulsively. Then Rieka entered.

"Well, was that the right one?" asked Hartwich.

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Thank Heaven! Did she not mention me?"

"No, sir; she said nothing. She only took the book and kissed it, then folded it in her arms and went to sleep again."

"If the child does not forgive me before I die, I shall have no rest in my grave!" moaned Hartwich. "Rieka, I am losing the use of my right arm too. Look at me. Am I not altered?"

"Oh, no, you always look just as purple!" said Rieka consolingly.

"Give me a mirror and let me see myself!"

Rieka handed him a mirror, and he looked at himself long and anxiously. "I look fearfully. Can you not hear how indistinct my speech is?"

Rieka put away the mirror. "Oh, your tongue is always heavy when you have been drinking.

Don't be worried about that."

"I have not drank a drop to-day, you insolent girl!" stammered Hartwich irritated. "Go back instantly, and take good care of the child, or----"

"Yes, sir, I shall do my duty without threats, but I can't mend the mischief that you have done!" And she slammed the door behind her.

"And I must bear this from an ignorant peasant!" wailed Hartwich. "How they will abuse me to my child, if she recovers! Oh, oh, I deserve it all; 'tis wretched,--wretched! But I must be calm. I must not be excited." Thus he murmured, with trembling lips, exerting all his energy to repress his excitement, and to force the breath regularly from his laboring breast.

Again the clock struck--ten this time.

"They must soon be here now!" thought Hartwich. "If I can only keep my head clear!"

The wretched man in his anguish now exercised his mental faculties in every way that he could devise, repeating the formula which he had composed for his will a hundred times, that it might be so stamped upon his mind as to be forthcoming even in his last moments.

At last steps were heard in the hall.

"It is Lederer with the bandages," he thought, suddenly remembering his desire to be bled. But there were several people there. It must be the lawyers. The door opened. "Ah, thank God! thank God!" Hartwich stammered, and fainted.

"I thought so!" cried the Geheimrath. "If you had only bled him, or at least remained with him!" he continued to the terrified barber, who entered at the same time. "Be quick now; give me that case; bring me some ice from the child's room," he ordered; and, while he spoke the lancet had done its work, and the dark blood was flowing from the arm.

"Pray be ready, gentlemen," he said as he was bandaging the arm; "I believe the sick man will come to himself in a few moments. You will find writing-materials there in the corner."

The gentlemen took their seats, and arranged a table for writing from the sick man's dictation. The surgeon brought the ice; it was laid upon Hartwich's head, and, as the Geheimrath had prophesied, he soon came to himself. He looked around him with astonishment "Am I still living?" he feebly asked.

"Certainly, certainly," said the Geheimrath, cheerfully; "it was only a slight attack."

"God of mercy," gasped Hartwich, "Thou art all compassion! My memory is still perfect. Are the lawyers here?"

One of them arose, and approached the bed.

"We are here, Herr von Hartwich, and await your directions."

"I am still of sound mind,--indeed I am," Hartwich insisted with childlike eagerness.

"The intention with which you have summoned us would certainly not indicate the contrary," said the lawyer gravely, signing to his companion to prepare to write.

"And I declare that this last decision of mine is entirely my own," Hartwich continued.

"I am convinced that it is so. I should far rather suppose that your previous will was a forced one," the official rejoined.

"Will it impair the authenticity of this document that I am unable to sign it? I cannot, unfortunately, move my hand."

"Not at all," said the lawyer. "These two gentlemen, Herr Geheimrath Heim and the surgeon Lederer, will have the kindness to affix their signatures as witnesses, and the instrument will be legally correct. If you are strong enough to dictate your will, there is nothing now to prevent your doing so."

"Oh, yes! oh, yes!" gasped Hartwich, as the Geheimrath supported him; "every moment is precious."

The preliminary sentences were written at Hartwich's request. The Geheimrath closed the door, and the dying man began to dictate in such feverish haste that the lawyer was obliged to entreat him to speak more slowly. Some irregularities in the formula were arranged, and the will was completed before the glimmering spark of life in the testator was extinguished. Little Ernestine was made heir to a property of ninety thousand thalers. The document was read aloud to Hartwich, and the Geheimrath and Lederer affixed their signatures instead of his own.

"Now I can die!" said the sick man, with the air of a released captive; and instantly his mental

and physical powers failed him.

"Geheimrath!" he faltered, and a strange smile transfigured his countenance, "lay the will upon my child's bed, as her--father's--last--farewell--thanks--thanks." And his eyelids closed, he muttered unintelligibly, and relapsed into unconsciousness.

The Geheimrath nodded to the lawyers, and said, "It was high time!"

## **CHAPTER IV.**

### **THE SAD SURVIVORS.**

The next day, at about the same hour, Frau Bertha was in her kitchen, beating whites of eggs for a cake, her round cheeks shaking merrily with the exercise. She had sent her maid into the garden with Gretchen, and was supplying the maid's place. She turned the bowl upside down, to convince herself that the eggs were sufficiently beaten; not a drop fell,--they were all right. She set them aside with an air of great satisfaction, and turned to a bag beneath the table, whence issued a melancholy flapping and cooing. A white dove poked its head out of the mouth of the bag, and Bertha thrust it back again, securing the opening more tightly. A pot of water on the fire boiled over with a loud hissing, and she hastened to roll up her sleeves over her large, well-formed arms, and lift the heavy vessel from the glowing coals. She was a beautiful sight, as the glare from the fire illuminated her massive proportions; as she moved hither and thither, now arranging her various cooking-utensils, now opening the door beneath the oven, to thrust in huge pieces of wood, hastily picking up and tossing back the bits of burning coal that fell out, she might have been Frau Venus, the coarse Frau Venus of the popular German imagination, fresh from the infernal regions in the Hörselberg, who, clad in a kitchen apron, was here in the likeness of a cook-maid to seduce the calm, cold-blooded Dr. Gleissert by the magic charms of her cookery. She tossed a net full of crabs into a pot of cold water, and looked thoughtlessly on at their slow death over the fire. She never dreamed that just at that moment a human life was leaving its mortal tenement beneath her roof, and when, a few minutes later, she was pounding ingredients in her huge mortar, that the noise she was making was the death-knell of a departing soul. She did not hear her husband's approach until he stood before her, and seizing her by the arm, said breathlessly, "Wife, this is our last day of torment!"

Frau Bertha looked at him with surprise, that was only half joy, painted upon her heated face. "I have never seen you so delighted before, except when you were examining those odd fishes at Trieste; what has happened?"

"Can you not guess?" asked Leuthold.

"Is he dead?"

"He is; he has been dying for the last twenty-four hours."

"Thank Heaven!" said Frau Bertha, folding her plump hands.

"And if I believed in Heaven I should say so too," rejoined Leuthold, throwing himself upon a kitchen chair. "Only conceive of the joy! We are wealthy,--independent,--delivered from our ten years' servitude,--delivered--ah!" He fanned himself with the pocket-handkerchief that he had just used at the bedside of Hartwich's corpse to dry the tears that he did not shed.

In spite of her good fortune, Frau Bertha looked uncomfortable. "I am almost sorry he has gone," she said timidly. "It seems to me a sin to rejoice so at any one's death,--he might appear to us."

"Don't talk such nonsense; you know I cannot endure it," said Leuthold angrily. "You behave as if we had killed him. Wishes are neither poison nor steel; and we are not rejoicing at his death, but at our inheritance. It is but human."

"Yes, yes," said Bertha, comforted, "you are quite right. If we could have had the money while he lived, we should not have wanted him to die; he might have lived for a hundred years for all I would have cared. It was his own fault that we wished him dead. Why did he keep us so pinched?"

Leuthold nodded approvingly. "I see you are willing to listen to reason; now have the kindness to come downstairs with me and pay the proper respect to the body."

"What must I do that for?" asked Bertha, alarmed.

"Because it is becoming! I have instructed you sufficiently upon this point; you know my wishes--come!"

These words, that cut like a knife in their utterance, made opposition useless. Bertha took her casseroles from the fire, looked after the doves in the bag, and followed her husband down stairs. On the way she asked him, "What shall I say when we get there?"

"Not much," said Leuthold dryly. "There is not much to be said in such stiff, silent society,--a couple of oh's and ah's will suffice; it is very graceful in a woman to fall upon her knees by the bedside; but if you should attempt it, pray restrain your usual impetuosity, or the repose even of the dead might be disturbed."

"You are a fearful man," whispered Bertha. "I am actually afraid of you. Will you make such joking speeches when I die?"

"I shall not outlive you, my good Bertha," said Leuthold, plaintively. "If I should, be assured I will mourn for you as the nurseling for his nurse!"

Frau Bertha looked doubtfully at her husband. She scarcely knew what to make of this tender asseveration, and she said nothing. They had reached the door of Hartwich's apartment.

"Where is your handkerchief--your pocket-handkerchief?" Leuthold asked softly. Bertha sought it in vain; she had forgotten it. "How thoughtless," whispered Leuthold, "to forget your handkerchief under such circumstances!"

"Then give me yours," said Bertha.

"You fool! I want it for myself. Take your apron; put that up to your eyes--so!" With these words he opened the door and entered slowly, pushing Bertha before him. Hartwich lay extended upon the bed, his face so changed that Bertha was glad to be able to hide her eyes in her apron. Leuthold stood beside her, a picture of dignified manly grief; his bearing impressed the bystanders; the surgeon, the men- and maid-servants, who were all present, were convinced that Herr Gleissert had really loved his step-brother, and that it was rank injustice to accuse him of heartlessness. After a few moments, he laid his hand gently upon his wife's shoulder, but its stern pressure reminded her that she was to fall upon her knees. She sank down as carefully as she could, and with her broad back and bending head was a beautiful and moving image of woe. After awhile he bent over her and said gently, "Come, my child, do not be so agitated; our tears cannot bring him back to life--come!" Then he raised her, leaned her head upon his breast to conceal her face, and conducted her from the room. The others looked after them with amazement.

"I cannot understand it," said the surgeon. "Every one knows that the woman never could endure Herr von Hartwich, and yet now she seems almost dead with grief!"

"She isn't really sorry," growled a groom; "it's all sham!"

"Yes, yes," Rieka added, "she didn't shed a tear,--not a single tear, for all she rubbed her eyes so with her apron!"

"That's true,--she is right," murmured the group; "neither he nor she shed a single tear. Well, there's a pair of them. Do they suppose we are so stupid as not to see how glad they are that the master is dead? 'Tis a pity that the money will not fall into better hands."

Then they separated, and went indifferently about their work.

"That was not so bad," said Leuthold, when he had reached his own room with Bertha; "but still you certainly have no genius for the stage."

"You ought to be glad that I can never play a part before you," she said, shaking herself as if to shake off the disagreeable impression of what she had seen like dust from her clothes.

In the mean time the maid had brought the child in from the garden, and had laid the table.

"We will have some champagne to-day," said Leuthold, taking down the keys of the cellar. "We need something to support us under such exciting circumstances. Send Lena for some ice." And he left the room.

Frau Bertha sent the girl for ice, and said to herself with complacency, "That ice-house was the best thing I ever planned."

The little girl, who was too fat and chubby to move very steadily, had crept under the table, and now, catching hold of the corner of the table-cloth, tried to lift herself by it, thereby pulling down a couple of plates and knives upon the floor. Bertha caught up the screaming child, gave it two or three hard slaps, saying, "Now you know what you are crying for," and then carried it to and fro to quiet it, well knowing that her strict husband would not endure any noise. Gretchen ceased crying just as her father entered with the champagne. Lena brought the ice, and the bottles were arranged in it. When the husband and wife were seated at table, Bertha had the fragments of the broken plates cleared away. "Oh, heavens!" she muttered, "nothing but bad signs. If our fortune should be destroyed like that china!"

"You unmitigated fool!" scolded her husband; "if everything that we desire were only as secure as our legally devised inheritance, Gretchen's future husband would be now tumbling about in a royal nursery, and there would be a French cook in our kitchen."

"Oh, then," Bertha interrupted him with irritation, "you are not satisfied with my cooking,--you want a Frenchman."

"Only a Frenchman could supply your place," replied her husband, quite ready to practise himself in the delicate flattery which he intended to make use of in future towards ladies in aristocratic circles. He kissed her hand and said, "I would not have these rosy fingers any longer degraded by contact with the rude utensils of cookery. Let all that be left to the hard, rough hands of some skilful gastronome."

Frau Bertha stared at him in surprise.

"Why, can gastronomes cook?"

"Most certainly,--what else should they do?"

"I thought they looked at the stars through glasses!"

Leuthold clasped his hands in dismay, and cast a look towards heaven. "Good heavens! when I think of your making such a speech among our future friends, I am so profoundly humiliated that I could almost determine to make over my property to some religious institution--some monastery--and enroll myself among its members. Woman, woman, must I teach you the difference between gastronomy, the science of cookery, and astronomy, the science of the stars?"

"Gastronomy or astronomy!" said Bertha pettishly, as she ladled out the soup, "it is a great deal better for me to understand cooking than the long names you call it. Would you have liked, during all the ten years that you were too poor to keep a regular cook, to have a wife who could talk Latin with you, but whose dinners a dog could not have eaten?"

"No, no, indeed, my dear Bertha!" said her husband with a shudder; "but the two can be united if you try. I do not ask you either to study Greek and Latin, or to resign your masterly supervision of our kitchen department; but you have hitherto performed many little household offices, that could as well have been left to the servant, because you had no pleasanter way of occupying your time. This must be otherwise now; hitherto you have had the excuse of our straitened circumstances that have compelled you sometimes to discharge a servant's duties. Now there will be no such excuse; for you will have a suitable household in town, and time to cultivate your mind and render yourself a worthy member of the society to which I shall introduce you."

Bertha in her impatience let her spoon fall into the soup-plate, and then wreaked her irritation upon the soup, which she poured hastily back into the tureen.

"If you should do such a thing as that before strangers," said her husband angrily, "you would stamp yourself as a person of no refinement, and I should be disgraced."

Bertha brought her hand down upon the table so heavily that the glasses rang again. "This is really too much! Can I no longer eat as I please? As long as you were poor, and I spent my little all in procuring delicacies for you, you found me all very well, and had plenty of fine words for me; but now, that you are rich and I have nothing left, I am not good enough for you, and you take quite another tone with me. Heaven help me! There is no more pleasure in store for me. I really believe you would send me out of the house if I should not succeed in pleasing you. Oh, if I had only known!"

She was silent, because Lena appeared with the roast; but a couple of large tears dropped into the soup-plate which she handed to the servant.

"What exaggerated nonsense!" said Leuthold at last. "Be good enough to carve the meat,--I am hungry. You know I am a respectable man,--slow to adopt harsh measures if they can be avoided. I hope you will not force me to them by stubborn conduct. You will recognize and fulfil the duties which our wealth imposes upon us."

"Duties, duties? I thought that when I was rich I could begin really to enjoy life and do as I pleased; but instead of that I must wear a double face and worry about everything. It is just as if you gave me a new sofa in the place of the old one, but forbade me to lie down upon it for fear of injuring the cover. Of course I should long for the old one, upon which I could stretch myself in comfort whenever I chose."

Leuthold smiled. "You are not forbidden to lie down upon the new sofa. I only ask you to take off your muddy boots when you do so. Do you understand?"

Bertha was so far consoled that she applied herself to devouring the food upon her plate in silence. Her husband regarded her with a strange mixture of humour and discontent.

"You must at least learn to hold your fork in your left hand," he said at last.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Bertha again. "What matter is it about such a trifle?"

"A great deal of matter, my dear. Such trifles show refinement, just as the mercury in the thermometer shows the degree of heat and cold. If you lay your knife aside and clutch your fork in your right hand like a pitchfork, every one of any culture will say, 'That woman is a person of no refinement. She has not been used to good society.' I grant it is insignificant in itself and ridiculous to every thinking man; but it serves a certain purpose. Such forms are marks of distinction between cultivated and uncultivated people. Just because they are so insignificant the uninitiated never pay any heed to them. But, although clad in purple and fine linen, ignorance of such trifles betrays the parvenu. Those who desire, like yourself, to enter circles to which they do not belong by birth, must find out all their conventional secrets, in order not to be disgraced."

"Oh, what a moral discourse!" sighed Bertha. "I have had enough for to-day. You are a thoroughly heartless man, and were kind to me only as long as you needed me. I must bear what comes, for I am poor and helpless since I broke with my father,--but you have tired me out, I assure you."

"And if this fatigue were an overpowering sensation, you would separate yourself from me; but since you are fond of the rest that I can provide you, there will be an enduring bond between us. I shall magnanimously treat you as my wife as long as you give me no legal ground for divorce; therefore, be composed; your future lot is a thousand times more brilliant than you had any right to expect."

Bertha arose, and was about to reply, but her husband commanded silence by so imperious a gesture that she swallowed down her anger and hastened from the room, sobbing violently. In the kitchen the maid was just taking the cake that she had made from the oven. It was successful--it was most beautiful! The servant placed it near the open window to cool. Bertha contemplated it mournfully. How much pains she had taken! how stiff the eggs had been beaten! how well it had risen! and no one cared anything about it! Did her cross husband deserve that she should prepare such a delicacy for him? Should he devour this masterpiece? Yet there it was,--so round and high, so brown and fragrant, that she gradually dried her tears, and was filled with more agreeable sensations and a pardonable pride. No one except herself possessed the receipt for this cake. No one else could make it. She thought with rapture of the delight of those who should in future partake of it at her table,--of the consideration that she should enjoy on account of it; and, thinking thus, her good humour returned, and she determined not to hide her light under a bushel, and punish her husband by withholding the cake from him, but to parade it before him; he should see what a woman he had treated so unkindly could do. When he tasted this cake he would repent his harshness! She took the plate and carried it on high into the dining-room, where she placed it before her husband with exultation.

"Yes, that is really beautiful," he said approvingly, looking first at the round, beautiful cake, and then at the plump, pretty baker; and his approbation exalted Bertha to the highest pitch of satisfaction, so that she felt morally justified in asking for a glass of champagne. Her husband removed the cork without allowing it to snap and disturb the decorum of the house of mourning, and then poured out a sparkling bumper for her.

"Come," she said, "we will clink glasses, and drink to the welfare of the good Hartwich, who has made us rich!"

"Yes, now that he is dead, may he live forever," said Leuthold smiling, and gently touching his wife's glass with his own,--"live forever in that heaven where I trust he may experience all the delight that his wealth will afford us here on earth."

They emptied their glasses, and Bertha ran into the adjoining room, where Gretchen was taking her noonday nap. She snatched the sleeping child from the bed, shook it, and cried, "Come, wake up, and you shall have some cake!"

The little thing, interrupted in its nap, was frightened and began to scream, refusing to be quieted until her father filled her mouth with the promised delicacy and dandled her in his arms.

"You do not even understand how to take care of your own child," murmured Leuthold. "What will you do when our niece comes to us?"

"What!" cried Bertha, "must I have the care of the disagreeable creature?"

"She will come to me--yes."

"But we will send her to boarding-school--you promised me!"

"If Ernestine recovers, as she may do under old Heim's care, she will be too weak for months to be sent among strangers without incurring the reproach of the world. You will be obliged, therefore, to submit to having her with us until such time as we can be rid of her decently. I assure you she shall stay no longer than is absolutely necessary. And now pray be quiet, and do not embitter this day by complaints."

Frau Bertha looked utterly discomfited. She determined that, at all events, Ernestine should never partake of the delicacies which she alone knew how to prepare. Coarse natures always



seek for a scape-goat upon whom to wreak their irritation; and, as she did not dare to make her husband serve this purpose, her choice fell upon Ernestine.

Leuthold, who was not used to see his wife lost in a reverie, softly touched her shoulder. "Come; it really looks almost as if you were thinking of something," he said dryly.

"Yes; I am thinking of something," she replied significantly. "I am thinking of the dog's life I shall lead as long as that sickly, ailing brat is under our roof, and no one will reward me for my pains."

She stopped, for Gretchen had grown restless, and required all her attention, and Leuthold evidently refused to give any heed to her complaints, but, as dinner was over, folded his napkin and rose from the table. "I must write the notice of his death--it is high time it were attended to," he said, while he washed his hands in the adjoining room. "Sew a piece of crape around my hat." He re-entered the room, and sat down at his writing-table. Bertha placed a candle and a cup of *café noir* upon it. He lighted a cigar, which he smoked as he wrote, sipping his coffee comfortably from time to time. The servant removed the dinner-table; Gretchen amused herself on the floor with some paper, which she tore into a thousand fragments, to make a mimic snow-storm; and Bertha tried on before the mirror several articles of mourning-apparel, which she had had in readiness for some time. She was delighted, for black was very becoming to her.

Peace and comfort reigned in the apartment. Leuthold emptied his cup and laid aside his pen. "There--that is most touching and suitable. Read it." He handed Bertha what he had, written, and she read:

"It has pleased Almighty God to release our beloved father, brother, and brother-in-law, Herr Carl Emil von Hartwich, landholder and manufacturer, from his protracted sufferings, and to transport him to a better world. He died this day, at twelve M. Those who were acquainted with the deceased, and with his active benevolence, will know how profound must be our sorrow, and accord us their sympathy.

"The Sad Survivors.

"Unkenbeim, 24 July, 18--."

## **CHAPTER V.**

### **UNDECEIVED.**

Ernestine was still lying motionless in Frau Gedike's huge bed, and by her side sat a little nurse scarcely three feet high, swinging her short legs, and thinking how charming it must be to lie in such a great big bed, just like a grown person, and what a pity it was that poor Ernestine slept so much, that she could not enjoy the pleasure. Now and then she turned her fair head round towards the window behind her, through the white curtains of which she could see a dark procession moving away from the house towards the village. When it had disappeared from sight, she gave a little sigh, and swung her feet rather more violently than before,--although she sat very upright, with great dignity of demeanour, for she was entirely conscious of the weighty responsibility of her post. She had been intrusted with the charge of watching Ernestine while the servants were attending the funeral services performed over Bartwich's corpse. When they were concluded, and the funeral procession had left the house, Rieka had begged the little child to keep her place until the gentlemen returned from the church-yard, in order that the maid might perform certain necessary household duties. Angelika--for she it was--undertook the charge with delight. She had given her uncle Neuenstein, who had determined to pay the last honours to Hartwich's remains, no peace until he consented to take her to Ernestine. True, she soon acknowledged to herself that she had never, in her whole long life of eight years, seen any place so tiresome as this quiet room, where nothing was heard but the buzzing of a couple of flies around a spoon in which a drop or two of Ernestine's medicine had been left; but she was not discontented; she sat as still as a mouse, so that she might not disturb the invalid, and did not even venture to look at her, for she had heard that sleepers could be awakened by a look. Only now and then she cast a wistful glance at the pretty book that was clasped tight in Ernestine's embrace. Suddenly the sick child muttered, "I am lying turned round the wrong way in bed." Angelika scrambled down in alarm from her high seat, and ran to the door and cried, "Rieka, Ernestine is saying something!"

The maid hurried in, and Ernestine moved uneasily, and insisted that she was lying with her head towards the foot of the bed. At last Rieka remembered that Ernestine's crib had been placed against the opposite wall, and suspected that she missed the old position. Rightly judging this to be a favourable sign, she quickly and carefully turned the child around in the bed; and when

Ernestine stretched out her hand and encountered the wall, where she had been accustomed to find it, she seemed satisfied, and apparently fell asleep again. Then Rieka left the room to finish her work; but, after a few moments, Ernestine opened her eyes, in which for the first time shone the light of intelligence, and looked around. "Angelika!" she said in amazement, and then stared around the room. "Why, this is Frau Gedike's room! and what a large, soft bed!"

"Yes, indeed," Angelika delightedly replied. "Isn't it comfortable? Ah, you poor dear Ernestine, are you beginning to grow a little better? Is your head mended again?"

Ernestine put up her hand to her bandaged head. "What is this?"

"You broke your head. Oh, it was terrible, I know from my dolls,--although it doesn't hurt them, and you can put on new heads; but they couldn't do that for you, and they said you must die; but you haven't died!"

"Oh, yes," said Ernestine, recollecting herself; "now I remember; last night my father struck me and threw me down. Yes, it hurt very much!"

"It was not last night, it was several days ago; but you slept the whole time, and didn't you know that they cut off your hair?" asked Angelika, running to the wardrobe and producing a thick bunch of long black hair. "Look, here it is,--there is some blood on it still, but, if you will only give it to me, I will wash it and make my large walking doll a splendid wig of it. Do, do give it to me, you can't make it grow on your head again."

"I'll give it to you willingly," said Ernestine; "but first ask Frau Gedike whether you may keep it."

"Oh, she is not here any more,--Uncle Heim sent her away!" replied Angelika, drawing the dark strands slowly through her fingers.

"Then ask my father."

This answer utterly discomfited Angelika. "I cannot ask your father," she said in a disappointed tone, putting the hair away regretfully. "He is dead! They put him in the hearse a little while ago,--I saw them."

"Oh," said Ernestine, startled, "is he dead? Why, why did he die just now?"

"I think because he was so angry with you," said Angelika with an air of great wisdom. "Don't you know when I am naughty mamma shuts me up in a dark room? and, because your father was a great deal naughtier than I, God has shut him up in a dark hole in the ground, and he must stay there always."

"Ah, for my sake, the dear God should not have done that, for my sake!" said Ernestine, bursting into tears. "Now I have no father any more; I have nobody; I am all alone in the world! My poor father! it is all my fault that he is put into the narrow grave, where the worms will eat him and there will be nothing left of him but bones. Oh, how horrible! how horrible! I saw a skeleton once in a picture, and my poor, poor father will look just like that!" And she wrung her thin hands and writhed about in the bed, moaning loudly.

Angelika was in despair at the mischief she had done. She had quite forgotten that she had been forbidden, if Ernestine should awake, to speak to her of her father. In the greatest distress she walked to and fro beside the high bed, and at last brought a tall stool, from which, when she had mounted it, she could reach Ernestine. She kissed her, she stroked her cheeks, and laid her chubby hand upon her mouth to silence her, but in vain. At last she hit upon the idea of showing her the book that lay beside her. She opened it at a picture and held it up before her, saying, "Look, dear Ernestine, only look at your beautiful book!" The sick child instantly brushed the tears from her eyes when she saw the picture.

"The swan!" she cried, "the swan! that is the story of the Ugly Duckling!" She hastily took the book out of Angelika's hands and turned over the leaves. Gradually the fairy figures of the snow-queen, the little mermaid, and the rest, obliterated the horrible image of her dead father, and his narrow grave faded away to give place to the shining garden of Paradise, and the clear, broad sea with the fairy palaces beneath its crystal waves. Her sobs grew fainter and fainter, and at last a smile played around her lips when she came to the story of the dryad "Elder Blossom."

"Now I know what a dryad is," she said. "I am glad, I am very glad!"

"What is it that makes you so glad?"

"That a dryad is nothing bad, for--don't you know?--*he* called me that. I thought it was to mock me, and it hurt me, but it was not so."

"He? who?"

"I don't know his name, your brother, who gave me the book."

"Johannes?" laughed Angelika. "Do you like him?"

"Yes, oh, yes, he is so handsome and good, just like the prince in the Little Mermaid." With these words a light shone in the child's dark eyes. "I would far rather have turned into foam than done anything to hurt him, if I had been the mermaid."

"That is charming! that is splendid!" Angelika declared with delight; "we both love him! He is such a dear brother. It is a pity he has gone away. If he were at home he would come and play with you; oh, he plays so finely!"

"Has he gone away?" asked Ernestine sadly.

"Yes, he has gone to Paris to get me a wax doll; only think!--one that can call 'Papa' and 'Mamma.'"

"Oh, there cannot be such dolls!" said Ernestine with a troubled look.

"Indeed there are, and when she comes I will show her to you. Remember the doll in 'Ole Luckoie;' she could speak, and had a fine wedding."

"But that isn't a true story," said Ernestine wisely, putting her hand to her head, which was beginning to ache badly.

"Only think what a charming thing it is to have a wedding," Angelika ran on. "I once went to a real wedding, and it was almost finer than the one in the story. Oh, the bride has a lovely time! Why, she sits just in the middle of the table, and in front of her is a great, tall cake, with a little house on top of it and a little man inside, a little bit of a man, with a bow and arrows, but no clothes on at all. She has the biggest piece of cake, and they put the dear little man upon her plate, and she is helped first to everything. I was really vexed with my cousin for eating hardly anything. And only think, last of all came ice-cream doves sitting in a nest made of sugar, upon eggs of marchpane! They looked so natural that I was too sorry when my cousin cut off one of their heads; I could have cried, and I determined not to eat any of it, but by the time it came to me, every one could see that it was not a real dove, for it was all melting away, and you had to eat it with a spoon. And there were quantities of champagne, and all the gentlemen made long speeches to the bride, and you had to sit perfectly still and not rattle your spoon at all while they were talking, but when they had done you could scream as loud as you pleased, and clatter your glasses, and the more noise you made the better; and all were pleased and kissed one another; only my cousin sat there so stupidly and cried. I wouldn't have cried when everything was done to please me. And I'll tell you what, when my brother comes back he must bring you a boy doll with a hat and waistcoat, and then he shall marry my doll. He will come in six months, but that must be a long time; for mamma cried when he went away. Perhaps we shall be grown up by then, and can make our dolls' clothes ourselves. That would be lovely."

"But we shall not be grown up in six months," said Ernestine. "First winter must come, and then summer again, and then winter and summer again, before we are grown up!"

"That is terribly long," cried Angelika. "I don't see how we can wait so long."

"And when we are grown up we cannot play with dolls. Then I shall buy myself a telescope like Uncle Leuthold's, and always be looking into the moon, for I like it better than anything."

"Into the moon? Have you ever looked into the moon?" asked Angelika in amazement.

"Indeed I have."

"How does it look there?"

"Oh, beautiful, most beautiful! It shines and gleams so silvery, and it is so calm and quiet, and there are mountains and valleys there just like ours, only they are not coloured, they are just pure light!"

"Did you see the man in the moon?"

"No, I didn't see him; Uncle Leuthold said there are no people in the moon; but I don't believe him. They are only so far off that we can't see them. And they must be much happier and better than we are here; I'm sure they never beat children; and who knows whether perhaps the dear God himself does not live there? If I could fly, I would fly up there!" And she gazed upward with beaming eyes, and a long sigh escaped from her little breast.

"No, dear Ernestine, you must not fly away; no one can tell that the moon is as lovely near to, as it is so far off. And it is very nice here, too, for when you grow up you can be either a mamma or an aunt, and then no one can do anything to you. No one ever strikes my aunt or my mamma--no one!"

But Ernestine was no longer conscious of the child's prattle; her eyes closed, her beloved book dropped from her hands; Ole Luckoie, the gentle Northern god of slumber, had arisen from its pages. He had poured balm into her painful wound, and extended his canopy, with its thousands of gay pictures, over her soul.

Angelika looked at her for awhile, and then asked, "Are you asleep again?" and, upon receiving

no answer, she was quite content, and got softly down from the high stool, and seated herself again upon her chair with the grave air of a sentinel. At last Heim, with Herr Neuenstein, came home from the funeral, and the two gentlemen entered the apartment together.

"She has been talking with me," Angelika announced.

"What! has she come to herself?" asked the Geheimrath in pleased surprise.

"Oh, yes,—we talked about a great many things—and then she went to sleep again."

The Geheimrath rubbed his hands.—"That's good! Did she seem to be perfectly sensible?"

"Oh, yes; she was perfectly sensible," Angelika assured him.

"What a pity that I was not here! Now I hope we shall bring her through," said the Geheimrath to Herr Neuenstein; but the latter stood looking at the corpse-like figure of the sleeping child, and shook his head.

"I see," continued the physician, "that it seems impossible to you, and yet I believe she will recover. Who that sees such a faded blossom lying there would suspect the wonderful recuperative energy hidden within it? And I tell you this child possesses an immense amount of vitality, or she would have succumbed to such brutal treatment as she has received. She will recover; believe me, she will recover."

"I should rejoice indeed to think that your exertions will not prove in vain. And you really wish to take her with you?"

"Yes, if her hypocritical uncle will let her go, I will deliver her from his claws, and educate her as is best for her health and becoming to her position as an heiress."

"You are a genuine philanthropist, Geheimrath."

"Yes, I am a philanthropist; but there is small merit in that. Some people love puppies and kittens, others cultivate flowers with enthusiasm,—I love to educate and train human beings. Whenever a pair of melancholy eyes stare out at me from a child's face, I want to stick the child in my herbarium like a rare flower. Yes, if it only cost as little to cultivate children as plants, I should have had a human hot-house long ago. But the taste is so confoundedly expensive."

"Yes, we all know that you spend your whole income in such good works. You might have been a millionaire long ago, if it had not been for your lavish generosity."

"What would you have? One man wastes his money upon one whim, and another on another. This happens to be my whim, and I spend just as much upon it as I can conscientiously in the interest of my adopted son, who stands nearest my heart. But now do me the kindness to leave the room, for our talk is disturbing the child's sleep. I will stay here for an hour and watch her."

"Come, Angelika," said Neuenstein: "Uncle Heim is very cross to-day,—let us go home." He took the child's hand, and nodded affectionately to Heim. "Shall I send the carriage for you?"

"No, I thank you; I must return to the capital; the king has commanded my attendance this afternoon. But I shall be here again to-morrow."

"Adieu, dear uncle," said little Angelika, standing on tiptoe, and holding up her rosy lips to be kissed. "You won't be cross to me, will you?" she asked, nestling her fair curls among his gray locks as he bent down to her; "I have been so good!" And then she went softly out with Herr Neuenstein.

When Heim was alone, he sat down by the bedside, and silently contemplated the sleeping child. "I'll wager," he thought, "that she will be very beautiful one of these days. Her face is older than her years, and that is always ugly in a child, but when her age accords with the earnestness of that brow, and her features lose their sharpness under more kindly treatment, it will be a magnificent head. To think of having such a child and beating it half to death! Such a child!"

Something like a tear glistened in the old man's eyes, and he softly took a pinch of snuff to compose himself, for these thoughts filled him with the pain of an old wound, and well-nigh overcame him. But the pinch was of no avail. He gazed upon the treasure before him, which had fallen to one utterly unworthy such a gift, who had neglected and despised it, and he thought what joy its possession would have given him. And he remembered that such joy might have been his, had his heart not clung unalterably to one who was not destined for him. Now it was too late; and the past, in which he might have sown the harvest of love that he longed to reap, was irrevocable. The passion that had so long filled his heart was conquered and dead; but the longing for affection, that is stronger than passion, still lived on in the old man's breast. "When a man's wife dies and leaves him," he thought, "she lives again in her children; but he who has neither wife nor child is doubly poor." He had watched over many human lives, but not one could he call his own; he had preserved the lives of many, he had given life to none. He had seen the bitterest woes soothed by affection, and he should die without leaving one child behind to mourn his loss. And, lost in such thoughts, it seemed to him that he was actually lying upon his death-

bed, and that he felt a soft arm stealing around his neck, and heard a sweet, caressing voice sob out, "Father."

It was Ole Luckoie who had granted him this bitter-sweet dream by Ernestine's bedside; it vanished as quickly as it had appeared, and left nothing behind but a tear on the old man's furrowed cheek.

Then the latch of the door began to tremble, as though a carriage were driving by, and the heavy footsteps that caused the noise approached the apartment. Before the Geheimrath could prevent it, the door was flung open, and Bertha's colossal figure appeared upon the threshold. She was dressed in a new shining black silk, and the stiff cambric lining rustled so loudly as she approached the bed that the child started up frightened, and the Geheimrath could not suppress an exclamation.

"Good-morning, Herr Geheimrath; good-morning, Tina," she said with a nod. "So, Tina, you're alive still, I see. There was no need of such a great fuss about you, after all."

Ernestine, at this rude greeting, flung herself to the farther side of the bed, and cried, "Oh, send my aunt away!--I do not want to see her. I will not!"

The Geheimrath politely offered his arm to the intruder and conducted her from the room without a word. Bertha, amazed, asked, "Why, what have I done? Can't I see my niece?"

"If you yourself do not understand, madam, that this frail life needs to be treated with the greatest possible tenderness, I, a physician, must tell you that it will be your fault if my care of the child should prove of no avail and she should die in spite of it. I must therefore entreat you either to discontinue your visits to the child, or to address her more gently."

"Why, goodness gracious!" cried Bertha, "I was only in jest. Mercy on me! you may wrap her up in cotton-wool, for all I care."

The Geheimrath gave an involuntary sigh. "Poor child," he thought, "to be in danger of falling into such hands!"

Suddenly the hall-door was opened, and a face appeared, so ashy pale, so livid, that Bertha started in terror. It was Leuthold; but he was hardly to be recognized. When he perceived the Geheimrath, he saluted him with his usual courtesy, then, extending his hand to Bertha, said in a low voice, "My dear Bertha, be kind enough to come up-stairs with me."

She followed him in the greatest trepidation, for she had never before beheld him thus; and on the joyful day of Hartwich's funeral, too! What could have happened? He took her hand and conducted her up the staircase, his fingers were as cold and clammy as those of a corpse. She almost shuddered as they walked along together in such solemn silence.

They reached the door of their own apartment. Leuthold entered, dragged his wife in after him, closed the door, and, before she was aware of what he was doing, she felt the icy hand around her throat like an iron band.

"Shall I strangle you?" he gasped, with eyes like a serpent's when it is wound around its victim.

"Merciful Heaven!" shrieked Bertha, falling upon her knees to extricate herself. The cold hand grasped her throat still more tightly.

"Utter one sound that the servants can hear, and I will throttle you!" hissed Leuthold. "Be quiet! or----" Bertha ceased struggling, and almost lost her consciousness. He then released her and pushed her down upon the sofa, where she sat utterly astounded.

He put his hand to his head, and then whispered, almost inaudibly, as though speaking with the greatest difficulty, "On the day of Ernestine's fall, when Heim came to the house, do you remember that I strictly enjoined it upon you to observe narrowly whatever occurred in the house?"

"Yes," stammered the frightened woman.

"Did you do it?"

No answer.

"You did not do it."

"I was so afraid of Hartwich that I went up-stairs again," Bertha confessed with hesitation.

"And so,--" Leuthold's chest heaved, his breath came heavily, and he clenched his hands convulsively, "and so it is your fault that Hartwich has disinherited us and left all his property to Ernestine." His face grew still paler, his slender figure tottered, he grasped at a chair for support, and fell fainting upon the ground.

"Good God!" shrieked Bertha, shaking the prostrate man violently, "the whole property? tell me, the whole property? Oh, you miserable man, what folly to fall into such spasms! Speak, and tell me whether we have nothing at all, or what we have!"

Leuthold slowly raised his head. Bertha carried, more than supported, him to the sofa. She brought some eau-de-cologne and poured it over his head so that it ran into his eyes. He uttered an exclamation of pain, and tried to wipe away the burning fluid from his eyes. "Are you trying to deprive me of my eyesight?" he groaned, and, when the pain was relieved, he sat in a dejected attitude, staring into vacancy.

"For mercy's sake, speak!" cried Bertha. "You can, at least, open your mouth. No legacy? Not an annuity?"

Leuthold looked at his unfeeling wife with an expression that, in spite of herself, drove the blood to her cheeks. There was something indescribable in the look,--a mixture of the pity and contempt with which one contemplates the body of a suicide.

"An annuity of six hundred thalers," he murmured, and covered his eyes with his hand, as if to shut out everything around him while he collected his scattered senses.

"Too much to die upon, and too little to live upon!" moaned Bertha, and, bursting into tears, she threw herself upon a chair in the farthest corner of the room. Leuthold sat motionless for a long time, his face hidden in his hands; he scarcely seemed to breathe. He appeared to need all his physical strength to assist him to endure the mental agony which was overpowering him,--to have no strength left to stir a limb. The man of feeling tries to master his unhappiness by raging and lamenting,--he combats his agony by physical exertion,--he rushes hither and thither, beats his head against the wall, wrings his hands, and lessens his woe in a degree by a certain amount of muscular activity. The man of intellect struggles mentally, and stands in need of entire physical repose. Such a man as Leuthold could only for a moment be excited to violence against the hated cause of his misfortune; he soon regained his exterior composure, and his misery became an intellectual labour, which might produce loss of reason, and was never-ceasing.

He sat lost in a profound reverie. Now and then, like lightning across a cloud, some idea of help in his misery flashed across his brain, but it vanished as soon as it appeared, leaving each time a blacker night in his soul.

"The sacrifice of ten long years gone for nothing!" he said at last in stifled accents. "My hair is bleached before its time with the slavery to which I have submitted with this goal in view, and now the prize is snatched from me just as it seemed within my reach. Again I must bow my neck to the yoke, and, with a mind fitted to appropriate to itself the most precious treasures of science, toil for my bread! I have wasted the best years of my life, that I may now begin all over again--an old man. It was indeed a losing game! When my powers began to fail me, I comforted myself with hopes of a near release; but now what can sustain me when that hope has deserted me? No release in future,--nothing but a never-ending struggle for daily sustenance! Oh---!"

With a long-drawn sigh of mortal agony, the tortured roan buried his face in the cushion of the sofa, and another long silence ensued, broken only by Bertha's loud sobbing.

At last she could endure the silence no longer. "What is to be done now?" she asked half sorrowfully, half defiantly.

"Let me alone," said Leuthold. "Leave me--you see how I am suffering and struggling!"

"How did you know about the matter?" she insisted.

"That fellow Lederer whispered it to me on returning from the funeral. He signed the will as a witness. We were separated in the crowd, and I could not even ask him whether I was left guardian or not. If I were only guardian---" He ceased, and sunk again into a profound reverie.

There was a slight noise in the adjoining room, and a lovely, smiling child's face looked in, and a clear, musical voice cried, "Peep!" At the sound Leuthold turned his head and looked with strange emotion towards the place where his daughter was standing. The little girl planted herself firmly upon her feet, and, after a couple of futile attempts, managed, to her own great delight, to cross the high threshold. This difficulty surmounted, she tripped gleefully across to her mother, who sat nearest the door; but upon receiving a rude repulse from her--a repulse that almost threw her down--she determined to pursue her journey as far as her father. To insure her swifter progress, she betook herself to all fours, and, when she reached her goal, climbed up by her father's knees and smiled into his face. Leuthold gazed for a few moments into her round, innocent eyes; his own grew dim; he took the child in his arms and whispered, as he clasped her to his breast, "Poor child!" His breath came quick--he clasped her tighter and tighter in his arms, until suddenly a burst of tears relieved his overburdened soul. The father's heart was filled for once with pure human emotion.

Gretchen tried to wipe his eyes with her little apron, and patted his cheeks with her chubby hands.

There is a wonderful power in the touch of a child's soft, pure hand, soothing a wildly-beating

heart and strengthening a soul sickened by hope deferred. It seemed to Leuthold as if the wounds that had tormented him were healed by that gentle touch. He kissed the rosy little palms again and again. He would labour with all his might for this child--she should have a brilliant future at any cost. He arose, and, putting her gently down on the carpet, walked slowly to and fro with folded arms, revolving in his busy brain a thousand plans for the future. His thoughts were rudely disturbed by Bertha, who, for want of any other object, wreaked her ill humour upon Gretchen. The child had got hold of an embroidered footstool, and was engaged in the delightful occupation of picking off the bugles and pearls fastened upon the fringe. Bertha snatched it away, and was slapping the little hands violently, when suddenly Leuthold seized her arm and held it in a firm grasp, while anger flashed in his eyes; and his words, his bearing, his whole manner, filled her with terror as he began: "Your nature is so coarse that you cannot even appreciate the promptings of maternal instinct. Had you possessed one atom of feminine feeling, you would have seen what a comfort the child is to me, and would have lavished tenderness upon her, instead of maltreating her. But of what consequence are my sorrows to you? When I staggered and fell to the ground beneath the weight of my misery, you thought only of yourself; your gentlest word to me was 'miserable man.' Let me tell you, however, that the weakness of an ailing man is not so repulsive as the rude strength of a coarse woman. Therefore, be kind enough to moderate the exhibition of your strength, at least towards this angel, who shall never suffer for an hour as long as I draw breath."

Bertha put Gretchen on the ground, and stood with arms akimbo. "Oh!" she began, trembling with rage, "is this the tone you begin to take--talking in this way to me just when you ought to be grateful to me for consenting to share your wretched lot?"

"My wretched lot?" repeated Leuthold, while his face grew deadly white again. "Who has made my lot a wretched one?--who other than yourself? Do you dare to increase its misery? Is not your disobedience, your folly, the cause of the whole misfortune? If you had obeyed my commands, and kept watch upon what was going on in the house, the arrival of the lawyers would not have escaped you. You might have informed me and I could, even at the last moment, have prevented the making of that will. You, and you alone, have ruined my child's and my own future; and, instead of falling at my feet and begging for forgiveness, you dare to reproach me! It would be ridiculous, if it were not so deplorable!"

"Of course," said Bertha, "it is all my fault. I expected that. Why didn't you stay at home yourself and watch? Because you suspected nothing, no more than I did, and because you wanted to get out of the way of Heim, who knew all about your former disgrace. Is it my fault that you have conducted yourself so in the past that you have to avoid all your old acquaintances?"

Leuthold swelled with indignation. "Silence, wretched woman! Would you drive me to extremities?"

"Yes," continued Bertha more angrily than ever,--"yes, I don't care now what you do. The only satisfaction I can have now is speaking out the truth to you for once. I will be reconciled to my father while there is time. Perhaps he will make over the business to me. I understand how to conduct it, and can make it pay. I shall have a better chance there, at any rate, than in staying here to starve with you. My honest old father was right when he warned me against you. Heaven only knows what infatuated me so with your hatchet face. I saw from the first what you were,--a heap of learning and mind, and a perfect icicle, with whom I never could be happy. We had only been married two months, when there was all that disgraceful fuss with Hilsborn; my father wanted me to be separated from you then; but you stuffed my ears with stories of your brother here, who would make you rich; and I believed you, and gave up my old father, and came here to this hole to live with you. What did I get by it? The little property that I inherited from my mother has been frittered away in household expenses, that you might seem disinterested to your brother. I gave up every thing--concerts, theatres, parties,--and willingly; for I depended upon a brilliant future. I have waited patiently and obediently until your brother should kill himself with the drink of which he was so fond; and, now that he is dead, what have I got in exchange for time, youth, money, and all? And now I am to make a grateful courtesy, and say, 'My dear husband, 'tis true that you have robbed me of everything, you have attempted to strangle me; but I will nevertheless take the liberty of remaining with you, that you may continue to enjoy the pleasure of calling me rough, coarse, and good for nothing, and that you may instruct me with which hand I am to put in my mouth the potatoes that are all we shall have to live upon.' This is what I am to say, is it not? Yes----"

Leuthold had been listening attentively, and, in the course of this long speech, had regained his former composure. He now interrupted her with, "That is, in other words, that you contemplate adding to my misfortunes the withdrawal of your amiable presence, leaving me to bear my heavy lot alone. Your intention demands my gratitude; if you wish for a divorce, I am entirely agreed to it, only pray furnish the ground for it yourself, that my good name may not be compromised. We have lived together hitherto in such outward harmony, it might be difficult to convince a court of the impossibility of a longer union. There must, therefore, be some legal ground for a divorce, and you can arrange all that to suit yourself."

"What!" cried Bertha, "am I to conduct myself disgracefully that people may despise me and pity you,--wolf in sheep's clothing that you are? No, no; I'm not quite so stupid as that. And then my father would not receive me, and there would be nothing left for me in this world."

Leuthold walked thoughtfully to and fro. "It was the mistake of my life that ten years ago I married you to get money to make that journey to Trieste. I thought you more harmless than you are. For ten long years I have endured the annoyance of your coarseness and narrow-mindedness. Such a wife as you are is a perpetual thorn in the side of such a man as myself; my nerves have suffered terribly. And now I find you are not even capable of maternal affection,--you cannot treat your child as you should. If it were not for Gretchen, I would never see you again,--but now----"

Bertha started. "Why, yes,--I never thought of Gretchen."

"You can easily understand that I shall not give up my child," Leuthold went on, looking fondly at the lovely little creature, who was sitting on the carpet prattling softly and unintelligibly to herself. "She is all that is left to me of my shattered existence;--my last hopes in life are centred in her--I will never give her up! The law gives her to you if I should furnish grounds for a divorce: so, you see, I cannot take the initiative. If, however, you consent to a separation, and will leave Gretchen to me, you are free to leave my house whenever you please. Consider what I say."

Bertha knelt down upon the carpet, and said in a complaining tone, "Gretel, shall mamma go far away?"

The child, in whose mind the remembrance of the slaps that had made its little hands so red was still very lively, avoided her caress, and crept away as fast as it could to its father's feet.

"Its choice is made," said Leuthold, taking it in his arms.

"Of course you are quite capable of setting my own flesh and blood against me," whined Bertha. "What shall I do! I cannot leave the child, and I will not stay with you. What shall I do!"

She walked heavily up and down the room, wringing her hands. Leuthold had carried Gretchen to the window, and was looking down into the court-yard, where the broad, stalwart figure of Heim was just leaving the house. He shot one glance of deadly hatred at his enemy, but it did no harm; and with a profound sigh Leuthold leaned his cold forehead against the window-frame and looked on whilst Heim stepped into his carriage and took a pinch of snuff with a most cheerful air. The driver clambered clumsily upon the box, and gathered up his whip and reins, the horses started off, the chickens flew in all directions, their old friend the watch-dog came barking out of his kennel, and the old-fashioned coach, belonging to the Hartwich establishment, rattled away.

As, after seasons of intense emotion, the exhausted mind slavishly follows the lead of the ever-active senses, Leuthold, in his misery, thus minutely observed every particular of Heim's departure.

"He is happy!" he thought; and then his eyes rested upon the fowls devouring the remains of the oats that had been brought for the horses. "Happy he to whom has been given the faculty of making himself beloved! mankind follow him as those fowls follow in the track of Heim's carriage. Is it any merit of his that wins him the hearts of all? Bah, nonsense! it is a talent,--and the most profitable one for its possessor. These benefactors of mankind, as they are called, thrive upon it: who would not do likewise if he only could? But those who have not the gift cannot do it. One man comes into the world with qualities that make him useful and pleasing to his fellow-men; another with propensities that make him an object of fear to his kind. Is the lapdog to be commended because his agreeable characteristics qualify him to spend his life luxuriously on a silken cushion? And is the fox to be blamed because he does not understand how to ingratiate himself with mankind, but must eke out his miserable existence by theft? Each after his kind, and we human beings have senses in common with the brutes,--and why not the peculiarities also of their several species? Yes, there are lapdogs among us, and foxes, and wolves, cats, and tigers! Struggle against it as we may, with all our babble of free will, temperament is everything. How can I help it if I belong among the foxes? Only a fool would look for moral causes in all this chaos of chances. The activity of nature is shown in eternal creation, destruction, and re-creation from destruction,--plants, brutes, and men are the blind tools of her secret forces, creative and destructive, or, as the moralist calls them, good and evil! But what do we call good? What pleases us. What evil? That which harms us. And we are to judge the world by this narrow egotistic scale of morals? Oh, what folly! Creative and destructive forces--are they not alike necessary agents in nature's great workshop? And if they work so steadily in unconscious matter, are they dead in mankind, the embodiment of conscious nature? Is our poor, patched-up code of morals strong enough to tear asunder the chains that keep us bound fast to the order of the universe? No,--it is miserable arrogance to maintain such a theory. Nature has never created a species without producing another hostile to it; the rule holds good in the world of humanity as well as among plants and brutes. The parasite that preys upon its supporting plant, the insect depositing its eggs in the body of the caterpillar, the falcon pursuing the innocent dove, the tiger rending the mild-eyed antelope, and, lastly, the man who preserves his own existence by preying upon his fellow-men,--all are only the exponents of those hostile forces that are indispensable to the economy of nature. Who can venture to talk of good and evil? There is only one idea that we owe to our advanced culture,--only one varnish that bedaubs and conceals the beast in us,--regard for appearances! This is the corner-stone of our ethics, the only thoroughly practicable discipline for the human race. Let a due regard for appearances be observed, and we are distinguished, lauded, and beloved among men,--the only reward of our virtue is the recognition of it by our



excellent contemporaries; their judgment decides the degree of our morality; everything else is the exaggeration of fancy."

He was aroused from this reverie by Bertha, who suddenly shook him by the shoulder with an impatient "Well?"

Leuthold looked at her like a man awakened from a dream. "What is it?" he inquired.

"I want to know what is to be done?" she replied angrily.

Leuthold laid the child, who had fallen asleep upon his shoulder, on the sofa.

"Oh, yes, with regard to our separation."

"I suppose you had entirely forgotten it."

"I confess that I was thinking of something else at the moment; but the matter is very simple. Go to your father and effect a reconciliation with him. Gretchen will stay with me. You are free to go and come as you please. If you find that you cannot do without the child, in a few weeks you can return, if you choose. It would, at all events, be better for you to be away for awhile until I have rearranged my miserable affairs. I am going now to hear the will read. If I am appointed Ernestine's guardian, my life will be connected for the future with that of my ward." He suddenly gazed into vacancy, as if struck by a new idea, then started and seized his hat. "Yes, yes, I must go. Perhaps I am guardian!" And he turned away.

Bertha called after him, "Then I may get ready to go?"

"Do just as you please," he replied, turning upon the threshold with all the old courtesy, and then disappeared. Bertha went to her wardrobe and began to collect her possessions. "I am rightly paid for leaving a good head-waiter in the lurch for the sake of a fine doctor. If I had married Fritz, I should now have been the landlady of a hotel, while, the wife of a doctor, I don't know where to lay my head!" She looked across the room at the sleeping child. "If I only had not that child, I should be easier! But, then, it is his child. She loves him far better than me. It will be just like him one day, and a sorrow to me," she muttered. Then, as if the last thought were repented of as soon as conceived, she hastened up to Gretchen, and, weeping, kissed her pure white forehead. "No, no, you cannot help me!" she sobbed, and snatched the child to her broad breast.

## **CHAPTER VI.**

### **SOUL-MURDER.**

A fresh autumnal breeze was shaking the heavy boughs of the fruit-trees in the Hartwich kitchen-garden. Beneath a spreading apple-tree a new bench, painted green, had recently been placed. Some white garments, hanging upon a line to dry, fluttered like triumphal pennons in the direction from which a number of persons was slowly approaching the apple-tree. Rieka was carefully pushing along the rolling-chair, which, after so long affording shelter to the cats and chickens, had lately been recushioned and repaired. By its side walked good old Heim and Leuthold. Ernestine's frail little figure, with head still bandaged and hands gently folded, reclined in the chair; and if her large, dark eyes had not been riveted with an expression of utter enjoyment upon the distant landscape, she might have been thought smiling in death, so ashy pale was her emaciated countenance, so bloodless were the lips which were slightly open to inhale the pure morning air. The signs of returning and departing life are as wonderfully alike as morning and evening twilight. The child lying there, silent and motionless, might to all appearance be bidding farewell to the world, instead of greeting it anew after her dangerous illness. For to-day Ernestine was, as it were, celebrating her resurrection to life. It was the first time that she had been permitted to breathe the pure, open air of heaven; and her delight was so profound that she could only fold her little hands and pray silently. She had not the strength even to turn herself upon her cushions; but her youthful soul was preening its wings and soaring with the birds into the blue autumn skies.

"How are you now, my child?" Leuthold asked in a tone of tender sympathy.

"Oh, so well, dear uncle!" the little girl whispered with a long-drawn sigh. "I think I could run about, if I might."

"Ah, you could not yet, even if you might," said Heim, looking not without anxiety into the child's face, transfigured by an almost unearthly expression. And he laid his finger upon her

pulse, now scarcely perceptible.

"Her spirit, as she recovers, is in advance of her body," he said, lingering behind with Leuthold. "Physically such a child is soon conquered and destroyed, but the heart is a wonderful thing in its power of endurance. I never see an expression of real suffering upon a child's face without the deepest sympathy. For when should we be really gay and happy in this life, if not while we are children?"

"You are right," said Leuthold. "That melancholy mouth, shaping itself now to an unaccustomed smile, those bright eyes, around which the traces of tears are scarcely yet obliterated, touch me deeply."

Heim glanced keenly at the speaker expressing himself apparently with emotion.

"Oh, what a pretty new bench!" said Ernestine in a weak voice, as they reached the apple-tree. "And the boughs droop around it like an arbour."

Her gaze roved hither and thither; the fluttering linen on the line pleased her; the white butterflies, with spotted wings, hovering about the beds, enchanted her; she thought the far stretch of country, with its distant border of forest, magnificent,--everything was so new that she seemed to see it for the first time, and admired it all with intense delight. The long rows of irregular bean-poles opened mysterious, attractive paths to her imagination. Even the tall asparagus and the heads of cabbage, upon which large beads of morning dew were still lying, seemed to her master-pieces of nature.

"Oh, how lovely the world is!" she said to the two gentlemen. "And no one to punish me! You are so kind, Herr Geheimrath, and you, Uncle Leuthold, and you too, Rieka, are so good to me! I thank you all so much!" And she took and kissed the hands of Leuthold and Heim as they stood beside her, while tears filled her eyes.

"You strange child, what Snakes you cry now?" asked Leuthold.

"I cannot tell; I am so happy!" sobbed Ernestine. "If I only had a father or a mother!"

"But if your father were alive he would beat you again," said Rieka, taking a strictly practical view of the matter. "You ought to be glad that he is no longer here; it is much happier for you."

Ernestine's head drooped. "Oh, I am not longing for my father who is dead; I want a father to love me."

"You have an uncle who loves you fondly, my child," said Leuthold.

"Uncle," the little girl began again after a short pause, "how did the first people get here? Every one has a father and mother; but the first men could not have had any. Where did they come from?"

Leuthold and Heim exchanged glances of surprise.

"Ah, now you are going to the very root of the matter, prying into the deepest mysteries of creation!" said her uncle with a smile.

"There is stuff for a scholar in the child," said Heim; "she must be educated."

"Most certainly!" cried Leuthold with unwonted vivacity; "something must be made of her. In two years she will read Darwin." And he became lost in reverie.

Heim plucked two pansies that were growing among the weeds, and handed them to Ernestine. "Don't trouble your little brain with such thoughts," he said with an attempt to laugh. "When you are grown up you can learn all you wish to know. How few flowers you have here! Not enough for a nosegay!"

"No matter for that, Herr Heim," said Ernestine gaily. "Although there are so few flowers here, it seems to me as lovely as Paradise."

"The child is imaginative," Heim observed to Leuthold. "She finds Paradise in a neglected kitchen-garden; there is poetry there." And he pointed to her head and heart.

Leuthold took the child's hand. "If you wish for flowers, my darling, you shall have them. You are now"--and a spasmodic smile hovered upon his lips--"so rich that you need deny yourself nothing."

"I am rich!" Ernestine repeated, as though she could not grasp the idea. "Does the chair in which I am sitting belong to me?"

"Most certainly."

"And this garden, and the fields?"

"Everything that you see."

"Oh, how delightful! But, uncle, have I money enough to buy me a telescope like yours?"

Leuthold looked surprised at this question "Is that the end and aim of your desires? Well, then, you shall have a far better one than mine. You shall have an observatory, whence you can search the heavens far and wide, and, if you choose, I will be your teacher. Would you like that?"

"Oh, uncle!" sighed Ernestine, "God is so kind to me--how shall I thank him for all he is giving me?"

An ugly smile appeared on Leuthold's face; she looked up at him in surprise, and so fixedly that he involuntarily turned aside.

It was strange! Why had her uncle smiled at those words. Was what she had said so stupid, then? Was he laughing at her, or at--what? Suddenly there was an alloy in her happiness, as if she had found an ugly worm in a fragrant rose or discovered a flaw in a clear mirror. A pang shot through her heart. Yes, little Kay in the story-book must have felt just so when a splinter of the evil mirror got into his eye and heart and nothing seemed perfect or stainless to him any more. Instinctively she looked up into the sky, as if to see the demon flying there with the mysterious mirror that cast scorn and contempt upon the works of the good God; and when she glanced again at her uncle, who had just smiled so disagreeably, he seemed to her to look as she had fancied an evil spirit must look, and she shrank from him in a way that she could not herself comprehend. She leaned back in her chair exhausted, to rest after all these wearisome thoughts that had chased one another through her brain, and Heim, observing this, took Leuthold aside; she heard him say, "Come, we will leave the child to take a little sleep."

Rieka sat down quietly upon the bench beside her. Ernestine nestled comfortably among the yielding cushions, and the fragrant breeze stroked her cheek like a gentle, caressing hand. The birds were softly twittering in the boughs overhead. All nature breathed in her ear: "Sleep, sleep on the tender breast of the youthful day. Rest! you are not yet rested, after all that you have suffered!" And she closed her eyes and tried to sleep, but she could not. Why had her uncle smiled when she spoke of God? This question kept her awake, and scared away rest from her trusting, childish soul.

Meanwhile Helm and Leuthold walked on through the garden. "Herr Professor," the former began to his companion, who was lost in thought, "I must speak with you about the future of our protégé. I have plans for her, depending upon you for their fulfilment." Leuthold looked at him attentively. "I had a desire," Heim continued, "the first time I saw this strange child, to adopt her for my own; and this desire has become stronger since chance has brought me into such intimate association with her. My request of you now is: Abdicate--not your rights, but--your duties as her guardian in my favour, and let me take her to the capital with me, and have her educated and trained so that full justice may be done to her physical and mental capacities."

Leuthold was silent for a few moments, and then said with some hesitation, as he drew a long strip of grass through his slender white fingers, "That looks, Herr Geheimrath, as if you did not give me credit for the ability or the will to educate my ward suitably."

Heim shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "There shall be no wire-drawing between us, Herr Gleissert; we both know what we think of each other, and a physician has no time to waste in complimentary speeches. Be kind enough to signify to me, as briefly and decidedly as possible, your acceptance or refusal of my proposal."

"Well, then," Leuthold replied with a keen glance, "I must reply to you with a brief and decided 'No!'"

"Indeed!" was all that Heim in his chagrin rejoined.

"Look you, Herr Geheimrath," Leuthold began after some moments of reflection; "I will be frank with you. You know the dark stain that sullies my past, and the fault of my nature,--ambition. But, for all that, Herr Geheimrath, I am not heartless! In my childhood I was repelled on all sides, just as Ernestine has been. I was always cast in the shade by Hartwich, the son of my wealthy step-mother. You, as a student of human nature, well know what power there is in early surroundings to mould a man's future,--perhaps this may make you more lenient to my faults. Neither affection nor interest was shown me, and so kindly feelings faded away within me,--I could not give what I never received. Thus, Herr Geheimrath, I grew up an embittered, hardened man. The severity and sternness with which I was treated caused me to cultivate a sort of plausibility that won me friends, although I had no qualities to enable me to retain them. Therefore I was accounted a flatterer and a hypocrite. But the worst of all was, I was never taught the nice distinction between honours and honour, and thus it was that, in my blind grasp after honours, I sacrificed my honour!" He covered his eyes with his hand and paused for a moment. Old Heim shook his huge head, vexed with himself for the emotion of sympathy that he could not suppress.

"My step-mother," Leuthold continued, "was an imperious, masculine woman, who tyrannized over her husband and made him as unhappy as her son and step-son. You have seen the effect of her training upon Hartwich,--he became a drunkard, sinning in the flesh; I, of a less sensual

nature, sinned in spirit!"

"Forgive me for interrupting you," Heim interposed here; "but I am constrained to observe that if you had sinned no further than in robbing poor Hilsborn of his discovery, you would indeed have coveted only spiritual things, and there might have been some excuse for you; but you longed for earthly possessions,--you even grasped after the property of the poor child who has been left to your care. Judge for yourself whether such a helpless little creature can be confided without anxiety to the charge of a guardian who has not scrupled to endeavour to possess himself of her inheritance!"

Leuthold stood confronting Heim, without betraying, by a single change of feature, the emotions of his mind. "Herr Geheimrath," he said with dignity, "I understand perfectly how all that must appear to a stranger entirely unacquainted with the circumstances of the case, and I cannot wonder that you think your accusation of me well founded. So be it. I did endeavour to possess myself of Hartwich's property, for two-thirds of it were mine by right. Are you aware, Herr Geheimrath, that when I first took my place in the factory here, Hartwich was on the brink of bankruptcy? Are you aware that entirely through my exertions the business is now free from debt, and that the income which in the course of ten years made Hartwich a wealthy man was the result solely of my improvements? He contributed nothing but the raw material, which my efforts converted into a means of wealth. Had I not a sacred right to the fruits of my exertions?"

Again the Geheimrath shrugged his shoulders and did not speak.

"Time is money," Leuthold continued; "and I frankly admit that I do not belong to the class of men who give without any hope of a return. I am a poor man, compelled to depend upon myself. I receive nothing gratuitously; why should I give anything? Hartwich owed me for the time I sacrificed to him. I do not claim too much when I aver that, with my capacity, I could have earned three thousand thalers yearly as the superintendent of any other extensive manufactory, while I received from Hartwich the small salary of a mere overseer. And three thousand thalers yearly amount in ten years to thirty thousand thalers, without counting the interest. There you have one-third of the property that I 'coveted.'"

Heim assented with an expression of surprise.

Leuthold continued more fluently: "Now for the remaining third. The man who is capable of introducing inventions and improvements into the establishment, producing in ten years a dear profit of ninety thousand thalers, can easily dispose of such inventions for twenty thousand thalers; and if I add the accumulated interest of ten years, it amounts to exactly thirty thousand thalers again. If my step-brother had paid me this sum, he would still have possessed thirty thousand thalers clear, which would have belonged of right to his daughter. I might have offered my services elsewhere, but it seemed to me more fitting that I should serve my brother than a stranger; I might have insisted upon payment, but I knew well my brother's avarice, and that it would be impossible to extort money from him except at the risk of such excitement on his part as might cost him his life. Therefore! thought it best, as I foresaw that he could not live long, to suspend my claims and allow him to devise to me by will what was really my due. How utterly I have been the loser by my--I do not scruple to say--magnanimous conduct, you well know; and now pray point out wherein I have unjustly claimed a single groschen!"

Heim, his hands crossed behind him and his head sunk upon his breast, walked slowly along by the side of Leuthold, whose slender figure had recovered all its former elasticity as he easily wound his way among the tangled bushes and weeds in the neglected path.

"I cannot tell how a lawyer would designate your conduct," the old man said meditatively. "I should not call it magnanimous; but you may be able to justify it from your point of view. Still, one never knows what to expect of such long-headed, calculating people."

"Yes, Herr Geheimrath, it is the destiny of those who depend upon themselves alone for whatever of good life may bring them, to be regarded as covetous,--they must grasp after what falls unsought for into the lap of others. In this matter I not only did what I could for myself, but for the future also. Herr Geheimrath, I am a father!"

"Yes, yes; but you were not a father at the time that you arranged with Hartwich his testamentary dispositions," Heim briefly interposed.

"Only two months afterwards my wife gave birth to a dead son. From the first moment when I dreamed of one day possessing a child for whom I could prepare a future, I cherished a determination to hold fast to whatever was mine by right. I think you cannot refuse to bear witness that I have endured the destruction of all my hopes with fortitude. My wife has left me, refusing to share with me my cheerless future. I stand alone with my helpless child. You have heard no word of complaint from my lips. Examine yourself, and your upright nature will compel you to acknowledge that I do not deserve your distrust. And now, as regards the last and weightiest consideration,--my relation to my ward,--ask any one whom you may please to interrogate here, whether I have not always been Ernestine's advocate and protector. Every servant in the house--the child herself--will tell you that it has been so. Upon this point my conscience cannot accuse me. For, look you, Herr Geheimrath, this child is the only living being in this world, besides my own daughter, whom I have to love. There is one spot in my nature,

hardened as it is by the rough usage of life, that has always remained soft,—the memory of my unhappy childhood. In Ernestine I am reminded of my own early youth, and there is a tender satisfaction in providing her with so much that at her age I was obliged to deny myself. Leave me this child, Herr Geheimrath; I am a poor, unhappy, disappointed man. Do not take from me the last thing that stirs the better nature within me,—it would be too hard!"

Heim stood still for an instant, and seemed about to speak. He bethought himself and walked on a few steps, then paused again: "The case is not psychologically improbable. You may feel as you say, and you may invent it all. What guarantee have I for its truth?"

"I am sorry to say, none, if you do not find it in the honesty of my confession. But, Herr Geheimrath, by what right—pardon me—do you require such a guarantee from me?"

"My anxiety for the child's welfare, I should suppose, would be allowed to give me such a right,—a right that, if you are not dead to human feeling, you would respect even although it has no legal grounds."

"Oh, certainly, certainly,—I do respect it, and thank you for your interest in the child. But I cannot deny that your persistent distrust of me surprises me exceedingly, and prompts me to force you by my conduct to a better opinion of me."

"That is, you will let me have the child?" Heim asked quickly.

"That is, I am more determined than ever to undertake the charge of her education myself, that I may one day convince you of the injustice that you are doing me."

Heim regarded the smiling speaker with a penetrating glance. "You rely upon the fact that I can legally urge nothing against you. Well, then, I can do no more. I confide the fate of this strange child, who has become so dear to me, to a loving Providence, that will watch over her and over you, sir, however you may contrive to withdraw yourself and your designs from the eye of human scrutiny."

As Heim spoke these words, the two gentlemen reached Ernestine's chair. The little girl sat perfectly still, lost in thought. Her uncle laid his hand upon her white forehead, and said to himself, "I will keep you!"

On the evening of the same day, Leuthold sat before his writing-table at the open windows. The cool night air made the flame of the lamp flicker behind its green shade. From the adjoining room came the low sound of the plaintive air with which the nursemaid was soothing little Gretchen to sleep. A cricket upon the window-sill chirped continually, and a singed moth would now and then fall upon the white, unwritten sheet that lay on the table before Leuthold. It was a calm, mild, autumn night,—a night when darkness hides the yellow leaves and one can dream that it is still summer. And yet the solitary man sat there gazing into vacancy, with as little sympathy with nature as though he had been banished utterly from her communion. In the corner of the window-frame there fluttered a large cobweb, and its proprietor was lying in wait for the insects that were attracted by the lamp. But the man's brain was weaving still finer webs in the stillness of night, and in the midst of them lurked the ugly spider of greed of gold, also lying in wait for prey. Ernestine must be ensnared; but she had protectors who were upon the watch. No human being must suspect that her guardian was her worst enemy.

The will had been opened, and two clauses in it had given Leuthold renewed life and hope. He was Ernestine's guardian,—and her heir in case of her dying unmarried. By the time that his light began to fade, he had laid all his plans, and arose from his seat with the feeling of satisfaction experienced by an author who has just thought out successfully the plot of a new work. Ernestine was no more to him than a character in a novel is to its author,—a character which is indispensable to the plot, and which the author treats with care as a necessary evil, but never with affection. Thus he had planned with great precision the child's future; and, unless he utterly failed in his designs, the figure that now hovered before his imagination would greatly conduce to the successful conclusion of the romance for his child and himself.

The lamp died down. Leuthold slipped out upon tiptoe, and, undressing in the next room in the dark, lay down in the bed beside which stood Gretchen's crib. Soon after the child awoke, and stretched out her hands towards her father. He drew her towards him, and laid her head upon his breast, that was chilled as though from the influence of his own icy heart. She nestled up to him, and put her little arms around his neck. He listened to her quiet breathing as she fell calmly asleep again, and gradually his own heart grew warm beside hers, beating there so peacefully. He scarcely ventured to breathe himself, for fear of waking her. It was a happy moment for him. Upon the breath of the slumbering child an ineffable delight was wafted into his soul. He held in his arms the only being whom he loved and who really loved him,—his child, his own flesh and blood! Suddenly there was a loud knocking at his door, and Rieka's shrill voice cried, "Herr Doctor! Herr Doctor! pray get up quickly and come to Ernestine!"

Leuthold started up and gently laid the child in her crib again. Every nerve in his body vibrated, his heart beat wildly, and his hands trembled as he dressed himself hurriedly. Something extraordinary must have occurred: was Ernestine worse?—perhaps dying? Was fate to

atone so soon for Hartwich's injustice? Were his hopes to be--the thought made him giddy, breathless, and, almost tottering, he reached the door where Rieka was waiting to light him down the stairs.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Oh, Herr Doctor, it is our fault," Rieka began: "Theresa and I were sitting by Ernestine's bedside and talking; we thought she was sound asleep, we were talking about master who is dead; and we told about the dairy-maid's refusing to sleep in the barn-loft any more, because she says he walks. And we spoke of his death, how he called for his child, and declared that he could not find rest in his grave if Ernestine did not forgive him. And we said we were sure that he would appear to her some day, for when any one dies with such a burden on his soul, there is no rest for him until he has the forgiveness that he craves. Then Ernestine suddenly began to cry, and we saw that she had heard everything. We tried to quiet her, but she grew worse and worse, and nothing would content her but that she must be taken this very night to the church-yard, to her father's grave, that she might forgive him. We can do nothing with her; she insists upon it; she is almost in convulsions with crying and obstinacy!"

They entered Ernestine's room, where Theresa, the other maid, was trying to keep the struggling, desperate child in bed. Leuthold went softly up to her, and laid his cool, delicate hand upon her burning forehead. His touch soothed her; she became quiet, and looked up at her uncle with a piteous entreaty in her large eyes.

"Leave me alone with her," he said to the servants, who obeyed with a mutter of discontent. He then trimmed the night-lamp so that it burned brightly, and seated himself beside Ernestine's couch. "My child," he began, in his low, melodious voice, "you are quite clever enough to understand what I am going to say to you, but you must promise me that you will never repeat it to any human being. Do you promise?"

"Oh, I will promise, uncle," sobbed Ernestine, "if you will only help me to let my poor father know that I forgive him,--oh, with all my heart!--and that my head is well again, and does not hurt me any more! Oh, my poor, poor father,--your little Ernestine wants so to tell you that she is not angry with you; but she cannot!"

"You are a good child, Ernestine, but you are only a child!" Leuthold continued, while the same strange smile that had so troubled Ernestine in the morning again played around his mouth. She looked up in surprise. Was what she had said so foolish again?

"You are too clever, young as you are, to be allowed to fall into the vulgar belief shared by the maids; and therefore I must tell you what it would not be best for them to know,--that the dead do not live in any form whatever."

Ernestine started, and gazed at her uncle.--"What?"

"Yes, yes; I tell you truly, whoever is dead is dead; that means, he has ceased to be; he neither feels nor thinks; a few bones are all that there is of him; and they are good for nothing but to convert into lime or manure for the fields."

Ernestine hearkened breathless to his words. "But where then are the spirits, uncle?"

"There are no spirits."

"Then shall we never go to heaven?"

"Of course not; those are all fables, invented to induce common people to be good. They must believe in rewards and punishments after death, to enable them to bear the trials and deprivations of their lot in life. They would rebel against all control, and be in perpetual mutiny, without the prospect of compensation after death. So there are wise philosophers in every country, composing what is called the Christian Church, who have invented many beautiful legends,--which you call the Bible. Superstition is founded upon the weakness and folly of mankind, upon ignorance of the true laws of nature; and the churches of every age and clime have used it as the stuff of which they have made leading-strings for the people. But the educated man, breathing only a pure, intellectual atmosphere, is free from such fetters. Science leads him with a loving hand to heights whence she points out to him the natural laws of the universe, and, in place of the prop of which she deprives him, gives him strength to stand alone."

Ernestine was ashy pale; her lips moved, but no sound issued from them; she clenched her hands, and felt as if crushed by some terrible, unheard-of mystery. She could hardly bear to listen to what her uncle was saying, and yet she caught greedily at every word; she could not bear to believe him, and yet she could not but distrust, now, what the pastor had taught her. She was ashamed not to be as clever as her uncle had called her: the poison that he had instilled into her mind worked quickly.

"But, uncle, can what so many people believe be all false? Old people and children, kings and emperors, beggars and rich men, all go to church:--is there any one except you who does not go?"

Leuthold laughed louder than was his wont. "It is easy enough to answer you, dear child. In

the first place, there are multitudes of men besides myself who belong to no church. In the second place, the number of people who profess to believe a creed is no proof of its truth, but only of the ignorance and narrow-mindedness of those professing such belief. Millions of men have been pantheists, and counted all those who did not share their faith criminal. Every religion condemns all others as erroneous. Which is right? As long as all were ignorant of the causes of the mighty and glorious operations of nature, these were ascribed to supernatural agencies and regarded as revelations of the divine. Thunder and lightning, light and air, all were governed, according to the ancients, as among savages at the present day, by their own several deities; every natural event was ascribed to some being, half man, half god; and thus heaven and earth were peopled with good and evil spirits, friendly or hostile to mankind. This superstition fled at the approach of science, or at least it became weakened,--etherialized. With increasing knowledge of natural laws, the sensual gods of Greece and Rome lost form and substance, and finally vanished, to be replaced by a true appreciation of the elements as such, and a faith in a central Providence ruling all things wisely and well. This is a great improvement; but it is not enough. We still have a Trinity,--a Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; we still have angels, demons, and saints,--a multitude of good and evil deities, who have followed us down from old pagan times, and who, although more respectably apparelled, are still prepared to work all kinds of miracles. The more fully the laws of matter are laid bare to our searching eyes, the dimmer grows our religious belief,--as the shadow, which in the darkness we have taken for the substance itself, fades before the first ray of sunlight, which reveals the substance distinctly. The various gods of all ages and climes were only the shadows cast by the operation of natural laws; as soon as the light of science fell upon them, they vanished. Thus, religious fancy was driven away from this physical world, as the laws ruling it were discovered, and obliged to seek a more abstract domain; but even there it is not secure; for scientific inquiry, climbing from height to height, and gaining in vigour with every fresh advance, long ago began to follow it thither; and it must consent to still greater concessions, if it would not be driven from its last foothold,--its self-created heaven!"

Leuthold paused. Ernestine's vague look of wonder reminded him that his habit of speech had carried him too far for the comprehension of a child. Nevertheless, it excited him to hear his own voice speaking thus once more, and his gray eyes glittered strangely as he observed the effect of his words, only half understood as they were, upon Ernestine.

"Has the pastor told me falsehoods, then?" she asked at last.

"He did not lie intentionally. He is a very narrow-minded man, and knows no better. He is not one of the deceivers, but of the deceived."

"But he is the wisest man in the village," Ernestine objected.

"In the village, yes! But do you think him wiser than your uncle?"

"No, certainly not!" she whispered almost inaudibly. It seemed to her a crime to think a common man wiser than the pastor.

"Well, then, let me tell you that he is not nearly as clever as you are!"

"Uncle!" exclaimed Ernestine alarmed.

"I tell you the truth, my child. You are now very young; but, when you are as old as the pastor, you will know much more than he does, and take a very different view of things."

"Are you in earnest, uncle?" Ernestine asked eagerly, for this first flattery had not failed in its effect. "Do you think I can ever be as clever as a man?"

"Most certainly! Unless I greatly err, you will be something distinguished, one of these days!"

Ernestine sat bolt upright in bed, looking at her uncle with sparkling eyes. Her pale face flushed, her breath came quick. Ambition kindled in her childish nature to a burning flame. The fuel had been gathering there since her first contact with those who had treated her with contempt. Now the spark had fallen, and she was all aglow with the insidious fire which gradually consumes the whole being unless some terrible misfortune bursts open the floodgates of tears to quench the unhallowed flame.

Leuthold gazed, not without secret admiration and delight, at the illuminated and inspired countenance of the child. Thus, thus he would have her look! He leaned towards her, and held out his hand. She grasped it fervently.

"Uncle," she said with childish emphasis, "will you help me to be as clever and to learn as much as a man? Will you teach me the sciences which you said would make men so strong?"

"Yes," replied Leuthold with seeming enthusiasm, "I will, indeed."

"Promise me, dear uncle."

"I promise you with all my heart that I will teach you as no woman has ever been taught before,--that I will guide and direct you until you have soared far above the rest of your sex. But

you must be diligent, and discard all desires but the desire of knowledge."

"Oh, I will, dearest uncle. Why should I not? What else can I wish for? I do not want to play with other children,--they laugh at me. I am too ugly and grave for them. I will live alone, and learn with you; and one day, when I know more than they, I will shame them. Oh, that will be fine!"

"But I hope, my child, that you will remember your promise, and not tell any one what I have said to you to-night."

"Not any one? not even Herr Heim?"

"Not for the world. If I should find that you cannot hold your tongue, I will teach you nothing, and you will be as ignorant as those who laugh at you."

"No, uncle, I will never tell anything; I will not, indeed!" Ernestine cried, "But tell me one thing,--are there really no angels, then?"

"Angels!" and her uncle smiled. "Of what use has been all that I have just said to you, if you can seriously ask such a question?"

"Then I have no guardian angel!" said the child, and her eyes filled with tears. "And I loved my guardian angel so dearly!"

"My child," replied Leuthold, "you are your own guardian angel. Your own strong mind will shield you from all danger far better than any such imaginary creature with wings."

Ernestine was silent. She must take care of herself, then. But she felt so weak and broken; how should she be supported unless she could lean upon some higher power? No guardian angel, no father, no mother, not even their spirits! It seemed to her that she was suddenly standing alone, without prop or stay, upon a rocky peak, with a yawning abyss just at her feet. The moment would come when she must fall headlong. Then there arose before her the last hope of the soul in utter misery,--God! He was all in all,--Father and guardian spirit; He was love; He would not forsake her. Though all else that she had believed in crumbled to dust, He still remained; she would cling to Him with redoubled fervour. She looked up at her uncle; should she tell him her thoughts? No! She could not speak that sacred name before Leuthold; she dreaded the smile she had seen in the morning,--she could not tell why.

Her uncle then spoke, and the last drop of poison fell into her soul. "We have in ourselves everything that modern religion has created outside of ourselves," he began. "Angels, devils, God-" Ernestine started and shrank,--"these are all only personifications of our good and evil qualities. It is only the boundless self-conceit of mankind that imagines that the grain of reason that distinguishes them from the brutes is something entirely beyond the power of nature to produce,--something supernatural, immortal, divine,--and that there must be, enthroned somewhere above the universe, an omnipotent being, who is in direct communication with us and has nothing to do but to busy himself with our very important personal affairs! This belief in God, with all its apparent humility and submission, is the veriest offspring of the vanity and arrogance of mankind, and all worship of God, my child, is, in fact, only worship of self. True humility is to acknowledge that we are no 'emanation from the Divine Essence,' as theosophists phrase it, but only nature's masterpieces, and that we can claim no higher destiny than that common to the myriad forms of being that bear their part in the universal whole."

Ernestine had sunk back among her pillows,--she felt annihilated; there was no longer any God for her!

Her uncle arose, for two o'clock had just been tolled from the belfry of the village church. He did not fail to observe the terrible impression that his words had made upon Ernestine. He took her hand; she withdrew it from his grasp. He smiled. "You are sorry, are you not, to give up everything that your childish mind has believed in so firmly? I can easily understand it. But, Ernestine, your powers of mind are too great to allow you to find consolation for any length of time in such delusions. Be sure that sooner or later you would have extricated yourself from such bondage, as the expanding flower throws off the confining hull. You have been ill, and your physical weakness has depressed your mental energy; but, when you are well and strong again, you will rejoice proudly in the consciousness that you are a free, irresponsible being, not dependent upon the will and the doubtful justice of a fancied Jehovah. Study yourself, my child; in yourself lies your future. Believe in yourself, and plant your hopes deeply in your faith in yourself. I will leave you now to sleep; and I am sure that to-morrow I shall find you a little philosopher."

Long after her uncle had left the room and Rieka had retired upon tiptoe to bed in the adjoining apartment, fully convinced that her charge was sleeping, Ernestine was wide awake. She lay perfectly motionless, as if shattered in every limb. She stirred for the first time when Rieka had extinguished the light, so that no ray came through the open door. Then the child drew a deep breath, and stretched her arms out into the darkness as if to clasp the forms of her vanished faith; but her arms encountered only the empty air. There was no more pitiable creature upon earth than she at that moment. What is left for a child without father or mother, who has lost her guardian angel and her God? She is a bird fallen from the nest, stripped by cruelty of its wings and left living on the ground. The child's foreboding soul, precociously matured by



misfortune, felt the entire weight of her desolation; and she hid her face in the pillow, that Rieka might not hear the convulsive sobs wrung from the depths of her misery. The tears which she poured forth for her vanished God were all that her uncle had left her,--the only prayer that she was capable of. She longed to pray--but could not in words. "He does not hear me! He does not live!" she cried to herself; and the hot tears burst forth again, and she wept in agony. And, as she wept, her heart grew soft and tender, and as the Crucified, after he had been laid in the tomb, was present invisibly among his disciples, so the God who had just been buried away from her mind came to life again in her heart; she did not hear nor see him, but she felt his presence, and it gave her strength to pray. She kneeled in her bed, folded her hands, and cried inwardly: "Dear God, let me keep my belief in Thee--if Thou art and canst hear me--" --that terrible "if" intruded. She paused to ponder upon it. And then there was an end to her fervent prayer, and God vanished again.

Thus the struggle between faith and doubt continued feverishly, and her soul thirsted for love as did her parched lips for water. Where was there a kind, gentle hand to offer her a cooling draught, and with it the kiss that should refresh her thirsty soul,--such a hand as only a mother has? Ernestine gazed out into the darkness. Her breath came in gasps, her heart beat audibly, but no more kindly tears came to her burning eyes. "O God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" was the last moan of her tortured heart; and then she sank into a feverish slumber.

## **CHAPTER VII.**

### **DEPARTURE.**

The autumnal gales had stripped the leaves from the trees; the tall firs in the forest, bordering the spacious brown fields of the Hartwich estate, were the only green on the landscape. Over the cheerless desert plain wandered a lonely little figure, pale and sad as Heine's Last Fairy. Ernestine had so far recovered that she was once more able to brave the autumn wind. She extended her arms, and could not help imagining that they might become wings, that would bear her far, far aloft. She knew it could never really be so; but the thought was so delightful! Up, up, far away from the earth,--it was so sad upon the earth. She was a stranger here, and she felt that her home must be elsewhere. In heaven? Oh, there was no heaven; but in the air--at least, in the air. And she ran on--ran as fast as she could--and her heart throbbed with excitement as the wind whistled in her ears and tossed her clothes about, and her hair.

An insatiable yearning--she knew not for what--had driven her out of the house--she knew not whither. There was nothing for her to crave for, and yet she could not help it. She thought she should die of longing! She wished she could dissolve into foam, like the little mermaid, that the daughters of the air might bear her aloft into endless space! And she stood still and gazed up into the gray clouds, and took a long breath. There was no longer anything there for her to aspire to, and she had not yet learned to look within. One vast void around and above her, and forth into this immense void she was driven!

At last she reached the woods, and stood beneath the dark firs, in whose boughs the wind was wildly roaring. It was the last time that she should stand thus among these familiar scenes, for on the following day she was to set out with her uncle for the south, that she might escape the northern winter. She was sorry, for she clung to her home, bleak as it had been. She must have something to cling to! She had looked forward with pleasure to the ice and snow; the glittering form of the snow-queen in the fairy book--the creature of Andersen's Northern fancy--had transfigured winter for her. Like little Kay, she had lost all delight in life, and, like him, she was perplexed in spirit at the word "eternity." But she could not help loving the winter and the solitude of her retired home. She walked on fearlessly, beneath the whistling of the wind, deeper and deeper into the forest, until, without knowing how, she emerged on the other side, and stood under the oak where she had first seen Johannes. The bough, now entirely dead, which had broken beneath her when she was trying to escape from him, still hung there. There, too, was the spot where he had given her the book--the wonderful book--that had peopled her fancy with such lovely forms. And yet that interview with Johannes seemed in her memory far more like enchantment than any fairy-tale, and she stood still, sunk in a reverie, until a furious blast of wind tore at the boughs of the majestic tree as if it longed to tear it down and scatter its fragments through the forest. With a crash, the broken bough, only attached hitherto to the trunk by a slender hold, was hurled to the ground, and the wind wailed on through the bare branches in the forest depths. Ernestine looked up startled. The boughs rustled and creaked, and the scared ravens flew croaking hither and thither. Again the blast swept howling across the plain, slowly, but with a mighty swell in its roar, towards the wood, and again it stormed and raved in its first fury about the isolated oak, which trembled and shook to its centre. But Ernestine was startled only for an instant; she was used to the blasts of a northern October, and she took delight in this wild might of nature. It was almost as if she herself were shaking the tree, and splitting its

branches with her own hands. The exultation of a Titan in the breast of a creature woven as it were out of moonlight and lily-leaves! Only a divinely-related spirit could have had such thoughts in so delicate a form,—a spirit that fraternized with the elements, and, in an intoxication of delight, forgot the frail casket in which it was confined.

Singing strange, wild songs, the child, with her wonted agility, climbed the tree that had grown so dear to her, and cradled herself exultingly amid its tossing branches. She ascended to the topmost boughs, and gazed far over forest and plain; and the more the creaking branches were tossed to and fro as she clung to them, the wilder grew her delight. It was almost flying—to hover, thus hidden, above the earth! She kissed the bough by which she held, and as she saw the young branches breaking here and there beneath her, and the hurricane raged so that it almost took away her breath, she looked up with inspired eyes, and whispered involuntarily, "It is the breath of God!" Suddenly she distinguished a sound as of human footsteps, and a shout came up through the roar of the blast. She thought of the handsome stranger youth! Could it be he—come to take her down from the tree? An inexplicable mixture of joy and dread took possession of her. Was it he? Would he stretch out his arms to her again? But it was not he. A chill struck to her heart, and a shade gathered over the landscape. It was her uncle! "Ernestine," he called to her, "thoughtless child! How you terrify me! Running to the woods and climbing trees in such a storm! You might kill yourself! Come down, I entreat you!"

"Let me stay here, uncle; I like it so much!" Ernestine begged.

"I must seriously desire you to come with me. What would people say if I allowed you to be out in such weather? Be good enough to do as I tell you."

Ernestine cast one more silent glance over her beloved forest, and then, with a saddened face, began to descend. When she reached the spot where the bough had been broken, and whence Johannes had rescued her, she broke off a couple of withered leaves, hid them in her dress, and slipped down the trunk lightly as a shadow. She turned to her uncle. All her delight had vanished; she was upon the earth once more, and her uncle's cold, keen eye disenchanting her utterly. Her look was downcast; she felt almost ashamed. If he knew that she had just been thinking of God, he would despise her. But why could she believe in God again while she was up there, and not when she was down here with her uncle?

She walked on without a word by Leuthold's side, glancing neither to the right nor the left, never heeding how the wind was well-nigh tearing her dress from her back. She did not want to fly any more,—she longed for nothing;—when her uncle was by, she was ashamed of every emotion. When she came to the place where the path leading to her home diverged from the road to the village, she asked permission of Leuthold to go and say farewell at the parsonage. After some hesitation, he granted it, and went on alone. Ernestine hurried along the well-known road. The village children shouted after her, "Halloo, there goes Hartwich's Tina,—proud Tina, with the whey face!" She paid no heed to them,—she felt herself above the jeers of such creatures. With a beating heart she reached the parsonage; then she suddenly stood still. What did she want here? To bid good-by to the pastor and his wife! But if the good old man should admonish her to love and fear God, as he was so apt to do? Or if he should ask her if she believed in God? What should she,—what could she answer him? Could she, doubter, apostate that she was, enter the presence of the servant of God without placing herself at the bar of judgment, or without lying? She stood like a penitent, not daring to enter the door which had been so often flung open to her. Twice she put her hand upon the bell-handle and did not pull it. She knew that the old man would be grieved if she went away without bidding him farewell; but she also knew that he would be still more deeply pained could he guess at her present state of mind. Perhaps he might despise her then; she could not bear that; and, just as she was ashamed of her faith when her uncle was with her, she was now ashamed of her doubts. How often had the pastor told her it was a sin to doubt! she had committed—nay, was now committing—this sin. No, her guilty conscience would not let her meet his eye, or kiss the soft, gently folded hands of his wife. She slipped past the house, so that no one could see her, and went into the grave-yard, where it was quiet and lonely and she could hide her guilty little heart upon her parents' graves. She knelt down beside them, and longed for tears to relieve her; but no blessing arose from the graves over which no spirits hovered, but which covered, as her uncle Leuthold had told her, nothing but bones. And yet she so longed to do penance for all her doubts. "If I could only have faith again this minute, and pray God to forgive me, I could go in and see the pastor," she thought. She looked around her, not knowing what to do;—there was the church, and the doors were open. She would go into the house of God; perhaps in that sacred place she might find again what she had lost. In profound self-abasement the child entered, threw herself upon her knees before the altar, and closed her eyes. "Now, now I can pray!" she thought; but, just as upon that terrible night when she was robbed of her religion and peace of mind, devotion seemed near her, but to be eluding her clasp. There lay the guiltless little penitent, her soul full of piety, but unable to pray,—her heart full of tears, but unable to weep. She sprang up in despair. God was not here either. She had thought she heard him in the tempest, and that the wind was his breath,—but on the way home her uncle had explained to her that it was nothing but a current of air occasioned by the change of temperature on the earth's surface, or by violent showers of rain, and she was convinced that she had been wrong and that her uncle knew very much more than the pastor. But if she believed her uncle, she could not believe in God; it was not her fault, and yet this doubt weighed upon her as the first crime of her life. Her trusting soul was like the iron that glows long after the fire in which it was heated is quenched; her faith was extinguished, but the influence that her faith had

exerted upon her endured and became her punishment. It began to grow dark; yet still she stood with head bowed and downcast eyes beside the wooden crucifix upon the tomb of her parents. The Christ who had been nailed to the cross for the sake of what her uncle called an illusion, seemed to regard her so reproachfully that she did not dare to look up at him; he had shed his precious blood for the faith which she denied; she almost thought he would tear away the hand nailed to the cross and extend it in menace towards her. An inexplicable shudder ran through her; again she fell upon her knees.

"Forgive, forgive!" she cried; and the tears burst forth and relieved the icy pressure upon her heart.

Then something grasped her shoulder and raised her from the ground. Was it her uncle, or the foul fiend, who was standing beside her?

"You are here, then," he sneered, "in the dark, kneeling and weeping. Aha! I came to look for my quiet little philosopher, and I find a whimpering child praying to a wooden doll! Can you tell me where Ernestine Hartwich is?"

"Uncle," cried Ernestine, driven to defiance in her despair, "why do you persecute me so continually to-day? Can I not be alone for one hour? and must I give an account of every thought and word? You have taken from me everything in which I confided,—you have come between myself and God, so that I dare not go to the pastor, but must slip round his house as if I were a thief. Do you think all this does not pain me, and that I feel no remorse? Whatever you may teach me, I shall never be happy again. Why did you tell me there were no spirits, no angels, no God? I did not wish to know it. I loved God, and, however wretched I was, I could always hope that he would be kind and merciful to me; if no human being loved me, I could always think that he did. And now I must bear everything that happens to me, hoping nothing and loving nothing,—no one,—not even you!"

Leuthold smiled, and stroked Ernestine's curls.

"I see now that I was wrong in treating a girl twelve years old like a boy of twenty. Too strong nourishment will not strengthen an invalid,—he cannot bear it; I ought to have thought of that, and not burdened your girlish brain with so much. I can understand your dislike of me as the innocent cause of your mental indigestion, and forgive you for it. Pardon me for overestimating your intellect,—it is my only injustice towards you."

Ernestine stood gloomily beside him, without a word; he could not guess what was passing in her mind.

"I will leave you here, my dear child. Pray on,—you need fear no further disturbance. Go, kiss the feet of your Christ,—it will relieve your heart. Go, Ernestine; or are you embarrassed by my presence? Shall I walk away? Well!"

He turned as if to go; but Ernestine held fast to his arm.

"I will go with you," she said sullenly. "I could not pray now if I tried. And I am not so stupid as you think me. I understood everything that you have taught me, and I do not believe any longer in—in—the other. What else do you require? One can cry without being thought silly; and I tell you I shall cry far oftener than I shall laugh. Oh, I shall cry all my life long!"

And she covered her face with her hands and sobbed aloud.

"You are nervous, my child. These tears come from mere bodily weakness. In a few years you will smile at what causes them now. Do not be troubled that you cannot love any one,—not even me. All such childish things are left behind in the nursery. Whoever will be truly free must begin by standing alone. Every tie that links our heart to others, however lovable they may be, is a fetter. Whoever will be strong must cease to lean on others. Love knowledge alone,—all living things can be taken from you, and your love for them is a source of pain. Science is always yours,—an inexhaustible source of delight. Men are unjust. They will estimate you not according to your mental powers, but your exterior advantages, and these are too trivial to gain their homage. Science gives you your deserts,—she measures her gifts according to your diligence. Women will envy you; for your intellect will far outsoar theirs. Men will slight you; for you are not, and never will be, beautiful, and they require beauty beyond all else in a woman. You will meet with nothing but disappointment among your kind, if you are not resolved to expect nothing from them. If you would avoid every grief that they can cause you, learn early not to depend upon them; and to this end, science, the culture of the mind, alone can lead you. Intellect will indemnify us for all the woes and necessities of humanity,—through it we can rise to the true dignity of our nature. Therefore, my child, seek out the true nourishment for the intellect, and the blind instincts of your heart will soon die in the clear light of the mind. You long for peace; trust me, it is to be found only in your mind, not in love."

Ernestine walked silently beside her uncle. Her eyes gleamed strangely in the twilight as she looked up at him. She did not understand all that he said. But there came an icy chill from his words, and it was owing to him that her feverish excitement of mind was allayed. Soft and gently as falling snow in the night, his words had fallen into her mind, and, without her knowledge, hidden the last blossoms of faith there under a thick, cold pall. Beneath it her young heart grew

torpid; and she took this quiet, painless sleep for peace.

When they reached home, they found the Staatsrätthin's carriage before the door.

"Uncle," said Ernestine alarmed and disturbed, "go in and see if it is the Frau Staatsrätthin herself,--if it is, I would rather stay outside."

At this moment little Angelika looked out of the window, and called Ernestine by name in a tone of delight. There was no help for it. Ernestine had to go in and encounter, to her distress, the majestic figure of the Staatsrätthin. The great lady acknowledged Leuthold's low bow by a slight inclination of her head, and held out her hand to Ernestine.

"You have avoided me hitherto, my child. Have I, without intending it, done anything to pain you?"

Ernestine stood silent in confusion. She could not have told, even had she wished to do so, what the kind Staatsrätthin had done to her, for she did not know herself what it was. She could not understand, in her childish inexperience, that it was her sense of shame at her own insufficiency that embarrassed her in the Frau Staatsrätthin's presence.

The lady's eyes rested kindly upon the shadowy little figure. She stroked the child's thick, short curls, and then turned to Leuthold, while Angelika, who had a large doll in her arms, drew Ernestine away to a deep window-seat.

"My object here to-day, Herr Doctor, is to arrange a pressing matter of business with you as speedily as possible."

"Madam," said Leuthold bowing, "I feel much honoured. May I offer you one of these clumsy chairs? or will you have the kindness to go up with me to my own apartments, where I can receive you in a more fitting manner?"

The Staatsrätthin glanced towards the children.

"I would like to speak to you alone for a few moments, Herr Doctor."

"Then, madam, let me request you to accompany me." With these words Leuthold opened the door.

"Angelika," the Staatsrätthin said to the child, "stay with Ernestine until I come back."

She went upstairs with Leuthold; and, when seated upon the couch in his study, she could not but observe the comfortable, cosy arrangement of the room, the delicate cleanliness and order reigning in it; while upon the table before her lay several exercise-books labelled "Ernestine von Hartwich." Involuntarily she was inspired with a kind of confidence in the grave, elegant man who had received her with so much grace. She inspected him with the experienced eyes of a woman of the world. His bearing was blameless, and his regular features bore an unmistakably intellectual stamp. Far-sighted and clever as the Staatsrätthin was, she was too much of a woman not to be impressed by the good taste in Leuthold's appearance and manner, and she was inclined to think Heim's estimate of him as somewhat unjust. She did not belong to the class of women ready to be imposed upon by a small hand with filbert-shaped, carefully-kept nails; but the refinement of Leuthold's person and surroundings was very agreeable in her eyes.

"The neatness and order that I see here surprise me, Herr Doctor," she began, as Leuthold seated himself opposite her; "for I hear that your wife is not with you at present."

"No, madam, I am alone; but I have an acute sense of fitness in exterior arrangements, and probably pay more attention to such things than is quite becoming in a man."

"Will your wife's absence be of long duration?" asked the Staatsrätthin with interest.

A shadow passed over Leuthold's countenance. "I fear, yes, madam. My wife, unfortunately, had not sufficient affection for our child and myself to endure the deprivations to which the disappointment of our hopes of an inheritance from my brother subjected us. She returned to her father for an indefinite time, and, as she has succeeded in keeping away now from her little daughter for two months, I have great doubts of her return."

"But that is very sad for you, Herr Doctor," remarked the Staatsrätthin.

Leuthold passed his hand across his eyes. "It is sad indeed, madam, that I should have made such a choice,--that I should have expended years of love and pains in the attempt to cultivate and train a nature incapable of culture. Mine is the same pain which is experienced by the sculptor who finds a serious flaw in the marble upon which he has spent years of labour. He exhausts himself in the endeavour to shape it according to his ideal, and, just when he hopes for its completion, a dark vein is laid bare by his chisel,--his work is worthless,--he has hoped and laboured in vain!"

The Staatsrätthin looked at him with interest, "That is rather coldly put, and yet poetically conceived, sir."

"An artist would not call it cold, madam, for he would know how great the suffering is to which I have ventured to compare my own."

The Staatsrätthin assented. Leuthold's manner pleased her more and more. Just then Lena entered, leading Gretchen by the hand, and carrying a brightly burnished lighted lamp, which she placed upon the table.

"Oh, what a charming child!" exclaimed the Staatsrätthin in unfeigned surprise.

Her keenly observant eye noticed with pleasure the ray of delight that illumined Leuthold's countenance. "Is she not lovely, madam?" he said, actually glowing with gratified vanity. "You do indeed delight the heart of a father who has seen his child forsaken by her own mother. Yes, she is a treasure. She has the personal beauty that once so attracted me in her mother, and will, I hope, develop a beauty of soul which I failed to find in her mother. She will, in the future, repair all that I have lost. While I have this daughter, I ask of life nothing beside."

The large-hearted Staatsrätthin was completely won by a declaration so full of affection. "The man that idolizes his child thus cannot be worthless," she thought.

Leuthold motioned to Lena to take Gretchen away again, and as she did so the Staatsrätthin remarked, as if casually, "There cannot be much room in your heart, filled as it is with love for such an angel, for poor, pale little Ernestine."

Leuthold looked steadily at her. "Madam, a lady like yourself, whose loving heart finds room for so many, can hardly say that in earnest."

"You are right," said the Staatsrätthin; "I ought to know how many one can love without defrauding any of their due measure of affection. But I am a woman, whose vocation it is to love; a man, and a scholar, like yourself, is apt to confine his regard to what is nearest to him."

"It is natural; and I do not deny that my daughter is dearer to me than my niece: nevertheless, I think I have sufficient affection for the latter to satisfy her demands and to enable me to fulfil all my duties as guardian. You can have no idea, madam, what anxious care the extraordinarily precocious intellect of that child requires, and what a weighty responsibility the training of such an uncommon nature involves."

"I can easily believe you; and I am convinced that she could not possibly be in better hands than your own. But Ernestine's physical education must weigh heavily upon you just at this time, when you are alone. I should very much like to relieve you somewhat in future of your arduous duties. You leave to-morrow for the south, and I cannot but rejoice, for the sake of Ernestine's health, that it is so. But I hear that you intend returning hither at the end of six months, to settle in this part of the country. If this be so, let me entreat you to intrust your ward to me every year for some weeks or months,--you will need some rest,--when you can give your undivided time to your daughter. Will you not allow me to take this part in Ernestine's education?"

Leuthold bowed. "Madam, you are one of those who scatter blessings wherever they appear. Your sympathy does me too much honour; I am unworthy of it. Therefore let me thank you, not for myself, but for my niece. There is another name, also, in which I must offer you grateful acknowledgments,--that of the unfortunate mother of the child. If she could speak to you from the other world, she would repay your kindness with far better thanks than my weak words can convey."

The Staatsrätthin's eyes filled with tears; she thought, what would become of her little Angelika without her mother, and, touched to her heart, she grew still more reconciled to the strange man whose manner contrasted so strongly with all she had heard of him.

"Then you consent to my plan?" she asked.

"I give you my word, madam, that, when I return with Ernestine, she shall stay with you as long as you desire."

"I thank you," said the Staatsrätthin, surprised at this ready assent. She was now firmly convinced that Heim had done this singular man great injustice.

"We have agreed so quickly in this matter," the Staatsrätthin began again, "that I cannot but hope that I shall be equally successful in regard to the other affair that brings me here. I have come, in fact, for the purpose of learning whether you will dispose of the Hartwich estate."

A delicate flush overspread Leuthold's face.

"Indeed, madam, you take me greatly by surprise."

"You are aware that my brother Neuenstein has long been desirous of possessing the factory; but serious losses in another direction rendered it impossible for him to command the sum required for the purchase. When I found how his heart was set upon giving his son a position as possessor and head of the factory, I determined, with the consent of my son Johannes and his guardians, to furnish him with the necessary funds. Johannes' answer to my proposal has just

arrived from Paris. He entirely approves of my plan, and would willingly even run the risk of a loss for his uncle's sake."

"I really cannot tell which to admire most, madam,--your determination and energy, or your generous spirit! Happy the man who has such a sister!"

"Oh, I pray you do not flatter me," said the Staatsrätthin, as a shade of embarrassment flitted across her face. "Such things are not worth mentioning. I wish to keep my brother and my nephew near me; and I could not do so if they were to buy property in another part of the country. It is most fortunate that my country-seat is just where it is. My motive is purely selfish. As you depart early to-morrow morning, we had better arrange matters upon the spot. Then I can lay the deed of purchase upon my brother's plate at tea this evening."

"A princely surprise," rejoined Leuthold, hastening to his writing-table to make out the necessary agreement. The transaction met his desires perfectly, for he wished above all things to be able to reside in the south with Ernestine, that he might carry out his plans with regard to her education, far from the scrutiny of her present friends; and, by the disposal of this property, the last reason for ever returning to the scenes of her childhood vanished.

In the mean time, Angelika and Ernestine were sitting in the window-seat of what was formerly the laundry, engaged in earnest conversation. Angelika had received that very day from her brother the crying doll that she had thought he meant to bring her upon his return. She was beside herself with delight, and could not imagine how Ernestine could be so unmoved by the sight of such a miracle of mechanism. She had made it say "papa" and "mamma," and open and shut its eyes, repeatedly. Ernestine was entirely composed and cold. She declared that the words "papa" and "mamma" were not very distinct, and that the eyelids made altogether too much noise in opening and shutting.

Angelika was not at all troubled by Ernestine's budding misanthropy, for she did not observe it. But that her friend should not care for dolls, was a bitter grief to the little girl. "You will never take any pleasure in dolls if you do not like this one," she said.

"Why should I take any pleasure in them?" Ernestine said in a tone of contempt.

"What? Why, don't you know? I suppose you think the poor things do not feel it when you are unkind to them. But mamma says they feel it all, and don't like it, although they don't show it."

"Do you believe all that your mother says?" asked Ernestine, shaking her head.

"Certainly; of course. Mamma always tells the truth."

"How do you know that?"

Angelika stared at Ernestine. "How? Why, because I do."

"Yes, but who told you so?"

"No one; I know it myself."

Ernestine looked down and said nothing.

"I know it myself," she repeated thoughtfully, not comprehending why the words struck her so oddly. "But suppose she should tell you what you could not believe?"

"Oh, a child must always believe what her mother says."

"How if she cannot do it?"

"But she must!" cried Angelika angrily.

"She must? How can we believe anything because we must? It is not possible," said Ernestine, and she thought Angelika very silly. Suddenly it occurred to her that the pastor was no wiser when he said that we must have faith and that it was a sin not to believe. What if you could not,--what was the use of that *must*?

"Ernestine, don't stare so at nothing," said Angelika, interrupting her reverie. "Just look how straight my doll can sit, all alone, without anything to lean against! Oh, just give her one kiss; she is your namesake--I christened her Ernestine."

"No, I don't want to,--it is nothing but a lump of leather, it cannot feel, and I will not kiss anything that is not alive and does not feel!"

"Oh, Ernestine, don't say that. She is not alive now, but perhaps she may get alive. Mamma told me once of a man in Greece, called Pygmalion, who made a marble doll for himself, and loved it so dearly that it grew warm and came to life. And I believe that if I should love my doll dearly she might get alive; and I am sure I shall love her very dearly! She can say 'papa' and 'mamma' already, which Herr Pygmalion's doll could not do at all; and in time I shall perhaps bring her on, just as he did his!"

And she clasped the "lump of leather" to her little heart, gazed tenderly and hopefully into its blue glass eyes, and was quite content.

Ernestine looked at her with mournful wonder; she understood now that "Faith gives peace," and she envied the child her happiness.

"Would you not rather have a puppy or a kitten?" she asked gently. "It could eat and drink, and you could feed it, and it would understand what was said to it, and run after you, and love you? Would not that be nicer?"

A shade of sorrow passed over Angelika's rosy face, like a cloud over the sun. "Oh," she sighed, "we have a little dog; but I cannot feed it; it does not eat nor drink!"

"Why not? Is it sick?"

"No; it is stuffed."

Ernestine smiled in spite of herself. "Then you have no dog!"

"Oh, yes, we have! he is called Assor. He only died, and mamma had him stuffed, so that he lies perfectly quiet near the fire, and never stirs. Mamma says he will not come to life again. Oh, Ernestine, it is very sad,--when I stroke him, he never licks my hand any more! I call him hundreds of times, and he used to turn his pretty black head round towards me, but he does not do it now; he cannot see nor hear me, and he used to love me so much."

The little girl covered her eyes with her hand and began to cry.

Ernestine tried to soothe her. "Your mother ought to have had the dog buried. Then you would have forgotten him and not grieved after him."

"No! oh, no! I could not have borne that. What! have the faithful old dog hidden in the ground! It would have been too hard! He was so faithful; he never left our side; and when he could hardly walk, he used to creep out of his basket to welcome us when we came into the room, and when he was dying in my lap, he looked up at me so mournfully, as if to say, 'I must leave you now.' And could I hide him away and forget him? That would be dreadful. No, no! he shall lie by the fire in the drawing-room; it is far more comfortable there than in the cold ground, and I will always think how good he was. And I'll tell you what,--when mamma dies she shall not be buried either. I will put her dressing gown on her and let her lie in her soft bed. Then I will pretend she is sick, and I will sit by her every day and talk to her, and, even if she does not answer me, I shall know what she would say if she could speak. And if she cannot kiss me, I will kiss her all the more. That will be a great deal better than to have nothing left of her; will it not?"

Ernestine shook her head. "That can't be done, Angelika; you can't keep dead bodies; they decay. How can you think of such a thing?"

"Oh, you say, 'That can't be done,'--you say, 'That's nothing,' to everything, and spoil all my pleasure; I tell you it is very unkind of you!"

Ernestine felt ashamed. She had been treating Angelika as her uncle Leuthold treated herself. The child was pained and unhappy when her dolls were treated with contempt, and her childish fancies not encouraged; and was she, Ernestine, to endure without a moan the utter overthrow of the hopes of her entire existence, when her uncle dragged down into the dust all that she had held most sacred? She leaned her forehead, heavy with the weight of her thoughts, against the window-pane, and looked up into the gray, storm-lashed clouds, through which there beamed no star, not a ray of moonlight. The children had not noticed the gathering darkness in the room, and Rieka almost startled them when she entered with a light.

"Is not mamma coming soon?" asked Angelika with a sigh. "Pray tell her that I want to go home."

"I will tell her," replied Rieka, and left the room.

"You are tired of being with me," Ernestine whispered sadly. "You cannot love me either, can you?"

Angelika was confused, and did not answer. Ernestine looked disappointed and bitter. "Very well, then--I need not like you either. Uncle Leuthold would only scold me if I did."

"What for?" Angelika asked amazed.

"Because it is silly to love anything except science, and because nobody loves me--nobody!"

As she was speaking, a carriage drove up, and old Heim alighted from it. Ernestine was startled; she felt as if the pastor, whom she had shunned, were coming. The door opened, and he entered the room.

"Well, here you both are!" he cried after his hearty fashion. "I wanted to say good-by to you, my little Ernestine, before you leave us for so long. But what is the matter? Have you been

quarrelling about the doll? Why, what a lovely creature she is!" He took the doll, seated himself in a chair, and dandled it upon his knee; the machinery of the toy was set in motion, and the doll screamed "mamma" and "papa" loudly. "Good gracious, how frightened I am!" laughed the old gentleman. "But she is very naughty,--you must train her better, Angelika. She ought not to scream so at strangers."

Angelika clapped her hands with delight. "Oh, I knew that you would like her, Uncle Heim. You will love her just as you do the rest of my dolls, won't you?"

"Of course; she is really such a lovely creature, that I must bring her some bonbons the next time I come."

"Oh, yes--do, uncle, do!" cried Angelika.

"But be careful not to let her eat too many, or she will have to be put to bed like your old Selma, and I shall have to play doll's-doctor again."

"Oh, no, uncle; I will eat some with her myself; bring them soon, pray do."

Meanwhile Heim had been observing Ernestine, who stood mute at a little distance.

"Well, what does our little Ernestine say to this wonderful new child?"

"Oh, uncle," Angelika complained, "she called it a lump of leather."

Heim looked gravely at Ernestine. "So young, and already such a skeptic! Only twelve years old, and take no pleasure in dolls? Poor child!"

Ernestine was silent. The words "Poor child" fell like molten lead into an open wound. Heim gave back the doll to Angelika. "Come here, Ernestine." She approached him shyly.

"What have you been doing? you look as if you had a guilty conscience?"

"Well, she has, Uncle Heim," Angelika interposed; "for she said, a little while ago, that it was silly to love any one; and that is very wrong!"

"Did you say that?" asked Heim astonished.

Ernestine felt as though she should sink into the ground. She clasped her hands in entreaty. "Oh, forgive me! I have all kinds of thoughts!--I do not know what I say or do! I only know that I am a wretched, wretched child!"

Heim shook his head, and drew the trembling child towards him. "My darling, tell me about it: is your uncle severe with you? does he treat you unkindly?"

"No, oh, no! he is very kind,--he is never cross to me--it is not that,--not that."

"I understand. In spite of his kindness, you feel that he is not near to you; you have no father nor mother, and you need warmth and sunshine, you poor frail little flower. Only be patient! when you get to the lovely, sunny south, with its flowers and birds, you will be better, and your heart will be lighter. I would have liked to keep you with me, I would have brought you up lovingly, and would have tried to fill a father's place to you. But it could not be,--God best knows why,--and I am sure it is better for you, mind and body, to leave this northern climate for a time."

These kind words melted Ernestine's very heart. She pressed Heim's hands to her lips. She wanted to confess all to him. "Oh, do not speak so to me!" she cried with streaming eyes,--"not so kindly!--I do not deserve it."

"My poor innocent child, what can you have done, not to deserve kindness? Ernestine, what is it? What disturbs you so?"

"Oh, if you knew--" cried Ernestine, and just then the door opened, and Leuthold appeared, just in time to prevent what would have ruined all his plans.

"Ah, Herr Geheimrath,--then I was not mistaken. It was your carriage that drove up. The Frau Staatsrätthin is with me upon business, and requests your presence at the signing of a paper."

"I will come immediately," Helm said briefly, and went up-stairs with Leuthold.

"Now uncle will drive home with us," cried Angelika delighted. "Isn't he kind, Ernestine?"

"Yes, oh, yes," sighed Ernestine, standing motionless beside the chair where Heim had been sitting. At last he returned with Leuthold and the Staatsrätthin.

"Angelika," said the latter, "we must hurry, so that Uncle Neuenstein shall not wait for his tea. Good-by, my little Ernestine. Herr Gleissert will tell you what we intend to do when you come back. Get well and strong, my child, so that you may come back to us a healthy little girl."

Angelika kissed Ernestine hastily, and drew her mother towards the door.



Ernestine stood still with downcast eyes. Heim went up to her and clasped her in his arms. He only said, "God bless you!" but these words agitated her greatly, and, as he turned to go, she sank on the floor, sobbing aloud.

The visitors had gone,--the carriages had rolled away. Leuthold had been amusing himself for some time with Gretchen in his own room. But Ernestine was still on her knees in the cheerless room below-stairs, weeping over the grave of her childhood.

## **PART II.**

### **CHAPTER I.**

#### **"ONLY A WOMAN."**

Upon a bright, sunny day, at the house of Professor Möllner in N--- there were gathered the principal Professors of medicine and philosophy in the town. The table provided for the guests was loaded with everything that could rejoice the hearts of men who had spent the morning in delivering lectures. Lunch was not the only end for which this assemblage was gathered together. These learned gentlemen had taken this occasion to discuss a very ludicrous matter,--nothing less than an application from a lady for permission to attend the lectures and to graduate at the University of the place.

Möllner had invited these gentlemen to his house for the purpose of this discussion. There sat the physiologist Meibert, the anatomist Beck, and the philosophers Herbert and Taun, leaning back in comfortable arm-chairs,--their throats very dry,--regarding with longing eyes the various bottles that stood as yet uncorked, as if awaiting the magic word that should make them yield up their contents. Hector, too, Möllner's large dog, was devouring with his eyes, at a respectful distance, the delicacies upon the table, quite unable to understand how the gentlemen could refrain so long from falling to. He would have done very differently had he been a man.

The Staatsrätthin entered the room, and with dignified repose and kindness of manner greeted the guests, who rose as she appeared. "I have just learned that my son is not here to receive his friends," she said. "Allow me to act his part. You must need refreshment after the lectures."

"Thanks, thanks! you are most kind," was heard from all sides as the Staatsrätthin filled the glasses. Herbert, the philosopher, was foremost in his acknowledgments; for he was a great favourite in society, and aspired to unite the solidity of the scholar with the grace of the man of the world. "We are greatly privileged in being allowed to kiss the hand whose tasteful care we have already admired in the charming, arrangement of this table."

"Professor Herbert's gallantry is well known," said the Staatsrätthin dryly.

"It is true," he replied, "that I endeavour always to give expression to the sentiments of respect and admiration that I entertain for your sex, madam, in spite of the failure of my attempts."

"Good-morning, mamma,--good-morning, gentlemen," cried a clear, ringing voice, and there came tripping into the room a figure so full of life and bloom that its joyousness was instantly reflected upon every face.

"Angelika," said the Staatsrätthin, embracing her, "have you come without your husband? What is the matter? You were not invited;--it was *he*. Is it a mistake?"

"Oh, Frau Staatsrätthin, we are entirely satisfied with the exchange," laughed the professors; and, Herbert taking the lead,--they gathered about Angelika, enjoying the atmosphere of youth and grace that encompassed her everywhere.

"I know perfectly well, mamma, that only Moritz was invited, but I have come too. I so wanted to hear judgment passed in this august assembly upon my former playmate. I may stay, may I not?"

"If your husband is willing, and these gentlemen do not object," said the Staatsrätthin.

"No, oh, no,--we certainly do not object," cried all the gentlemen, with the exception of Herbert, who remarked softly, with a thoughtful air, that he feared that their charming associate might hear some observations on this occasion not flattering to her sex.

"Oh, I cannot fear anything of the sort from you, the acknowledged champion of dames, the most gallant of men," laughed Angelika,--"and the other gentlemen will not be too bard upon us."

Herbert shrugged his shoulders.

"Besides," Angelika continued gaily, "I have been a little hardened in the matter by my stern lord and master, who has very little consideration for our sex."

"Scarcely to be wondered at in a practising physician," Herbert said in a low tone to his associates; then, turning with his sweetest expression to Angelika, "Could you not have taught him better long ago?"

"Oh, no," complained Angelika.

"He considers his wife an exception," interposed the Staatsrätthin; "she seems to have left no room in his nature for sympathy with the rest of womankind. I have never seen a man so exclusive in his regard."

"Such a wife deserves it all," said Herbert, kissing Angelika's hand.

At this moment the door opened, and old Heim, his fine head crowned with locks of silvery whiteness, entered. All bowed low to this "Nestor of science," as he was called. After the death of his king he had accepted a call to N---, and had for eight years occupied the chair of pathology in the University there. He was followed by his adopted son, for whom he had created a professorship for the cure of diseases of the eye,--a fair, handsome young man, slender in figure and gentle in demeanour, with hands so small and well shaped that they seemed formed for the very purpose of handling such a delicate piece of mechanism as the eye. The Staatsrätthin and Angelika greeted them both with all their old cordiality, and Professor Herbert said aloud, "How fresh and strong our revered associate looks! he must teach us how to retain our youth."

"Yes, indeed," said Meibert, "if Bock could see him he would recall his cruel assertion that man retains full possession of his mental powers only until the age of fifty!"

"He will soon recall that when he has passed fifty himself," said a deep, powerful voice. All turned to the new-comer.

"Ah, Möllner, have you been listening?"

"Oh, no; but I could not help hearing, as I came in, that you were making pretty speeches to one another,--just as if you had cups of tea before you, instead of glasses of good wine. Pray, what has made you so sentimental?"

"Your protracted absence, probably," said Angelika, relieving her brother of his hat and cane.

The strong, fine-looking man threw an affectionate glance at her. "Indeed! let me entreat forgiveness, then. One of my experiments was unsuccessful, and I was obliged to repeat it. That is why I am late!"

"I suppose, then, you have been torturing some unfortunate dog or rabbit," said Angelika in a tone of distress. "Poor thing!"

"For shame, Angelika!" said her brother. "Those are not words for the sister of a physiologist,--a woman who ought to understand the object of science."

Angelika made no reply, but observed, well pleased, how tenderly Johannes stroked Hector, who came to greet his master.

The door was flung violently open, and in rushed, in a great hurry, Angelika's husband, Moritz Kern, Clinical Professor and practising physician. His figure was not tall, but muscular,--his eyes were black and sparkling, his features sharply cut, and his stiff black hair close cropped around his head. "Morning, morning," he cried, quite out of breath, but in high good humour, as he threw his hat and gloves upon a table and himself into a chair. "Excuse me for my tardiness. Ah, my dear,--kiss your hand,--love me? Yes? Not seen you since morning. Walter with you? No? Was he good?"

"Yes, indeed," said Angelika, who stood beside her boisterous husband like a rose upon a thorny stem; "but he fell off his rocking-horse and has got a great bruise."

"Good, good,--harden him," he replied smiling. He looked for an instant into Angelika's blue eyes, and the fire of his glance must have penetrated her heart, for her fair brow flushed and her eyelids drooped like those of a girl upon the day of her betrothal.

"Come, Moritz, you can make love to your wife another time," cried Johannes; "it is late,--we must come to business. What detained you?"

"My dear friend, I couldn't help it. I had a girl at the clinic that gave me no end of trouble. Old trouble with the heart,--acute inflammation,--stoppage in the arteries of the left foot,--mortification,--the leg must come off to-day."

"A splendid case!" said Helm approvingly.

"Heavens! what savages you are, to call that a splendid case!" said Angelika horrified.

"My angel, if you choose to assist at a council of rude men, you must not start at such innocent technical terminology," said her husband, enjoying Angelika's pretty dismay.

"Yes, I too have been scolding her for sympathizing with the victims of my experiments," said Möllner.

"You were wrong to blame her. I like to have her compassionate. Continue to weep for the poor dogs, my child, and the yet more unfortunate frogs. What have you to do with the reasons for torturing them? I do not want you to imbibe any flavour of science from your husband or brother. I like you just as you are; you suit me precisely. I will not have you otherwise."

"For heaven's sake, mamma, carry Angelika away!" cried Johannes laughing. "As long as this fellow has his wife by his side, there is nothing to be done with him!"

"She shall stay!" said Moritz decidedly. "There is nothing of importance to be done. The Hartwich woman asks to attend our lectures; why waste any thought upon such a fool? Don't answer her request at all, and be done with it!"

"Softly, softly, my young friend," cried old Heim very gravely, while Moritz, with Angelika's hand in his, swallowed a glass of wine. "First read this paper, which the girl sent to me, and which so enchained Möllner's attention when I gave it to him to-day after lecture that--I must betray him--it was the cause of his tardiness. The experiments were over long before he made his appearance!"

A slight flush overspread Johannes' face as he handed Moritz the paper. The latter read the title aloud--"*Reflex Motion in its Relation to Free Agency.*"

"By Jove! a good idea, if it is her own!"

"It is her own--that I'll vouch for!" cried Heim with warmth.

"That must be both philosophically and physiologically interesting," said the philosopher Taun to Herbert, who coldly shrugged his shoulders.

"Let us see whether the article corresponds to the title," muttered Moritz, turning over the leaves.

"Read us some of it aloud," said Heim; and Moritz selected, at random, and read: "According to my opinion, the want of external self-control proceeds from sluggishness of the inhibitory nerves in comparison with the activity of the motor nerves, for the effort to control one's self is certainly, in a degree, neither more nor less than a struggle for mastery between these two sets of nerves. If the irritation acting upon the one is stronger than the force of will which should excite the other to activity, the reflex motion will take place in spite of what is called 'best intentions,' whether the occasion be a start of alarm, a desire to yawn, laugh, or weep at unfitting times, a scream, an angry gesture, or even a blow bestowed upon the object whence proceeds the incitement to wrath."

Moritz paused, and said smiling, "She has forgotten a kiss, which is only a reflex motion under certain circumstances,--that is, when one does not wish to kiss, ought not to kiss, and yet cannot help it." And he drew his wife towards him, and kissed her. Angelika blushed deeply, and, rising, greatly embarrassed, joined her mother, who sat quietly at work by the window. The gentlemen laughed, and Moritz looked after her with eyes full of tenderness.

"It certainly is strange that while the Hartwich has made due mention of the reflex motion of terror--a start; of pain--tears; of fatigue--a yawn; of anger--a blow, it does not seem to have occurred to her that there are reflex motions of tenderness, also," remarked young Hilsborn.

"Probably," said Moritz laughing, "she has had no opportunity for observing any such. I suppose that, like all blue-stockings, she is so ugly that no one has ever bestowed any tenderness upon her."

"She is certainly not ugly," said Johannes with warmth. "She might have admirers enough if she chose."

Moritz turned hastily round to Johannes, who sat almost behind him, and stared as if a new idea had suddenly occurred to him. "What the deuce, Johannes! do you know her? Oho! indeed! now I understand the interest that you take in her. Well, you can teach her to make good her omissions."

"I should really like to be present at such an interesting lesson!" said Herbert.

"Laugh away," said Johannes calmly. "You may laugh at me as much as you please, but have the goodness, Moritz, to spare your jests as far as Fräulein Hartwich is concerned; and you too, friend Herbert. Pray heed what I say. We have nothing to do here with the personality of this girl; it is nothing to us. All we have to do is to pass judgment upon her intellectual capacity, and to accede or not to her request. Go on, Moritz!"

And Moritz read further: "Even the law, without knowing it, recognizes this physiological fact, for it punishes less severely a murder committed in the heat of passion than one that is premeditated. And what is a murder committed in the heat of passion, in reality, but a reflex motion in a broader sense? If this theory be correct, many a poor criminal may escape not only a violent death at the hangman's hands, but also the flames of the material hell to which bigoted moralists have consigned him. Let us endeavour, therefore, to discover what relation these facts sustain to Free Agency. All that we can do to attain the self-control which is the germ of all the virtues is, from earliest childhood, to exercise the inhibitory nerves in the discharge of their functions. It is an undoubted fact that, from the beginning of life, the mind must learn to use as its tools the various organs of the body. We cannot understand the use of a tool to which we are unaccustomed as we can one that we have frequently handled. Thus it is with the mind and the nerves. Every nerve that is often called into activity by the mind is strengthened by exercise. For example: the sense of touch grows remarkably keen with blind people, who depend upon it as a substitute for eyesight. By continual exercise of the nerves of sensation in his finger-tips, the blind man achieves the greatest perfection in his sense of touch. 'Practice makes perfect,' we often hear said with regard to arts and occupations difficult of mastery. And what is this practice but the custom of the mind to exercise this or that nerve, bringing into play the required muscular activity,—the exercise of certain nerve-fibres? Are the inhibitory nerves alone not to be thus controlled? Certainly not! The mind can make them also implicitly obedient to its will, if it neglects no opportunity for exercising them,—and why should it not apply itself to this task with the same zeal that is expended upon the attainment of an art or handicraft? I, for example, was in the habit of screaming at the unexpected discharge of a pistol. I had a pistol discharged daily in my hearing, without warning, and in a short time I was able to suppress the scream. It may be urged that I had gradually become accustomed to the noise, and was no longer startled. But this was not the case. I was as much startled as ever, but I had taught the appropriate inhibitory nerve to cut off the reflex motion upon the larynx. I know that a subjective experience of this kind proves nothing objectively; but such a simple inference, I think, needs no proof. Here we come again to the boundary-line separating the physiological from the psychological, where free agency results from a material law, just as fragrance comes from the chalice of a flower. Only let us be sure that our nerves are but a key-board upon which, if we strike the right keys correctly, we shall produce the harmonious accord of our whole being, and, if we do not learn to do so, we are to be pitied or despised, according to the school in which the lesson is needed."

"And so on," said Moritz, turning over the leaves. "The rest can be easily imagined. Here is a special treatise upon the motor nerves,—it seems pretty fair,—and rather a long essay upon nervous excitement, but I think we have done our duty and read enough of the testimony. How shall we decide? Shall we carry out the joke, and admit a student in petticoats to the lectures and the dissecting-room?"

"Why not?" said Professor Taun with some humour. "We admit so many stupid lads, why not one woman?"

"My dear friend," old Heim began, "I do not think we have ever had many pupils more gifted than Fräulein Hartwich. And is not a talented woman better than a stupid man?"

"That is a question," remarked Herbert, riveting his sharp eyes upon Heim's honest face. "I do not believe that the most talented woman can accomplish what is possible, with diligence and perseverance, for a man of common ability. What aid can a woman lend to us, or to science? The aid of her labour only, for no woman possesses creative force. And the feminine capacity for labour is so weak, that it is hardly worth while to commit an absurdity for the sake of making it ours."

"An absurdity?" asked Heim.

"Yes, I should call it absurd to admit a woman among our students, to degrade science to a mere doll to amuse silly girls withal, until, finally, there would be an Areopagus erected, before which we should be expected to make our most profound bow, in every feminine tea-party. There is competition enough already, without increasing it by the admission among us of the other sex."

"That sounds strange," said old Heim; "it looks almost as if you were afraid of the competition which you so thoroughly despise. Why speak of competition in science? Leave that narrow-minded word to trade, which is really confined within certain limits. In such a boundless and abstract domain as science, there is no place for personal envy and arrogance. Can there be any

question of competition when we are labouring for a cause which is to benefit the world? Whoever asks for other rewards than are contained in knowledge itself, is no priest of science. The true student exists for science, not science for him,—he rejoices in every fresh advance, no matter by whom it is made, for the honour of the cause that he serves is his own, and we can say truthfully, Each for all, and all for each. If, therefore, we are offered the labour of a pair of hands willing to share our pains, let us not reject them because they are the delicate hands of a woman, but accept them, and offer them a modest place, where they can achieve all that lies in their power."

"But," cried Moritz, "let such hands do for us what we cannot do for ourselves,—knit stockings, for instance,—instead of trying to assist in what we can easily accomplish without them."

"My dear young friend," said Heim smiling, "the temple of science is large, very large. I think neither we nor our posterity, however numerous they may be, will be able to complete it."

"I think, gentlemen," said the philosopher Taun, in his gentle, refined way, "that there are only two points of view from which the matter is to be considered. Either we must base our decision upon the intellectual capacity of the lady, and, if so, subject the paper before us to conscientious criticism; or we must determine, once for all, that no woman is to be admitted to our University,—in which case there will be no question whatever of capacity or incapacity. Let us, then, come to an agreement upon these points."

"That is true,—Taun is right," cried Heim. "I vote for the admission of women of genius, like this one."

"And I against it," rejoined Herbert; "for I contend that there are no women of genius!"

"For my part," said Taun, "I am not decidedly opposed to the admission of a woman among our hearers, and, if I were, the originality of Fräulein Hartwich's paper would have shaken my decision. I cannot judge of the value of the physiological part of it,—I must leave that to our friend Möllner; but the philosophical idea that is its basis I think extremely suggestive, and that is more than can be expected from one of the laity."

"I oppose the emancipation of women," cried Moritz, "principally because I find the existing order of society quite rational, and will do nothing to disturb it."

"I vote for Fräulein Hartwich," said young Hilsborn. "It will not interfere with our social order to grant her request. She will not be followed by crowds of imitators, for the simple reason that her talent is extraordinary. I maintain that we have no right to deny any opportunity for development to such a talent because it is accidentally hidden in a woman's brain. A great mind requires strong nourishment, and it is cruel to withhold such from it out of mere envy, and condemn it to extinction among the commonplace occupations of women."

"Hilsborn is far from wrong," said Meibert; "but can such a mind quench its thirst for knowledge nowhere but in a University? The lady has certainly proved in the treatise before us that she has learned something outside of the walls of the lecture-room. What does she want of a degree? It must be vanity that suggests the want, and we are to blame if we lend ourselves to the gratification of such a folly."

"That is my opinion also," added Beck.

But Hilsborn was not silenced. "It seems very natural to me that a woman who feels herself possessed of the mental power of a man should aspire to manly dignities, and her desire to espouse science, not as an amusement, but as the occupation and end of her existence, is a proof of her deep conviction of its grave importance. There is certainly nothing here of the female vanity which resorts to bodily and mental adornment merely for the sake of pleasing."

"You are a brave champion, Hilsborn," said Möllner, holding out his hand to the young man.

"Then we are only three against four," said old Heim. "Möllner's vote alone is wanting,—and if he gives it in favour of the Hartwich, there will be a tie; so I propose that we give him the casting vote, especially as he, as a physiologist, is best capable of judging of the value of the essay before us."

"I should have thought," cried Moritz, "that any one of us could have passed judgment upon such a piece of dilettanteism; it is only the modern nonsense about the fibres. There is not much in it!"

All present looked eagerly towards Johannes, who was calmly leaning back in his arm-chair. "It is no piece of dilettanteism. I grant that it is hasty and one-sided to ascribe all self-control to the impediments of reflex motion; nevertheless, Fräulein Hartwich's essay evinces a comprehension of the physiology of the nervous system far beyond what is usual, and I cannot deny that such a self-dependent realization of scholarship is a proof of the most decided creative faculty." Here he looked at Herbert.

"Indeed?" said the latter pointedly.

"Yes!" said Möllner with warmth; "but, nevertheless, I give my vote against her admission; and of course that decides the matter,--we are now five to three!" The gentlemen looked at one another, some with surprise, some with annoyance.

"What do you mean?" cried Heim. "You were thoroughly delighted to-day with the girl's talent."

"We relied upon you," said Hilsborn reproachfully.

"This is the first injustice of which I have ever convicted my friend Möllner," said Taun, shaking his head.

Johannes looked at his dismayed associates with quiet amusement, and did not observe that Herbert extended his hand to him to thank him for his assistance.

"God be thanked," he muttered, "that you have given the fool her discharge!" And he swallowed the contents of his glass with evident satisfaction.

"Johannes! Johannes!" Hilsborn began again, "why have you treated the girl and ourselves in this manner?"

"Why?" asked Johannes,--and there was a glow in his face that quite transfigured it,--"because she is far more to me than to any of you."

"You have chosen a very odd method to show that it is so," Hilsborn remonstrated.

"Do you think so, short-sighted man?" asked Möllner gravely.

"What harm can it do you to make the Hartwich happy?" grumbled Hilsborn.

Möllner looked at him with a smile.--"When we take away from a child a knife with which it is playing, we do so, not because we are afraid it will harm us, but itself. True, the child will regard us as an enemy, but we act for its own sake."

"Well, is the Hartwich the child that you feel so bound to protect?"

"Yes, Hilsborn! Woman, of whatever age, is intrusted to the guardianship of man. It is ours to decide her future, to protect her; and we are responsible for her development. Which of you, my dear friends Heim, Taun, and Hilsborn, when I put it to your consciences, can deny that the Hartwich is treading a mistaken path,--that she is trespassing beyond the bounds that form the natural division-line between the sexes? I have nothing to urge in opposition to the mental activity of woman, provided it be exercised within the limits of her proper sphere; and these limits I set far beyond the place assigned her by our friend Herbert and my brother-in-law Moritz. But I have such a reverence for true womanhood that I will lend my aid to no project which can be carried out only at its expense."

"I think," said Moritz, "that the Hartwich must have already entirely renounced the womanhood of which you speak, or she never would have entertained such projects. There can't be much there to spoil."

"You judge hastily, Moritz, as you always do," said Johannes. "If you knew under what influences this girl has grown up, you would understand that it is not a want of delicacy, but lofty courage,--a passionate, sacred enthusiasm,--that prevents her from shuddering at the horrors of the study of physiology and enables her to look beyond the individual to the universe. A dazzling light, flaming before our eyes, blinds us to what lies nearest us. Thus was it with this gifted girl when the light of science arose for her, enveloping with its glory the world of reality around her."

Moritz's face, usually so gay in expression, suddenly grew grave: he looked at Möllner with manifest anxiety.--"Johannes, you talk as if you had a personal interest in this preposterous creature!"

"Why should I deny it?--Yes, I have!"

"Good heavens!" cried Moritz, "you are not going to stand in friend Hilsborn's way? He seems to have serious intentions with regard to her."

"Oh, you are wrong there, Moritz," said Hilsborn. "Her perilous struggle for emancipation inspires me with sympathy, it is true, but with no desire for a closer knowledge of her. I may surely like to have her for a pupil without wanting to marry her."

"And there, Hilsborn," said Johannes gaily, "lies the difference between us; for I should wish to have her not for a pupil, but for a wife!"

An exclamation of dismay burst from the lips of all present. "How did you come to know her?" "Where did he know her?" the gentlemen, with the exception of Heim and Hilsborn, inquired.

"How the idea of my danger seems to startle you!" said Johannes good-humouredly. "Is the girl an evil spirit,--a witch? No, she is only a woman. How can you be afraid of a woman? What makes

her terrible to you makes her interesting to me; and where is the danger for me, even if I should try to lead her out of her crooked path? Yes, even if she should become my wife----"

"Heaven save you from such a wife!" the Staatsrätthin interposed.

"Matters have not yet gone quite so far, mother; there is nothing in the affair yet but pure human sympathy. But suppose it were to go further,--what then? The husband who is made unhappy by his wife has only himself to blame; for woman is just what we make her."

"Oh, presumptuous man!" exclaimed the Staatsrätthin, "there are women who would prove your error to you after a terrible fashion! This Hartwich girl was to me a most disagreeable child,--what must she be now?"

"A woman who seems strayed from another world,--an apparition once seen never forgotten!"

"Heavens!" said the Staatsrätthin, really alarmed, "where and when have you met her? She vanished almost ten years ago; and if her rationalistic books had not appeared last winter, every one would have forgotten her."

"Did you know her before, then?" several gentlemen asked curiously.

"We were playmates for some time," said Angelika, "but in the end I could not endure her, she was so old-fashioned and despised my dolls."

The gentlemen laughed.

"She was the most strangely interesting child I ever saw in my life!" said old Heim.

"Indeed she was," said Möllner; "but there was something repellant about her, for she had been embittered by cruel treatment, which had developed her mind precociously, while it had stunted her body. Such incongruity is always disagreeable, and therefore every one shunned her, as she shunned every one. We soon forgot her, for she left our part of the country when she was twelve years old, and we heard nothing more either of her or of her guardian, who accompanied her. A year or more ago, however, a couple of brochures from her pen appeared, that excited a tempest of criticism, at least among women, on account of their rationalistic tendency. I did not think it worth while to read them, as the pale little Hartwich girl had almost faded from my memory. No one knew anything about her, and we took no pains to know, for my mother and sister had been deeply shocked by the child's atheism, and had given her up. A short time since I went to see my friend Hilsborn, and met him just as he was getting into his carriage to drive to the village of Hochstetten, two miles off. He had been sent for to see the village schoolmaster. Hilsborn asked me to go with him, and, as the day was fine, I consented. When we arrived at the small castle that lies in the outskirts of the village, we alighted. Hilsborn went to find the schoolmaster,--I remained behind, to await his return, and walked slowly past the large, neglected garden, that surrounds the castle. A fresh breeze stirred the waving wheat-fields, and the setting sun shone through the quivering air upon the distant landscape. Suddenly, painted upon the flaming horizon, like the picture of a saint of the Middle Ages upon a golden background, appeared the figure of a woman dressed in black,--a woman so beautiful and sad that she might have been Night's messenger commanding the sun to set. She stood with folded arms, motionless, upon a little eminence in the garden, looking full at the descending orb of light, while the breeze stirred the heavy folds of her dress. The evening-red cast a glow upon her grave face, white as marble, and the light in her large eyes seemed not to proceed from the sun which they mirrored, but from within. I stared like a boy at the beautiful, silent apparition, and forgot that my gaze might annoy her should she become aware of it. And so it proved. As she took up some coloured glasses lying beside her, I saw with surprise that she was trying some optical experiment, and just then her glance fell upon me. A shade of vexation passed over her face, now turned from the light, and lent it a cold, stern expression. Without honouring me with a second glance, she gathered together her optical instruments and walked quietly down the little hill. Just then the sun disappeared below the horizon, as if at her command, and gloomy twilight gathered above the silent garden, in whose paths she disappeared. I could not picture to myself a happy face among those rank, thick bushes behind that high wall. I could not imagine a happy heart in the breast of that lonely, gloomy figure. Night fell while I was still vainly looking after her. I hurried on to the schoolmaster's, upon the pretence of finding Hilsborn, and learned from him that my unknown was Ernestine Hartwich. She had, a short time before, rented the Haunted Castle, as it was called, and, as they were not very enlightened in the village, the beautiful girl was regarded with a sort of supernatural terror,--for certainly something must be wrong with one who lived so entirely cut off from intercourse with human beings, and who, worse than all, never went to church. There was some excuse to be found for her, to be sure, in the evil influence of a step-uncle and guardian, who had had charge of her since the early death of her parents, and who possessed entire authority over her. He is that famous, or rather infamous, Doctor Gleissert, of whom you have all heard."

"Oho! he!" murmured the gentlemen in a contemptuous tone, and old Heim bestowed upon him a hearty "Scoundrel!"

"Well," Johannes continued, "I am sure you will not imagine me such a fool as to have fallen in love at the first sight of a beautiful face, but the apparition that I have just described presented a

combination of what is most attractive to a man,--'beauty, intellect, and virtue.'

"Virtue!" Herbert repeated; "are you so sure of that?"

"Yes. If Fräulein Hartwich were not virtuous, she would not live in such strict retirement. Those who have tasted the cup of self-indulgence are too apt to return to it; the truly pure alone can find contentment in seclusion and loneliness, inspired only by a grand idea! I go still further, and, as a physiologist, upon the ground of the preservation of force, maintain that a woman engaged in such unusual and profound studies needs all her vital energy for her work, and is dead to all the pleasures of sense. Hence we so often find entire lack of sensibility in women accustomed to great mental activity,--because their supply of vital force is not sufficient for the double occupation of thinking and feeling. And therefore my only fear is that there is no warm heart throbbing within that exquisite form."

The professors looked significantly at one another, and the Staatsrätin exchanged anxious whispers with Angelika.

"Well," said Herbert, as he arose from his chair, "I propose that we leave our respected associate to his dreams, and wish for his sake that his pupil may not be as accomplished upon the subject of the nerves of sensation as upon the inhibitory nerves."

The gentlemen all arose.

Johannes looked fixedly at Herbert and said, "I am no dreamer, Doctor Herbert, although I believe in the virtue that requires no certificate of character. And, I repeat, I believe so firmly in this virtue, that I denounce as a slanderer the man who dares to assail it by a single word!"

"Sir!" cried Herbert with irritation, "your remark is insulting!"

"Only to him to whom it may apply!" said Johannes calmly.

Angelika ran to her brother and threw her arms around him. "Johannes! Johannes! consider who it is that you are defending. You do not even know her."

"Yes, yes, she is right!" added several of the gentlemen.

Johannes held up Ernestine's paper, and said with earnest gravity, "I do know her."

Herbert took his hat, and, with a silent bow, was about to leave the room, when the beadle of the University rushed in and handed Johannes a letter. "Herr Professor! Herr Professor! this comes in haste from his Honor, and concerns all the gentlemen."

Johannes opened the letter, and Herbert stood listening upon the threshold. After reading it, Johannes looked around the circle with a smile. "Gentlemen, we have been most strangely mystified. The prize essay upon the '*Capacity of the Eye for Stereoscopic Vision*,' which we all attributed to Hilsborn, is by--Fräulein Hartwich!"

An exclamation of surprise greeted this announcement. All present crowded around Johannes to read the letter; even Herbert entered the room again, to make sure that what he had heard was true. There was no doubt of it,--the fact was indisputable that these gentlemen had accorded the prize offered for the best essay upon the '*Capacity of the Eye for Stereoscopic Vision*' to Ernestine, to whom they had just denied admission to the University because she was a woman. It was a fact not exactly pleasant to contemplate, and the professors exchanged glances of chagrin.

"What is to be done?" asked some.

"This alters the case entirely," said Beck.

"Möllner," cried Meibert, "this is embarrassing enough. I think we shall have to reconsider our decision."

"We can scarcely withhold a diploma from a woman to whom we have awarded this prize," said Taun.

Heim nodded in high good humour, and growled, "Ah, yes, you sing a different tune now!"

"Gentlemen," said Johannes with emphasis, "I pray you do not mistake the point at issue. If the question had been of the capacity of the applicant, the essay that we have already read would have influenced our decision; but there is a social principle concerned, which we must not violate for the sake of an individual. Must I remind you of what you know so well?"

"Our colleague is still victorious," said Taun, offering his hand with kindly dignity to Johannes. "We cannot think you in the wrong."

"The prize awarded to a woman!" muttered Herbert, as he left the room. "It is enough to kill one with vexation!"



"It is a pity," said the others, when he had departed, "that our pleasant morning should have been so spoiled by Herbert."

"Do not be disturbed by it, dear friends," laughed Johannes; "it did me good to tell him the truth for once. He is one of those who sustain their mental existence by continual conflict. 'Destroy, that you may exist,' is their motto,--and of course they are the sworn enemies of all rising talent. They must be so, because they are not conscious of any power in themselves to soar above it; they need all the strength of their nature to enable them to avoid being extinguished by the wealth of vital force that is expended all around them. Those whose lot is cast beyond the sphere of such individuals can afford to pity them, but those who are within reach of their poisonous fangs must fear them as the arch-enemies of all creation and growth. Although I could not accede to Fräulein Hartwich's request, the envious malice with which he criticised her pained me excessively."

"That is very true," said the philosopher Taun. "It is sad enough when such embodied negations interfere with the free, joyous activity of art,--doubly so when they meddle with science!"

"Who would have thought it," cried Angelika, "of the gallant Professor Herbert, who is sure to propose 'the ladies' at every supper-party! I am amazed!"

"One who pays court to 'the ladies,' my fair colleague, may very possibly be no advocate for woman, since, according to my brother Schopenhauer, what constitutes the modern lady is not the strength, but the weakness, of her sex," replied Taun.

"True enough," said Johannes. "Such a man might show consideration for weakness,--he can only contend with strength."

"Only wait awhile, Herr Professor Herbert!" cried Angelika, shaking her plump little forefinger towards the door of the room. "I shall not forget you,--only wait--I will strip the sheep's clothing from the wolf's back, in full conclave of his lady friends! And you too, Moritz,--I have a word to say to you, but not until we are alone."

The gentlemen laughed, and took their hats.

"Come, we must not deprive our friend Kern for one moment longer of such a charming curtain-lecture," said Taun.

All took their leave, except Heim, Hilsborn, and Moritz.

"And so," began Angelika with a pout, "you miserable, detestable man, we are to do nothing but knit stockings?"

"One thing beside," said Moritz, seizing both her hands,--"you may kiss--that is a charming vocation."

"Nonsense! any stupid fool can do that,--the clever ones must do something better."

"No woman with so pretty a mouth can do anything better! Only those who are ugly or old shall knit stockings."

"There is no getting a serious word from you, Moritz, but I am sorry for poor Ernestine, and it grieves me that you were so hard upon her."

One single stern glance from Moritz's black eyes encountered his wife's; it was enough--it silenced her instantly.

"You know," he said kindly, but gravely, as if to a child, "that I do not like to have you undertake to decide upon matters of which you understand nothing."

Angelika looked down, and a tear trembled upon her long eyelashes.

"What is it?" asked Moritz soothingly, and drew her towards him,--"tears? And why not? Nothing more than a dewdrop in the bosom of a rose,--nothing more." He brushed away her tears, and she smiled at him again.

"It is well for you, my son," said the Staatsrätthin gently, but gravely, "that your wife's heart is so warm that the frost made in it by unkind words melts to tears and does no further injury."

Moritz looked at his mother-in-law, and then at his wife.--"Angelika, was I unkind?"

Angelika shook her fair curls and said, in a tone which told all the sweetness of her childlike disposition, "No, Moritz, you were right."

"There, mamma, that is a true woman as she comes from the hand of her Creator to be a blessing to the man to whom she belongs," cried Moritz, with a fond look at his wife.

The Staatsrätthin stood beside them, her eyes resting with unspeakable affection upon her

child, but there was a strange mixture of delight and anxiety in her heart.

"This youthful devotion is very beautiful, but, when its first fervour has passed, nothing remains of the bridegroom but the lord and master of the wife, who is oftentimes as unhappy a slave as she is now a happy one." Such thoughts passed through the mother's mind, and she sighed.

Meanwhile, Johannes had been talking in a low voice with Heim and Hilsborn about the contents of a letter which Heim had handed him to read. "Then, Father Heim, that is settled," he said.

The Staatsrätthin turned to them, and asked, "What have you there?"

"A letter from Fräulein Hartwich to Uncle Heim, mother."

Johannes handed her the letter, and the Staatsrätthin read:

"HERR GEHEIMRATH:

"I do not know whether you remember a little girl called Ernestine Hartwich, whose life you once saved, but I do know that, even if you do not remember her, you will not refuse aid to any one who appeals to you. I have sent an application to the University here to be allowed to attend the lectures. I did this without my guardian's knowledge, for he disapproved of the plan. I therefore wish to keep the matter a secret from him until results shall reconcile him to my mode of proceeding."

"Very considerate," interposed the Staatsrätthin ironically; "but let us proceed."

"My request to you is, my dear sir, that you will arrange matters so that the reply of the faculty to my application shall reach me without my uncle's knowledge, and, indeed, that you will convey it to me yourself. I also need your medical advice, for I am far from well, and my uncle has never permitted me to see a physician. I obeyed his wishes until I learnt that you reside in my neighbourhood. Now I turn to you with all my old confidence. If any one can help me, you can. I must entreat you, if you would spare me a painful scene, to come to me on a day when Doctor Gleissert is not at home. He goes to town on business every Wednesday and Saturday. I pray you to come to me on one of these days.

"With great respect,

"Ernestine Hartwich."

"Well, that is certainly more brief and to the point than might be expected from a blue-stocking," said Moritz.

The Staatsrätthin looked troubled. "It is dry and cold,--scarcely courteous,--certainly not cordial, as she might have been to her former benefactor."

"Remember, my dear friend, that nearly ten years have passed since that time,--a very long period for so young a girl," said Heim.

"Ah, Uncle Heim," cried Angelika, "you dandle my boy on your knee now, just as you did my doll then. These years have passed like a dream for me."

"Your nature is very different from Ernestine's, my child," replied Heim.

"Yes, thank God!" ejaculated Moritz.

The Staatsrätthin folded up the letter. "I cannot help pronouncing this letter heartless,--there is no other word for it. And mingled cowardice and defiance in regard to her uncle breathe from every line of it."

"Proving how her strong nature has been cowed by that scoundrel," cried Johannes with warmth.

His mother looked at him anxiously. "How could she, if she is such a strong, noble woman, submit to be cowed by such a man?"

"Why not, dearest mother?" replied Johannes. "However noble and strong she may be, she is only a woman, after all."

At this moment a carriage thundered past the house. They all looked out of the windows.

"The Worronska!"

"The fast countess!" cried Moritz. "What a model of an Amazon! How beautiful she is, managing those four horses and looking up here! That look is for you, Johannes. See! she is smiling at you."

"I shall not interfere with Herbert," laughed Johannes. "I hear he is devoted to her."

"What! Herbert!--to the Worronska?" cried Moritz. "How did that happen?"

"Why, he was tutor for some years to a friend of the count's in St. Petersburg. He knew her there," replied Johannes.

"Now, that would be a charming daughter-in-law for you, my dear Staatsrätin," said Helm. "Why, she would be even worse than the Hartwich."

"Bah!" said Johannes. "She too is only a woman. If she fell, she owed her ruin to a man,--and a man might have been her saviour."

## **CHAPTER II.**

### **THE SWAN.**

A dark, gloomy pile overlooked the village of Hochstetten, that lay about two miles from the city, in the midst of a charming country. It had once been called Hochstetten Castle; but since the direct line of the noble family in which it had passed for a century from father to son had died out, and only a castellan had dwelt there, to hold it in possession for a distant branch of its ancient house, it had gone by the name of the "Haunted Castle" among the people; for of course in such an old house, where so many men had died, there must be ghosts, and popular superstition declared that the spirits of the departed still hovered about the spot where their earthly forms had been wont to wander.

But in this last year it happened that the castle was really inhabited by a spirit whose appearance inspired the vulgar, who suspect the devil's agency in whatever they do not comprehend, with quite as much horror as they had felt at the ghosts of their former lords,--although this latter spirit still inhabited a young and very beautiful body. Ernestine Hartwich had rented the castle, and, with her uncle, was living her strange life there. Since her arrival the house and the overgrown grounds within the high walls were certainly under a spell, and were avoided by all who were not obliged to go that way. There lay the old castle, in the midst of lovely hills and mountain-chains, embosomed in green trees, bathed in the sunlight of a dewy summer morning, and yet its gray, ancient walls looked abroad over the fresh life of wood and plain as gloomily as if they hid within them only death and decay.

Two strangers, driving past in a light vehicle, gazed gravely and silently at the place. The road grew somewhat steep, and they descended and walked beside the horse. A young peasant passed by, with scythe and reaping-hook, and, seeing the pleasant faces of the strangers; nodded kindly to them. The elder of the two stopped, as if prompted by a sudden impulse, and asked, "What castle is that?"

"That?" was the reply. "That is the Haunted Castle."

"Who lives there?"

"The Hartwich lives there."

"Who is the Hartwich?"

"Why, the witch who has rented it."

"Why do you call her a witch?"

"Because there's something wrong about her."

"Walk on with us a little way, if you have time, and tell us something of the lady," said the stranger.

"Oh, yes, I have time enough," replied the peasant, flattered by the interest that his remarks had excited. "But, good gracious! I do not know where to begin to tell about her. There is no beginning and no end to it."

"How does she look?" asked the younger gentleman. "Is she pretty?"

"No, indeed! She is pale and thin, and has big, coal-black eyes. And she looks so gloomy that you can tell as soon as you see her that she has an evil conscience."

"It is characteristic of the degree of culture to which the common people have attained," said the elder in an undertone to his companion, "that they have no admiration for beautiful outlines, but only for flesh and colour. They think a classic profile ugly if there is not a plump cheek on either side of it. This rude taste for the raw material is natural and excusable in peasants and common labourers, whose work is principally with raw material. Where should they learn anything better? But it is sad to think how many of the educated classes there are whose taste is just as uncultivated, and who admire only the beautiful embodiment, not the embodied beauty."

"Yes," added the other, "it is just so in spiritual matters. An expression of thoughtfulness is always strange and gloomy in the eyes of the common people; they are attracted only by thoughtless gaiety. The stamp of mind upon a serious brow is in their eyes the sign-manual of the evil one. But how many among ourselves are scarcely better than the people in this respect! We do not share their prejudices,--eh, Johannes?"

"No, Hilsborn, God knows we do not. This superficial idea of beauty explains the fact that Fräulein Hartwich was called ugly as a child, although she had a beautiful brow, a fine profile, and such eyes as I never saw before or since in my life,--eyes, Hilsborn,--and he laid his hand upon his friend's arm,--"in which lay a world of slumbering feeling, and the promise of bliss unspeakable for him who should awaken it to life. I had forgotten the little girl whom I saw only once, but when lately I encountered a glance from the eyes of that strange, lovely woman, I recognized the child again,--the poor, forsaken child. There was the old shy melancholy in those eyes, and they pierced my heart with a foreboding pain. I could have taken her in my arms and borne her away from the hill where she stood, as formerly from the breaking bough to which she had fled from me!"

"God grant she be worthy of such a man as you!" said Hilsborn.

"Do not speak so, Hilsborn; you know I will not listen to such words. Let us ask this fellow more about her."

He turned to the young peasant, who was walking whistling on the other side of the road.

"Is she not at least kind to the poor?" he asked.

"God preserve any one to whom she is kind! No one wants anything from her. Her uncle distributes some money every week, but only the very poorest people take it, and they always cross themselves over it."

Johannes and Hilsborn looked at each other with a smile. "Then her evil influence extends even to her charities?"

"Yes, that's what I mean,--wherever she goes she carries misfortune. She pretends to know more than any one, and wants to introduce all sorts of new-fangled ways. She wouldn't have people sick with a fever covered up in good, thick feather beds, or give them a single glass of good liquor. All that was wrong, she said. A poor widow in the village had a sick child, which she nursed as well as she could. The Hartwich went to see her, and overpersuaded the woman, so that she let her watch with it one night. Scarcely had she seated herself by the cradle when the child grew worse, and fell into convulsions. The Hartwich sent the mother to the castle to send off a man on horseback for the doctor, and was left all alone with the child. When the woman got back from the castle the witch had the child on her lap, and the poor little thing was dying. The woman, frantic with terror, tore the little body out of her arms; but it was dead! and the Hartwich left her, as she would not hear a word from her. When the doctor came, he talked all sorts of stuff, and wanted to have the child dissected, as they call it; but of course no Christian mother would allow such a thing, and no one knew what the Hartwich had done to the poor little creature."

"But, you foolish people," began Johannes indignantly, "you do not suppose----"

Hilsborn signed to him to be silent. "Hush!" he said in a whisper; "will you attempt what the gods try vainly--to contend with stupidity?"

"You are right," replied Johannes. "This people needs the teaching of centuries."

"Well, my good fellow," he said, again addressing the peasant, "what happened then?"

"Why, that very night, after the doctor was gone, the Hartwich came to the woman and offered her money,--I suppose to induce her to hold her tongue,--but the poor thing showed her the door, and told her what she thought of her."

"That was her thanks!" murmured Johannes.

"Since then she goes to see no one, and we are quit of her."

"Was this unfortunate instance the only one?" asked Johannes, "or has she done any further mischief?"

"Oh, yes, quantities! Once she persuaded a man to go to the city and have his leg taken off,--he had injured it ten years before. The man died in the city, and left a wife and children. If that witch had not sent him there, he would have been living still. He had managed to live with the injury ten years, and he might have borne it ten more. The poor widow heaped her with curses!"

Johannes exchanged glances with Hilsborn.

"Do you, too, believe that she is a witch?" he asked the peasant.

"Well, if I don't exactly believe that, I know well enough that no blessing can attend her, for she does not love God."

"How do you know that?"

"Oh, there are a great many signs of it. She does not like to hear him mentioned,--she never goes to church, and doesn't pray at home."

"You cannot be sure of that," said Johannes.

"Oho! yes, I can, for Harcher's Kunigunda is a maid at the castle, and she tells us all about it. For one thing, there used to be a bell-tower up there, and the bell was always rung for prayers, morning and evening, in old times. It was right and good to hear the bell ringing with the one in the village church, and we were used to it, and liked it. Even when the last of the family up there died, the village congregation gave the castellan two bags of potatoes every year that he might allow the ringing to continue. But when the Hartwich came, what did she do? Why, she tore down the bell-tower and made it into an observatory, as she calls it, where she sits for nights long and counts the stars."

"Well, if she looks up into heaven so much, she must surely think of God and his works there," rejoined Johannes smiling, "and those who love to pray do not need to be reminded of it by the ringing of bells."

"No, no! that is not so," the peasant obstinately maintained. "She does not wish to be reminded of prayer, or she would have loved the clear sound of the bell, as we did, and would have left it hanging where it had rung out comfort and religion for a hundred years. She might have built her star-chamber upon the old tower all the same, if she had wanted to,--but she did not want to,--and so we hated her from the first."

Johannes and Hilsborn looked grave.

"Books she has in plenty; she brought whole chestsfull with her, but never a hymn-book or prayer-book, Kunigunda, who dusts them, says, and, search as she may, she has never seen a Bible there yet. And the Hartwich never mentions the name of God; and if any one does it before her, she talks of something else instantly. But the worst of all is that she has a room there that no one, except her uncle and herself, is allowed to enter, and she always locks the door when she is there with her uncle. What they do there no living soul knows, but Kunigunda tells all sorts of strange stories about it, for she has often listened at the door, and sometimes got a peep inside when the Fräulein was going in or coming out. She says there are all kinds of strange things in there, such as no honest man knows anything about,--black tablets, with eyes and ears painted on them, and burning flames, and bellows, and Heaven only knows what beside! And she has heard dreadful noises, that were not of this world,--sometimes sounds as sweet as the organ plays in the church, and then a rustle and roar as of a mighty wind, although not a breeze is stirring outside, or blasts of a trumpet like the trumpet of Jericho, so that she ran away in deadly fright."

"Those were experiments in sound," said Johannes, greatly amused, to Hilsborn.

"And Kunigunda says that it is often so light in that room that the rays through the keyhole dazzle her just like sunlight, although the sun has long been set outside. Kunigunda declares that it is not common light,--it burns quite blue, and she had to shut her eye quickly not to be blinded by it. Now, what sort of light is that? What business has she with fire and flames? And Kunigunda says she is almost always up until morning, and scarcely sleeps at all. Oh, she leads a godless life,--for, if God had not intended men to wake in the daytime and sleep at night, He would not have made night dark and day light; and if she were doing any good, why should she shun the daylight when she does it? Kunigunda says, too, that she tortures poor dumb animals just for pleasure, for she has often seen how she and her uncle carry rabbits and such creatures into their secret chamber, and they never bring them out again. Now, what do they do with the poor things? They cannot eat the rabbits. And Kunigunda will swear that there are a couple of skulls in the book-room, tumbling about among the old books. Now, I ask, what Christian would take the head away from a dead man and spoil his rest in the grave? Is it not just dishonouring a corpse out of devilish wantonness?"

"There certainly is a whole mountain of charges towering between Fräulein Hartwich and her neighbours," whispered Johannes to his friend, "and I see clearly that the curse of singularity has pursued her even hither, and that this rare creature is repulsed and isolated here as she was as a

child. It is high time that some strong arm should bear her hence into the purer atmosphere of a warm, healthy existence, from which her eccentricity has hitherto excluded her."

"Do you see that green balcony there?" said the peasant, when they were quite near the house. "There she has hanging a kind of cittern that plays of itself. I would not believe Kunigunda, when she told me of it, at first; but then I hid myself here once, and heard it with my own ears, the music softer and sweeter than any that human hands can make. I could feel it beginning to bewitch me."

"Indeed! and how did it feel?"

"Oh, my heart grew so soft, so different from usual,--just--just as if I had been drinking linden-blossom tea. I could not help thinking of the girl I loved, who is dead, and I could have listened forever. Suddenly I bethought me that there was a spell weaving around me, and I ran away as fast as I could."

"That was an Æolian harp, my good friend," Johannes explained; "its strings were stirred by no spirit hand, but by the wind. The spell that you perceived was only the effect of the beautiful tones upon your ear and heart; and if you had examined yourself, you would have found that, when you were thinking of your dead sweet-heart, you were better than when you are sitting in the village inn abusing the Hartwich. Consider for a moment whether an evil spirit could inspire such good, tender sensations. And listen as often as you can to the Æolian harp; it will not bewitch you,--it will only do good to you."

The fellow looked in amazement at the kindly speaker.

"I don't exactly understand you, sir, but you seem to mean well."

"What makes you think so?" asked Johannes,--"you do not know me."

"Oh, why, you look honest and good, sir," said the peasant, looking frankly into Johannes's face.

"Then believe what I say, when I tell you that you do Fräulein Hartwich great wrong. I have known her from childhood, and I know that she is good and kind!"

Johannes sent an earnest glance towards the castle, which they were passing. An elderly woman was just opening a window in an upper story.

"Look!" cried the peasant, "that is her housekeeper, Frau Willmers. The Fräulein is just getting up--it is nine o'clock."

"God bless your awakening!" Johannes breathed softly to himself.

And, borne on the breeze of morning and the fragrance of flowers, the blessing was wafted up to the girl, who, weary with her night-watch, was reposing by the open window. She laid her head upon the sill, and the fragrant summer air fanned her brow. Johannes's words floated around her in a sea of light and warmth, and she felt them without hearing them. At last she opened her burning eyelids, and looked abroad, seeing everything at first through the gray, misty veil which weariness spread before her eyes,--but gradually was revealed in its full splendour the sunny picture, above which arched the clear, cloudless firmament. She arose and leaned out with a deep sigh of pain. She knew no happiness but that of gratified ambition,--she could imagine no other, and therefore desired no other, for we cannot desire that of which we have no conception,--and yet, in the sunlight laughing around her, in the gloom of night, in the beauty of the valley and the grandeur of the mountains, a promise of a far different happiness beckoned to her, and she pined in longing for it without recognising it. Yes, from every voice of nature, from the song of birds, the murmur of the brook, the roaring of the tempest, and the muttering of the thunder, a call was ringing in her ears, she knew not whence or whither, but she would willingly have plunged into the ocean to follow it.

"There is no surer means of preventing all aimless desires than study, nothing better to prevent all abstract dreaming than absorption in some specialty," her uncle had told her when he suspected her of moods like that we have just described. "If you long to grasp the whole, first grasp a part,--if you thirst to fly to heaven, remember that the observatory is the only way thither,--if you desire to feel the warm throb of life, you can find it nowhere so satisfactorily as at the dissecting-table."

And she had turned away silently, uncomplainingly, from her flight to distant realms, to the telescope, and with a warm, swelling heart that would have embraced a world, had busied herself with analyzing microscopic organizations. Thus, in the course of long years, she had grown used to suppress emotions such as she experienced to-day, and they seldom came to the surface, just as the bells of the sunken city are only heard above the sea on Sunday. To-day was not Sunday, but it was an anniversary. Ten years ago to-day she had been sent to her first and only party,--her father had almost killed her,--and the whole current of her life had been changed. She knew the date perfectly, for the next day was the anniversary of her father's death. The familiar forms of those days hovered around her; they were the only ones that had ever approached her nearly, for since that time she had had no intimate relations with any one. She had studied mankind, but

human beings were strangers to her. And as she thought and pondered, she wished herself again the child that ran races with the wind and cradled herself among the storm-tossed boughs. Oh for one breath of hopeful childhood, one throb of that love-thirsty heart, one tear of that wrestling faith! All dead and silent now, every blossom of childhood and youth faded: a woman, old at two-and-twenty, looking down from the heights of passionless contemplation upon a life, lying behind her, that she has never enjoyed, upon a time, now past, that she has never lived. Sighing, she turned away from the sunny landscape. "Our life lasts seventy--perhaps eighty--years," she said to herself, "and the delight of it is labour and trouble." This reading, by a great modern philosopher, of the golden words of the ancient writings, she had adopted as her motto, and it still possessed its old charm for her. What more could she desire of life than labour and trouble? What could youth or age bring her beyond these? She turned away from the window, and quickly arranged in thick braids around her head her loosened hair which had fallen down like a black veil. Her glance, as she did so, fell only passingly and indifferently upon the mirror. She never saw the face that gazed at her from its depths,--a face as faultlessly beautiful as an artist's fancy pictures those dark, melancholy female forms with which the ancients peopled the night. She dressed herself in simple white, and then her arms dropped wearied at her side. The expression of strength that the word labour had called into her face gave way to a profound melancholy, almost despair, and she sank exhausted upon a couch. She sat still for one moment, her head sunk upon her breast, and then the large tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Labour is a delight, when one has strength for it--but I have none!" she said, clasping her knees with her small, transparent hands, while she gazed despairingly towards the distant horizon.

The housekeeper, Frau Willmers, entered. "A gentleman is waiting below, Fräulein Hartwich, who sends his card and says he comes from the gentleman whose name is written upon it."

Ernestine read the name "Professor Heim," and below, in Heim's handwriting, "earnestly recommends the bearer of this card."

"The gentleman is welcome!" she cried with awakened animation. "Show him into the library."

"Will the Fräulein receive him without the knowledge of----" the woman asked with hesitation and surprise.

"I will!" replied Ernestine firmly.

"Now, Heaven be praised!" muttered the old woman, "that you are to see some one at last, and the gentleman is well worth a look. But you will bear the blame with your uncle, so that I may have no responsibility in the matter?"

"The responsibility is mine."

Frau Willmers hurried out and conducted the stranger into Ernestine's library.

A pleasant bluish twilight reigned in the room as he entered it, caused by the heavy blue damask curtains that draped the high bow-windows. It was a spacious octagon apartment, in the style of the tower chambers of the Middle Ages, opening on to a balcony, which was likewise separated from the room by blue damask curtains. The Æolian harp, of which the peasant had spoken, hung in the balcony, and some loosened tendrils of a wild grapevine, growing outside, stirred by the breeze, touched the strings and called forth from them broken stray notes, which a stronger breeze would blend in harmony, as the fingers of a child, guided by its teacher, plays vaguely upon an instrument until the practised hand of its master produces a full, clear chord. In the dark boughs that overshadowed the balcony, birds were singing, and now and then hopping confidingly upon the rose-bushes with which it was decorated.

"She loves beauty," thought the stranger with a pleased glance around the cool, quiet apartment, which breathed only contentment and peace. And it must be true peace of mind that the inhabitant of this room possessed,--wherever the eyes were turned, they fell upon the immortal works of the great thinkers of modern times,--a costly library was ranged upon shelves, in richly-carved oaken bookcases.

The stranger began to read the titles of the books, but the more he read the more thoughtful he became. If the contents of these books were, or were to be, crammed into one woman's brain, there could dwell there not peace, but only torturing unrest, strife. At last his eye rested upon a writing-table of dark oak, richly carved, as was all the rest of the furniture of the room. Around the edge of the table, cut in raised letters, he read the sentence, "Our life lasts seventy--perhaps eighty--years, and the delight of it is labour and trouble!" He gazed long and thoughtfully at this motto, so strangely grave for so young a girl. A shade of melancholy passed over his handsome face as he turned away and noticed the scores of sheets of paper scattered here and there on the table, all containing either a few figures or written sentences, evidently hurried beginnings of scientific labour of all kinds, tossed aside, as it appeared, hastily and impatiently. Partly on the table, partly on a desk, and partly on the floor, were piles of open books, their margins filled with annotations, pamphlets, &c. Names like Helmholtz, du Bois, Ludwig, Darwin, &c. showed what massive material this bold aspiring mind was calling to its aid, over what mountains of labour it was pursuing the path to its ambitious aims. "So much vital force wasted in fruitless energy--so

much noble zeal expended upon a blunder. What a pity!" said the stranger with an involuntary sigh. Then he noticed just in front of the writing-table a small open drawer, in which Ernestine apparently kept her most precious and valuable books. One of them was Möllner's latest work on Physiology; another, du Bois' Eulogy upon Johannes Müller; and the third, *Andersen's Fairy Tales*.

The grave man's features showed signs of deep emotion at this sight. Only a strong, true nature could so preserve the memories of its childhood. He could not help taking the book in his hand to examine it more closely. As he did so, he noticed a little marker of paper yellowed with age. It was placed in the last pages of the story of the Ugly Duckling, just where the children stand by the pond and cry, "Look! there comes a new swan!" Was it this, then, that had made the story so precious to her--the prophecy that the duckling would one day be a swan, and not the memory of what had been dear to her childhood? He put the book back in its place with a look that showed that the question he had put to himself grieved him. Then he became so lost in thought that he was almost startled when a door behind him opened, and Ernestine approached him. As he saw the tall form, with its air of royal dignity, standing there calm and silent in the noble consciousness of mental superiority, he repeated involuntarily in thought the words, "Here is a new swan!" Yes--the ugly duckling had unfolded its wings! For one moment his heart throbbed violently. It cost him an effort to preserve his composure.

"I crave forgiveness, Fräulein Hartwich," he began, "for venturing to offer my medical skill in place of his for whom you sent."

"If you come from Dr. Heim, you are welcome. Is he ill, that he sends me a substitute, or is he angry with me?" And Ernestine looked gravely and fixedly at the stranger.

"Neither the one nor the other, Fräulein Hartwich," was the reply. "He has merely permitted me to use his name as the talisman to unlock this enchanted castle."

"And why so?" asked Ernestine, regarding him still more attentively.

"Because I am convinced that I understand the treatment of your case better than Dr. Heim."

Ernestine started, and turned away from the arrogant speaker. Her face darkened with momentary displeasure,--but not long. She raised her large eyes to him again and said frankly, "No, you are not in earnest. Heim would not have sent me a physician as vain and conceited as these words make you appear!"

Johannes offered her his hand with a smile. "Boldly spoken, Fräulein Hartwich,--I thank you! Nevertheless, I must rest under the charge of vanity and arrogance until you declare me innocent, for I only uttered Dr. Heim's honest conviction and my own. You shake your head, and do not comprehend me. I hope you will do so soon. How could I have had the courage to challenge your displeasure by so bold an assertion, had I not been sure that time would justify my pretensions?"

Ernestine motioned to him to be seated. "May I be permitted, sir, to request your name before speaking further with you?"

Johannes cast at her a glance of kindly entreaty. "I pray you allow me to suppress it for the present. I should so like to inspire you with confidence in me for my own sake, without the aid of a name perhaps not unknown to you. Such confidence would be so precious to me. Call it a whim, if you will, but I beg you to indulge me!"

"As you please, sir," said Ernestine with some constraint, looking keenly at him as she spoke. She seemed to be searching in his handsome face for something,--she scarce knew what,--it seemed to suggest some dim recollection to her mind. Then she dropped her glance, as if comparing what she saw with some image in her memory, yet without arriving at any satisfactory conclusion.

Johannes watched every expression of her countenance. No shade of thought passing across that broad white brow escaped him. He gazed at her and almost forgot to speak, she was so wondrously beautiful, this shy, grave girl, pale and suffering from her devotion to the studies to which she was sacrificing herself with such religious zeal. The saddest error would be touching in such a form,--yes, we must bow before it, instead of laughing at it. So thought Johannes as he sat silent before her, and something of what was passing in his mind must have been mirrored in his features, for Ernestine turned away with a shade of embarrassment, and asked suddenly, "Well, sir, and what news do you bring me of Father Heim? Is he still vigorous in mind and body?"

The indifference of her tone rather nettled Johannes. "Yes, Fräulein Hartwich, he is indeed. Beloved and revered by his associates, as well as by his patients, the evening of his days is calm and cheerful."

"I am very glad to hear it. I am bound to him by ties of gratitude, he has done much for me, at one time he saved my life. Therefore I hoped for benefit now from his prescriptions. He is a great practitioner, although he has not quite kept pace in his old age with the march of modern science."

"He certainly is. But he can do nothing for your gravest malady, and therefore he has sent me



in his place."

"You are, then, famous for some *spécialité*. But how can Dr. Heim know that I need such a physician?"

"He does know it, for you were attacked as a child by the malady of which I speak, and Dr. Heim was powerless to effect a cure. Now that he is convinced that my method of cure is efficacious, he has adopted me as his assistant. Therefore I ask you frankly and openly, Will you have me for your physician? Yes or no!"

For a moment Ernestine made no answer, and then said firmly, "Yes, if Dr. Heim believes that you can restore me to health, it is sufficient, and I will follow your prescriptions implicitly."

"I thank you," said Johannes; "but I warn you beforehand, I am a strict physician, and my medicines are bitter!"

"Scarcely as bitter as disease?" said Ernestine inquiringly.

"Who can say? To speak with perfect sincerity, Fräulein Hartwich, the malady from which I come to relieve you, the disease that poisons your past and your future, is your uncle's influence!"

Ernestine stood up. "Sir!"

"Hear me before you condemn me! I assert nothing that I cannot prove."

"No, sir, I will not hear you. You do my uncle gross injustice; whatever proofs you may adduce. A life of self-sacrifice and devotion far outweighs the accusation of a stranger. What do I not owe to him? What has he not done for me? I owe to him my scientific culture. He has made me what I am."

"And may I be so bold as to ask if you are so very sure that you are what you should be?"

A pause ensued. Ernestine retreated a step, and, offended and confused, cast down her eyes.

Johannes continued. "What if I were come to prove that you are not?"

Ernestine looked sullenly at him. "I certainly cannot answer you here; but your depreciation of me forces me to ask whether you have read anything that I have written, and so have come to form so poor an opinion of my abilities?"

"On the contrary, Fräulein Hartwich, your essay upon Reflex Motion is full of talent, and your article upon the Capacity of the Eye for Stereoscopic Vision has won the prize."

Ernestine started. Her face flushed, her eyes sparkled. "Why have you waited until now to tell me? My essay won the prize! Do I wake, or am I dreaming? Oh, how can I thank you for this intelligence? I have no words. But let your reward be the consciousness that you have given me the greatest happiness my life has ever known! And do not attempt to malign to me the man to whose disinterested care for my education I owe it."

"Poor girl, if this is your greatest happiness! You are betrayed indeed, if you owe no other enjoyment to your uncle!"

"Oh, sir, what can there be beyond fame and honour?"

Johannes looked gravely at her. "Something of which your uncle has never told you."

In the flush of her gratified ambition, Ernestine did not hear him. She walked a few steps to and fro, then seated herself again, and said with a beating heart, "Perhaps you also bring the answer to my application for admission to the lectures at the University."

"I do, but it has been rejected decidedly, Fräulein Hartwich."

Ernestine's arms dropped at her sides. "Rejected! Was it known, when they rejected it, that the prize essay was mine?"

"It was."

Ernestine stood for one moment as if stunned. At last she began slowly and dejectedly, "Ah, I understand it all! the gentlemen took the author of that treatise for a man, and awarded it the prize, but my application was refused because I am so unfortunate as to be a woman. It is only natural, why should a woman be permitted to vie with the lords of creation?"

"Your disappointment makes you unjust," said Johannes. "Your essay received the prize because it accomplished what it aimed at. The application of the woman was rejected because in the University no woman can accomplish what should be her aim."

"How can you prove that?" asked Ernestine with bitterness.

"Because she has deserted the sphere which nature has assigned her, and cannot fulfil the requirements of the one that she has selected for herself."

"You, then, are one of my opponents?"

"I am, Fräulein Hartwich."

"Oh, I am sorry!"

"Why? Of what consequence can the opinion of a stranger be to you?"

Ernestine looked down. "The impression that you make upon me, sir, is such that it pains me to find that you are one of those narrow-minded persons who deny to women the possession of any but the humblest ability."

"You are mistaken, I think them, and especially your self, possessed of very great ability."

Ernestine looked at him with surprise. "But how can this ability avail us, if we are not allowed to enlarge the bounds of the sphere within which we are so unkindly confined at present?"

"That sphere does not seem to me contracted. I think it so noble, so elevated, that the loftiest talent may well content itself within it, if it be rightly understood."

"But if a woman, if I--forgive my presumption,--am especially endowed beyond other women, should I not, with the power, possess also the privilege of transcending the usual bounds?"

"You would then possess the privilege of ennobling your sex, of showing it what it could accomplish within its own sphere,--you would possess the power to be first among women, but not to become a man."

Ernestine looked down sadly. "Have you read my essay?"

"Yes."

"Do you think it deserved the prize?"

"Yes."

"And yet you would deny me the right to accomplish tasks usually assigned to men."

"You have accomplished one such. How far your kind uncle may have assisted you in your labor we will not ask."

Again Ernestine's eyes drooped.

Johannes continued: "Probably you yourself are not aware of the answer to such a question,--at all events, the victory over the other competitors for the prize was slight, and by no means difficult. But do you imagine, Fräulein Hartwich, because the instinct of your genius has answered this one question, that you can lord it over the boundless domain of science? Have you the least suspicion of the magnitude of what you propose?"

"I believe I have learned enough to know what there is for me to learn."

"Do not deceive yourself with regard to your aim. You wish to learn that you may teach,--not as every schoolmaster teaches, to tell what has been told you before,--you wish to educe new truths from what you learn,--in other words, you wish to produce, to create!"

"And you deny me the requisite ability?"

"Not at all," replied Johannes; "but I grant only one domain for the creative faculty of woman,--the domain of art,--because, in works of art, the heart shares in the labour of the understanding; because, in the creation of beauty, a profound inner consciousness and soaring fancy can replace masculine acuteness of thought--and these belong especially to the gifted woman. But science presents tasks for the thinking power. I deny to woman not the ability to grasp the grand results of science, but the mental endurance, the technical facility, to arrive at them unassisted."

Ernestine clasped her hands in entreaty. "Do not destroy the hope and aim of my life!"

Johannes bent towards her and said gently, "My dear Fräulein Hartwich, may your life have other aims than this that you can never attain!"

"Never attain!" cried Ernestine, sitting proudly erect "I can see nothing to justify those words. If I were only well and strong, if my body were only a more, obedient tool of my mind, I would show what a woman can do! I would show that we are not merely domestic animals, endowed with some degree of reason, as a certain class of men designate us, but free, independent, equal beings! If you only knew how my whole soul revolts at our social oppression, our intellectual slavery! Oh, believe, believe, sir, that I am not actuated by vain ambition, but I am wrung with anguish for those wretched souls who, like myself, have chafed so painfully in the fetters of commonplace conventionalities, or, like those born blind, have dreamed in their darkness of the

light that floods the world with joy and freedom, but from which they are excluded! I long to break the yoke under which my whole sex languishes, to avenge their wrongs. For this I will give my money and my blood!--for this I resign all claims to the happiness of woman!--yes, for this I would sacrifice life itself!"

Johannes sat listening to her with his arms folded. He now began quietly: "I understand and admire you,--but you exaggerate. The social position of woman is determined by her capacity and her desires. Women like yourself are rare exceptions; your sex, as a general rule, is at so low a stage of development that they neither can claim nor desire any higher position."

"And whose fault is this?" Ernestine interrupted him eagerly. "Yours,--you masters of the world. If we are intellectually your inferiors, why not educate us more thoroughly? Why not elevate us to a higher degree of intelligence? It is for your strong hands to form us as you will. And nowhere in Christian lands is the position of woman more depressing than in this country. Look at Russia, the land that so long retained serfdom and the knout,--even there the number of learned women is perceptibly increasing, and the Russian high schools do not reject female pupils. Look at France, at England,--women are everywhere employed and the sphere of their capabilities enlarged, and the sex is held in higher estimation. Unfortunately, I cannot deny that the mass of German women are either mere household drudges, with never a thought beyond the material interests of the kitchen and nursery, or glittering dolls, with no idea of anything but the adornment of their persons. They understand little or nothing of politics, of the interests of their native land, of science, or of poetry; they go to art for amusement, not for instruction and refreshment. Such mothers can never implant the seeds of patriotism in the breasts of their sons, or educate the minds of their daughters; such wives can never share the thoughts and aims of their husbands. Who is to blame? Those men alone who would exclude woman from their world, and, denying her all claim to intellectual ability, banish her to the kitchen, or force her to indemnify herself for exclusion from their spiritual life by rendering herself necessary to their material existence!"

Johannes made no reply. It was enjoyment enough for him to look at her and hear her. He wished her, before attempting to reply to her, to finish all that she had to say.

Ernestine continued: "All this constitutes the ignominy of my sex,--an ignominy that must be overcome, or its revenge will be terrible; for luxury and self-indulgence have been the ruin of those nations who rendered no homage to the spiritual nature of woman. We must force this reverence from you, at any risk, before it is too late. Smile, if you will, at my presumption in arrogating the place of a feminine Arnold von Winkelried, breaking a path for our spiritual freedom through the lances of contempt and prejudice. I know what lies before me. No commonplace woman feels any pride in her sex; when one of her sisters achieves distinction, she is only all the more galled by the consciousness of her own inferiority, and takes her revenge, if she knows no better, with the wretched weapons of conventional prejudices,--casting the odium of indelicacy upon the woman who dares to be free; and men contemptuously close their doors upon her. My lot must be to struggle and suffer. Still, I do not hesitate. If I can effect nothing here, I will seek other lands, where woman striving after better things is treated with humanity and true chivalry."

"Where humanity and chivalry assist woman to lay aside the very crown of her being,--her womanhood!" Johannes now interrupted her; "for how can you preserve it, if in anatomical studies you harden yourself to everything that shocks a compassionate woman, if you are forced into contact with things at which all maidenly delicacy must revolt? I have not interrupted you hitherto, because I wished thoroughly to understand you, and because your sacred zeal touched and delighted me. With much that is crude and exaggerated, there is truth, and beauty, in what you have just said. But, believe me, the physical frame of a woman is as little suited as her intellect to certain scientific pursuits. I directed you to the broad domain of the beautiful,--of art,--but you would not listen to me--there you would have to share your fame among too many. Your ambition craves something entirely new and unheard-of. But, Fräulein Hartwich, this ambition will be your ruin! If you long to create, create forms for your ideas that will speak for themselves, clothe them in poetic language, or give them local habitation and a name in art--you can complete such work, and your soul can find rest in it from its labours. A poetical idea can be fully embodied in a work of art; but a scientific hypothesis is inexhaustible, because, however clearly proved and demonstrated, it brings new problems in its train. Only a man's rude strength can endure such a restless pursuit that knows no pause; the woman's delicate nature must succumb even because her mind is so alive that she labours with all the ardent desire, the breathless interest, of the devotee of science. And if she succeeds, at the sacrifice of her life, in contributing some addition to the universal stock of knowledge, she has done only what would have cost a man far less pains. The result of her work is wrung from her death-agony, and the world, with a shrug of its shoulders, says, 'It is about all that a woman could do!' Is praise thus qualified not purchased too dearly at the cost of health and life?"

Ernestine had listened with intense eagerness. Her dark eyes were riveted upon the speaker. As he ceased, she folded her hands in her lap and said, "What injustice you do me if you think that desire for the world's applause is the moving spring of my actions! Yes, I do long for recognition; that I have confessed to you. But I might have obtained it more easily if I had chosen other branches of science, and my uncle allowed me to choose. I selected, from inclination, natural philosophy, and, in especial, physiology. I cared little for history, because I care little for mankind. Moral philosophy seems to me too dogmatical, so does religion. Nature alone is always

filled with new, genuine life. 'There I know,' as Johannes Müller says, 'whom I serve and what I have.' Physiology has opened a new world for me,--or, better still, has re-created the old world, for I truly see only when I understand what I am looking at;--every sunbeam glancing in a dewdrop, every wave of sound borne to my ear from afar, awakens new and vivid images in my mind. What enjoyment is comparable to that which science offers us! She makes the real a miracle,--and shows us the miraculous as reality. And shall I resign this ennobling possession because I am a woman? And can this inspiring search for life bring me death? Oh, no! I cannot, I will not believe it!"

Johannes held out his hand to her. "You are a rarely-gifted woman, and comprehend the nature of science. But, supposing that you possessed the rare power--both of body and mind--to accomplish the task which you propose to yourself, you must do it at the cost of your vocation as a woman. For no woman can fulfil both these offices. As a scholar, you must live exclusively for your studies; the duties of wife and mother would distract you too much to admit of your accomplishing your purposes, for they require an entire lifetime. Now you have the courage to endure the want of love and happiness growing out of your determination, but will your courage last? When age and illness assail you,--when you become weak and helpless and need faithful, devoted hands about you and true loving hearts upon which you can rest from weariness and pain, and there is no one belonging to you,--because you have chosen to belong to no one,--how will it be then? Have you no presentiment of such misery? Is there no desire for consolation, no longing for love, in your inmost soul?"

Ernestine's gaze was fixed darkly on the ground. "I know nothing of love. How can I long for what I know nothing of?"

"Good heavens! how can that be? Have you had no parents, relatives,--friends who were dear to you?"

"No! my mother died at my birth, and my father--who treated me very harshly, and did not care for me--died when I was twelve years old. My guardian became my teacher and guide, and initiated me into the pursuit of science. At no time of my life have I had any intercourse with my equals. I did not wish for it. My uncle sent his own little daughter to a boarding-school and lived for me alone, but the tie that bound me to him was only my interest in science and his readiness to gratify it. He is cold by nature,--as I am also. I have never felt anything for him but gratitude. I have always lived alone, and have never loved a human being."

Johannes was deeply moved. "Poor girl!" he said. "Had you cast yourself on the ground at my feet, bathed in tears, bewailing the death of father, mother, or husband, you could not have inspired me with such pity as those words, 'I have never loved,' awaken within me. You look amazed! The time will come when you will understand me,--when by the depth of your anguish you will learn the heights of bliss from which you have been banished; then he, whom you now regard as your enemy, will be beside you,--to soothe your grief for your lost life,--perhaps to lead you to one nobler and better!"

Ernestine turned away, greatly agitated. She would not have Johannes observe her emotion, and therefore only breathed a gentle "Farewell," and would have left the room.

"Are you going? Have I offended you? May I not come again?" he asked.

Ernestine stood still, and did not speak.

"May I not?" he repeated,--and there was such urgent entreaty in his voice that it stirred the very depths of Ernestine's soul.

There was one moment of hesitation; then she returned to him, held out her hand and said, with eyes swimming in tears,--eyes that pierced his heart to the core:

"Yes; come again."

"God bless you!" he said, with a long sigh of relief, and then, kissing her hand respectfully, he left the room. She stood still where he had left her, lost in thought.

The tones of the Æolian harp floated out upon the air, the roses exhaled fresh fragrance, the birds twittered, and the sunlight shone in soft rays through the blue curtains. She heeded none of these things, she stood there absorbed in the pursuit of some dim, half-remembered image in the distant past--even in the days of her childhood.

Why was it that the oak boughs, whither she had fled from the handsome lad, seemed to rustle around her again? Why was the little Angelika so distinct in her memory,--the little girl rocking in her arms the doll that her brother had sent her, in the sure hope that her tenderness would inspire it with life?

And as she stood there, dreaming in the midst of Æolian tones, fragrance, and light, she herself was like Pygmalion's statue, when beneath the breath of love the first glow of life informed its marble breast, and the cold lips opened for its first sigh!

## **CHAPTER III.**

### **THE VILLAGE SCHOOL.**

When Johannes left Ernestine, he turned his steps towards the village. He was as if inspired by the consciousness that his was a part to play that falls to the lot of few men in this world,--to promote his own happiness in watching over and caring for the happiness of another. He walked on with the firm, elastic tread that belongs to a strong man in the bloom of youth, and wherever his glance fell it scattered seeds of the kindness which was reflected in the smile that greeted him upon every face that he met. He took his way towards a little vine-clad cottage in which dwelt the patriarch of the place,--the village schoolmaster. Before the door stood Hilsborn's vehicle, while a fat old mastiff was barking incessantly at the horse, who pawed impatiently, and never seemed to perceive that the dog was evidently only fulfilling an irksome duty, and was not actuated by the slightest feeling of hostility. Johannes stroked, in passing, his broad, bristling back, a caress not unkindly received, and then entered the house, whose hospitable roof was so low that he was obliged to stoop as he crossed the threshold, lest he should brush his forehead against the bunches of unripe grapes that hung down over the lintel. He passed through the little, dark hall, and entered the dwelling-room. There he found Hilsborn sitting with the schoolmaster upon one of the low, broad window-seats, while the schoolmaster's old wife, Brigitta, sat knitting upon the other. The schoolmaster was a spare, elderly man, with long gray hair, and eyes in whose uncertain depths that ominous white spot could be perceived that is the arch-enemy of light.

"Aha! the Herr Professor," said the old man, rising to greet Johannes. "We thought you had been enchanted in the Haunted Castle, and would never come back to us again."

"You may not have been so very far wrong," said Johannes, shaking the offered hand.

"Yes, you have kept us waiting well!" observed Hilsborn.

"Brigitta, dear, will you make ready for us? These gentlemen will perhaps do us the pleasure of sharing with us our mid-day meal,--it will be about the time for their luncheon," said the schoolmaster to his wife, who had arisen when Johannes entered, and was awaiting this hint to withdraw. Johannes and Hilsborn declined the proffered hospitality, but Frau Brigitta had already left the room. As the door closed behind her, the old man grew very grave. "Herr Professor," he began, and his voice was a little hoarse, and his hands trembled slightly, "now we are alone,--now I pray you tell me the truth. I would not ask you while my wife was here,--for I would spare her unhappiness as long as possible. But I must and will know, for the future of my son is at stake. Is it not true, Herr Professor, that you have no hope of saving my eyes?"

Hilsborn made no reply. His compassionate heart withheld him from so utterly destroying the old man's hopes in life. In his indecision, he exchanged a glance with Johannes, which the old man observed.

"Oh, my dear sir, that look, which I could see in spite of my increasing blindness, speaks to me as plainly as your silence. I have long had no hope myself. A year ago, when my eyes were so inflamed, I expected the catastrophe would occur from which your skill has so long saved me. The question now is--can my eyes be operated upon?"

Hilsborn hesitated again. He could not in honour delude the worthy man with false hopes only to have them so bitterly crushed in the future, and yet--who with a heart in his breast could tell the sad truth to that face of anxious inquiry? "I cannot give you a decided answer at present," he said at last with some effort.

The patient man clasped his hands entreatingly, and his dim eyes strove to read Hilsborn's countenance. "Do not believe, Herr Professor, that it would be kind to deceive me. If I now know that I am incurable, I can do instantly what would be difficult later,--take my son immediately from the University and train him to be my successor here. You can understand that if I am disabled I can no longer provide for the continuance of his academic course, and that it is best that the young man should learn as soon as possible the destruction of his hopes, that he may reconcile himself to resigning the lecture-room for the school-room. I know how hard it will be, for I was just entering upon a scientific career when I was excluded from it by my father's early death. And let me tell you that if my son bears this blow well, I have nothing more to fear." His voice faltered as he uttered these last words. He was conscious of it, and was silent,--unwilling to betray his emotion.

Johannes and Hilsborn stood for one moment, not knowing what to reply. They could not console the unhappy father by the assurance that he would need no substitute. They well knew how important it was that what the conscientious old man proposed should be done. At last

Hilsborn said, with characteristic gentleness, "If you wish to make sure of a substitute in case of the worst, it is best that you should do so as soon as possible, as in the event of undergoing an operation you would be unable to work for a long time, and, besides, I cannot answer for the result."

"Thank you, kind sir. You have told me the truth, and now I know enough," said the schoolmaster, wiping his eyes with a coarse, gaily-printed cotton handkerchief.

"Have I not often told you," said Hilsborn, "that you never ought to touch your eyes except with linen cambric?"

"True! true!" said the pale, troubled man, forcing a smile, "but where am I to procure such a luxury?"

"Why, your lady at the castle should give it to you," said Hilsborn.

"She would do so willingly, I am sure, but I could not make up my mind to so bold a request; for, since the other villagers have treated her so badly, she has avoided us also; and I fear she has visited us with some of the indignation that she must feel at the shameful insults she has received."

"Well, then, I will ask for you," cried Johannes. "I will go back to the castle, and you shall have what you require in a few moments."

As he spoke, Frau Brigitta entered, with a bottle of wine and the soup. Her good old face beamed with delight at the opportunity of offering her hospitality to such honoured guests. Her husband seized the gentlemen's hands, while she was busied with laying the table, and whispered, "Promise me, I beg you, that you will not mention what you have told me to any one, that my poor wife may be allowed to enjoy all the hope that she can for the future."

"We promise you," was the grave reply.

"May I be permitted to offer the gentlemen some slight refreshment?" asked Brigitta with old-fashioned formality; for etiquette in the country is like the fashion of dress, which follows at a long distance the fashion of the city,—so that a form of polite expression is used in the country long after it has ceased to be *bon genre* in town. And yet there is something touching in all those old-time phrases and customs that we remember as used by our grandparents and great-aunts and uncles. They suggest so vividly the images of the departed, and bring back the memories of childhood. Who has not in early childhood seen some old aunt or grandmother, upon refusing a fifth cup of coffee, turn the cup upside down in the saucer and lay the spoon carefully upon it? And when, twenty or thirty years after, we see some country pastor's or schoolmaster's wife go through the same ceremony, does not the dear old form, long ago laid at rest in the grave, rise before us to check the smile upon our lips? Who cannot remember as a child the friendly sympathy that greeted a satisfactory sneeze? And when, a quarter of a century later, some kindly country soul hails such an occurrence with a cordial "God bless you!" does it not seem as if we must reply as formerly, "Thanks, dear grandmamma," and are we not homesick for a moment for our good old grandmother? Such was the impression made upon the young men by the kindly formality, the officious hospitality, of the schoolmaster's good old wife.

"I pray you honour us by tasting our poor meal," she said, as she put a coarse thick napkin of her own spinning upon each plate.

After the conversation that they had just had with the unfortunate husband, the two young men had little appetite for eating or drinking; but they would not refuse the old woman's kindly hospitality, and therefore seated themselves at the clumsy table. For one moment there was a silence so profound that the tick of the death-watch in the bench by the stove could be plainly heard. Then the schoolmaster poured out the wine. His hand trembled slightly, and he was obliged to take care lest any of it should be spilled; for he could not see well when the glasses were full. Then, holding up his own glass, he said cheerily, "Long life to you, gentlemen, and to our noble German science! I drink to you."

They clinked their glasses; but it cut Hilsborn to the very soul to think that the science which their good old host was so lauding should have been so cruel a prophet to him a few minutes before. Johannes, too, looked down at the wineglass in his hand, and the drops that he tasted from it were bitter to swallow.

"Come, good wife, clink your glass with mine," said the old man to Frau Brigitta. "My wife is very fond of a little drop of wine," he said to his guests; "but we never indulge in it except when we have such honoured guests as sit around our table to-day."

"And why not?" asked Hilsborn.

"Because it tastes so much better when there are others here to enjoy it with us," was the simple, smiling answer.

"But you ought to take more of it," said Johannes. "This good old wine is excellent for you; it is a tonic."

The old man looked sadly at the few drops which he had poured out for himself, and with which he had only moistened his lips. "You forget that I have been for a long time forbidden to take wine, on account of my eyes."

"My poor husband!" said his wife, sadly stroking his hollow cheeks. "He has to deny himself so much."

Johannes and Hilsborn exchanged glances, and then the latter said, "I reverse that prohibition, Herr Leonhardt. Take a good glass of wine whenever you feel inclined. It cannot harm your eyes as much as it will improve your general health."

"Thank God!" cried his wife rejoiced. "That proves how much better you are."

"Or how much worse," Leonhardt said in Latin to Hilsborn, with a grave look. Then, turning tenderly to his wife, he slowly emptied his glass, whispering to her, "Long live our Walter!"

The old woman nodded delightedly. "Our good boy! if he only had his degree!"

Leonhardt clasped his hands with a deep sigh. "That is all that I ask of God."

"Are you speaking of your son?" cried the gentlemen. "Then let us join you. May he live to be the delight and prop of your old age!"

"He is a very talented young man," added Johannes. "His essay was declared the best after Fräulein von Hartwich's."

"Indeed!" said the schoolmaster. "I am glad to hear it. Ah, the Fräulein is fortunate. She has everything necessary for her studies,--books and apparatus. There is hardly such another private laboratory and library in the country."

Johannes looked surprised. "Indeed! how do you know that?"

"My son has, during his studies, also perfected himself as a mechanic, for he says it is a great advantage for a naturalist, and Fräulein von Hartwich, hearing of it accidentally, intrusted him with some repairs of her furniture, and then he saw what treasures she possessed."

Johannes looked thoughtful. "Hm! as far as I know, Fräulein von Hartwich's income is by no means so large as to allow of such extravagant expenditure. Her uncle may have permitted his ward to encroach upon her capital; it would only be a fresh proof of his want of principle."

After a short pause, he turned to the schoolmaster.--"Herr Leonhardt, answer me one question. If a man wishes to rid a country of a dangerous wild animal, is it best to track him to his den by cunning, that he may be safely overcome there, or to startle him with loud noise and frighten him off, so that he either escapes or has time to prepare to defend himself?"

The schoolmaster looked puzzled. "Why, a prudent man would surely pursue the first course."

"I think so too. Well, Herr Leonhardt, I mean to track Doctor Leuthold Gleissert to his hiding-place. I am persuaded that this man is a thorough scoundrel, but I can bring no proof that I judge him correctly. Until I have collected such proof, which can only be done quietly and with caution, I cannot proceed against him openly. I need your assistance, Herr Leonhardt, for you know more than all of us concerning this man and his proceedings. Give me, if you can, some tangible cause for accusing him, that I may succeed in delivering that rare creature, his niece, from his clutches."

"I will do my best," said Leonhardt. "But he lives so retired that I shall hardly be able to procure any important information for you. The only thing that I can observe is the names of his correspondents; for, as there is no post-office in the village, I have a post-drawer in my house, which the post-boy empties in my room. So that I can easily learn to whom all Doctor Gleissert's letters are addressed. Perhaps that may be of use to you."

"Do so," replied Johannes, "you will greatly oblige me." He emptied his glass and arose. "And now let me have pen and ink, and I will write a couple of lines to the lady at the castle."

The schoolmaster opened a little, old-fashioned desk, and produced the necessary articles. Johannes wrote:

"MY DEAR FRÄULEIN HARTWICH:--Will it offend you if I offer you the opportunity of exerting yourself within the sphere which I believe is assigned to woman?--I, who provoked your displeasure this morning by remonstrating against any exertion outside of that sphere. A tragedy is about to be enacted in the peaceful cottage of the schoolmaster Leonhardt, and the physical and spiritual aid of a woman like yourself will be most welcome there. Come see these people for yourself; they are the worthiest of your kindness of any in the village, and you have seen the least of them. Say nothing to Frau Leonhardt of the hint I have given you above. The poor man needs linen-cambric rags for his eyes, and would not trouble you by asking you for them. This will furnish you a pretext for establishing relations with these people--if you will; and I am sure you will. I know

that I shall hear of your kindness when I return; and I shall return again and again.

"Your friend of a few hours, but for life."

Johannes sealed the letter, and gave it to the schoolmaster. "Here, Herr Leonhardt, is the request for the linen-cambric. Send it to Fräulein Hartwich; and if she should happen to visit you herself, I pray you and your wife not to mention my name. I desire the Fräulein to remain in ignorance of it for a short time. Promise me."

The worthy old couple gave the required promise, and, bidding a kindly farewell, the gentlemen entered the carriage. Johannes took the reins, and the impatient horse bore them swiftly back to town.

The schoolmaster and his wife returned to the house and finished their dinner, for it was nearly twelve o'clock, at which hour the afternoon school in the village reassembled. They dispatched the note to Ernestine, and then the schoolmaster betook himself to the school-room to wait for his pupils. At the stroke of twelve there was a trampling of little feet in the hall, and finger after finger rapped at the door, and awaited the gentle "Come in!" without which no entrance was allowed, for the schoolmaster was a great stickler for order and decorum, and knew well how to retain the respect of his scholars. Most of the children were better in school than anywhere else. It was strange. Herr Leonhardt never struck a blow; he was rarely angry; he only reproved gently; and yet the most unruly boy, the most sullen girl, was controlled by his glance. The wise old man believed that love for the teacher was a better spur to improvement than fear, which could only call forth hatred and malice towards its object. And thus he smoothed away many a foolish, rude, and cruel trait from the peasant youth of his village, bringing out the good in the minds of those intrusted to his care, and suppressing the evil, so that, during the thirty-five years of his gentle sway in the school-room, the Hochstetten boys and girls were more in request for servants than any others in all the country round.

"Good-afternoon, Herr Leonhardt!" cried the entering throng, scattering themselves among the long benches with a sound like gravel poured out upon a path.

"St--St!" was heard from the master, and instantly all was quiet in the room, except for the rustling of the opening copy-books, and the lesson began.

Suddenly there was a soft, low knock at the door,--such a knock as comes only from a guilty conscience,--and a little, cleanly-dressed girl, about six years old, stood upon the threshold with downcast eyes. She held out before her, as if trying to hide behind it, a satchel so large that it really seemed difficult to decide whether the child had brought it, or it had brought the child; and the pearly drops upon her brow showed how fast she had been running.

"Why, Käthchen!" cried Herr Leonhardt, "why do you come so late? Come here to me, little culprit. It is the first time in the whole long year since you first came to school that you have been late. Something very unusual must have happened?"

Little Käthchen slowly approached him, while her chubby face grew scarlet. "I--I had to pick berries," she faltered, biting her berry-stained lips.

"Oh, Käthchen," said Herr Leonhardt, raising his forefinger, "that is very strange. *You had to!* Who told you to?"

Käthchen still looked down, and her face grew, if possible, redder still.

"Look me in the face, my child," said the master gravely. "Are you telling the truth?"

Käthchen tried to raise her brown, roguish eyes to his face, but, ah, the consciousness of guilt weighed down her eyelids like lead. She could not look at her teacher; she only shook her curly head.

"Käthchen," said the master kindly, "you were not sent to pick berries, for I know how desirous your father and mother are to send you to school--you ran into the wood to pick and eat them yourself. Perhaps this is your first falsehood, as it is the first time you have been late at school. Pray God that it maybe your last."

"Oh," the little culprit broke forth, "the neighbour's Fritz took me with him, and the berries tasted so good that I stayed too long."

The other children laughed; but a motion of the master's hand restored silence, and he continued to Käthchen: "Now, my child, for your tardiness you will have a black mark; and go down one in your class; but, Käthchen, for the falsehood you will lose your place in my heart, and I cannot love you so much. But I will forgive you if you will go stand in the corner of your own accord. Which will you do?--lose your place in my heart, or go stand in the corner for a quarter of an hour?"

The child burst into a flood of tears, and, sobbing out, "I'd rather, a great deal rather, go stand



in the corner!" walked there instantly, and turned her dear little face to the wall.

The schoolmaster looked after her pityingly; but nevertheless he was firm, for he always imposed the severest penalty for a falsehood. The lessons were continued, and in about ten minutes he called the still sobbing Käthchen from her corner. The child came running to him, and he held out his hand to her, saying, "Will you promise me, Käthchen, never again to say what is not true?"

"Oh, yes, I will never, never do it again," was the contrite answer.

Then the old man took up the rosy little thing and set her on his knee. "Then, my dear child, I will love you dearly as long as you are honest and industrious. And if you are ever tempted to tell what is not true, think how it would grieve your old teacher if he knew it, and tell the truth for his sake."

"Yes, yes," cried the child, her little heart overflowing with repentance, and, throwing her arms around the master's neck, she hugged him with all her might.

The other children had watched the ceremony of reconciliation with intense sympathy, for they were all fond of brown-eyed, rosy-cheeked Käthchen, and were rejoiced that her troubles were over.

"Now," said the teacher, when Käthchen was at last seated in her place, "now let us see whether you have done your task well."

Käthchen pulled out her books from the dark depths of her huge satchel; but, alas! the light of day revealed upon them many a stain from the berries which had been put into the bag. The child's dismay and her companions' amusement were infinite. Even the schoolmaster could not refrain from smiling as he looked at her terrified little face. "Never mind," he said, "you have suffered enough. Let us see how they look inside." He opened the copy-book, and was evidently pleased with the neat copy. But the sums were in dire confusion.

"Käthchen," cried Herr Leonhardt, "if a horse has four legs, how many legs have two horses?"

"Six!" was the confident answer.

"Käthchen, how many are twice two?"

"Eight!"

Herr Leonhardt cast to heaven that resigned glance peculiar only to such patient martyrs. "Käthchen, how many fingers, not counting the thumb, are there on your left hand?"

Käthchen counted with her right hand the fingers of her left, and triumphantly declared, "Four."

"And how many on your right hand?"

Again the same process was repeated with the right hand, and the same answer ensued.

"That's right! Now, how many are there together?"

No answer.

"How many fingers have you on both hands?"

"Ten!"

"Without the thumbs, child,--without either of the thumbs."

Käthchen began her arduous task anew.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door.

"Another child late?" said Herr Leonhardt, and cried, "Come in."

But, instead of the rosy face of a child, a pale countenance, with large, dark eyes, appeared, and gazed almost shyly around the circle. This apparition produced a perfect panic. "Oh, heavens! the Hartwich! Mercy! mercy! the woman of the castle!" and similar exclamations of alarm, were heard from all sides. The children started up,--those who were nearest the door crowded away from it, the larger ones dragged the little ones close to their sides, the Catholics even crossed themselves. An actual uproar began, which even the teacher's voice failed at first to control.

Ernestine observed it all without any change in her regular features. Leonhardt approached her respectfully, and would have asked her pardon for the children's folly, but she interrupted him.

"On the contrary," she said softly, "it is I who should ask pardon for interrupting your school

by my dreaded appearance. I meant to go to your dwelling-room, to take you the linen-cambric handkerchiefs that you need, but not knowing where it was, I knocked here by mistake. Have the kindness, Herr Leonhardt, to relieve me of this parcel, and I will relieve your pupils from their alarm."

The old man held out his hand to her, but she did not take it. "Never mind that; such a civility shown to me might deprive you of the children's respect."

"Oh, my dear Fräulein Hartwich," Leonhardt warmly entreated, "do not ascribe this folly to me, to whom it gives, of course, much more pain than it can to you, whose position is too exalted to allow you to heed such trifles; but to me it brings the bitter conviction that the labor of a lifetime has been in vain!" He ceased, and cast a sad, weary glance at the little flock crowded so closely together.

At his words the cold look in Ernestine's eyes vanished, and, for the first time, she regarded attentively the old man, who stood so respectfully, and yet so dignified, before her. His inflamed eyes revealed to her instantly the nature of the tragedy alluded to by her unknown friend, and she was filled with sympathy.

"We will talk together by-and-by, Herr Leonhardt," she whispered, so that the children should not hear what she said. "Now let me go."

"Will you have the great kindness, Fräulein Hartwich, to go and see my wife for awhile?" said Leonhardt "It would give her such pleasure,--she is in the opposite room."

"Most certainly I will. I will wait for you there."

She turned to go; but Leonhardt, seeing that the children were now more quiet, and hoping to show her that their folly was not as great as it had seemed, cried to the foremost ones of the throng, "You have behaved foolishly and naughtily before Fräulein Hartwich. Come, show her that you can be better, and bid her good-by, like good children."

The children stood motionless. The old man, distressed at their conduct, looked around the room, and said, "Will none of you shake hands with her for my sake?"

"I will," said Käthchen's clear, childish voice; and the fearless little girl, who had only followed the example of the others, walked up to Fräulein von Hartwich, and offered her chubby little hand to be shaken, and her berry-stained lips to be kissed. Ernestine stooped and kissed the little, pouting lips, and looked kindly into the pretty child's frank, sparkling eyes.

"Now see, all you larger children," said the schoolmaster, "a little child, only six years old, shames you all! What are you afraid of? You see Fräulein von Hartwich every day!"

"Yes, but not in a room--out in the road; we can run away then," one of the older ones shrewdly declared.

Ernestine smiled sadly, and left the school-room without another word.

The schoolmaster looked around upon his pupils with an indignant glance. "You have to-day disgraced yourselves and me, and I see plainly that everything that I have said to you and to your parents upon this point has been of no avail. I will give up trying to contend with your superstition and hate,--I am too old and weak for such a contest. Only let me say to you once more, 'Judge not, that you be not judged.' And tell your parents that if the time ever comes when I shall have to leave you, what has occurred to-day will go far to prevent me from regretting my departure."

The children sat dismayed and silent, for they had never known their teacher to be so much displeased. They bowed their heads low over their books and slates, and hardly ventured to breathe, still less to utter a word of excuse. The lessons were gone through with even more quiet than usual, and when two o'clock struck, the children left the house and crept away as sad and depressed as if they were following a funeral. But scarcely were they escaped from the neighbourhood of the school-house than they recovered themselves, and fell upon poor Käthchen. "Fie! Käthchen, you let the Hartwich kiss you! Nobody cares for you now!"

"Yes, yes, Käthchen's mouth is black, because the Hartwich kissed it."

"Oho, Käthchen, no one will ever give you a kiss again!"

"Only wait, and see how the Hartwich has bewitched you! To-morrow you will know!"

Poor little Käthchen was overwhelmed with speeches and reproaches of this kind. But they troubled her very little, for her teacher was pleased with her, and that was better than all else besides; and she was proud that she had dared to go forward when all the rest were afraid.

"If you are so unkind, I will not give you any of my berries," she said, swinging her huge satchel carelessly to and fro. This trump-card did not fail of its effect, for the berries were not bewitched,--at all events, the Hartwich had not touched them; so the little girl soon had the satisfaction of seeing the children all gather around her once more.

When Leonhardt went to his wife, he found her deep in friendly talk with Ernestine.

"My dear, kind Fräulein Hartwich," he began, "how it grieves me that you, who came to do me a kindness, should have been so insulted in my house! To be sure, they are only children, and they could not really insult you, but----"

"As the parents are, so must the children be,' is what you would say," Ernestine interposed, "or what, at least, you think. Do not be distressed, Herr Leonhardt. I am used to insult and ridicule, and I have grown callous to them. But it is strange that a similar occurrence took place ten years ago to-day, at the first and only children's party which I ever attended. My misanthropy dates from that day; and the fresh proof that I have just had convinces me that I am not fitted to mix with the world,--least of all, with what passes for such in this country. Tell me, Herr Leonhardt, is it entirely impossible for you to enlighten these people in some small degree?"

"To speak frankly, I believe I could have done so had not my influence always been counteracted by their priests and pastors. As a teacher, subordinate always to a priest or pastor, I could effect nothing against the superstition, the religious intolerance, instilled into the peasants by their spiritual guides; for with peasants the authority is always the greatest that does not attempt to combat their errors. A quack who makes use only of old women's remedies will always inspire them with more confidence than a regular physician whose prescriptions gainsay all their medical and dietetic prejudices. A pastor who from a religious point of view justifies and encourages their superstition and ignorance will be regarded by them as a far worthier and more trustworthy guide than one who teaches only the pure truth of God. So, you see, I have always contended with unequal weapons, and have frequently been in danger of falling a victim to their malice and thus losing my place. In quiet times, when nothing occurred to show plainly the difference between us, all went pretty well; but since your arrival, Fräulein von Hartwich, the old quarrel has been renewed, and I see again how powerless I am."

"Then I am come only to sow discord in this peaceful spot," Ernestine said in a thoughtful tone. "Yes, yes,--misfortune attends me wherever I go."

"Oh, do not say that!" cried Frau Brigitta, seizing Ernestine's hand, "but it seems to me--forgive a simple old woman for speaking so plainly to you--it seems to me that a lady so beautiful and richly endowed as you are, ought not to live here so lonely and secluded. My husband and I often say, 'What a pity it is that such a splendid creature should bury herself alive!' It certainly is unnatural; and what is natural is sure to be best!"

Ernestine was silent, and sat with eyes cast down.

"I too must say," said Leonhardt timidly, "that you are not in your right place here. Did you ever see the statue of a renowned philosopher or artist set up in the midst of a village? Certainly not; for the village boys would pelt it with mud,--no one would understand its value,--it would be merely a doll, at which every one would laugh, and to deface which would be considered a very good joke. And will you, Fräulein Hartwich, in the bloom of life, with all your refinement of mind, voluntarily expose yourself to the same fate that would await such a statue were it erected here, for the purpose of inspiring this rude people with ennobling ideas? Surely you cannot answer to yourself for such a course of life!"

Ernestine gazed attentively at the old man's faded but still noble countenance. His address was so different from what she had expected from a simple village schoolmaster, that she was greatly astonished at it. It stimulated her to reply to him.

"I understand your comparison, Herr Leonhardt, and am greatly honoured by it, but,--forgive me for saying so,--it does not seem to me quite correct. I know of no village where statues either of Christ or the Madonna are not erected, and the rudest peasant pays them reverence,--because he appreciates the idea that they embody. Could we only breathe a sympathy with other than religious ideas into the minds of this neglected class, the representatives of such ideas would also receive the same reverence."

Frau Leonhardt was a little troubled by the turn the conversation had taken; for, as a faithful servant will listen to no slighting remarks concerning those whom he serves, she, as a true servant of her Lord and Saviour, disapproved of Fräulein von Hartwich's mode of speaking of Him, and thought it scarcely becoming in a good Christian to listen to such talk. But her husband, with modest tact, put an end to her anxiety. "I have myself," said he, "thought of what you say, but it seems to me to be an entirely different matter. The people honour in these statues not ideas, but persons,--and the holiest and highest persons that they can conceive of,--the persons of their God and his saints. As we take delight in the pictures of distant relatives, whom we may never have seen, perhaps, but whom we honour and cherish for the sake of what we know of them, so, a thousand times more so, do the people honour what speaks to them of the eternally invisible Father of all! This sentiment, Fräulein von Hartwich, seems to me widely different from the admiration that a comprehension of the great ideas of to-day might awaken in the minds of the people. We are not yet far enough advanced to say how it may be,--and who knows whether we ever shall advance so far as to be able to elevate those classes who labour for us that we may think for them, and who desire nothing at present for their happiness but their plough and their God? What they really need now, in my opinion, is that their God should not be represented to them as an angry, avenging Jehovah, but as the loving, redeeming God of Christianity! To return

to my simile,--with regard to yourself, Fräulein von Hartwich, let me repeat that you can only be in your true place where your efforts and ideas are understood and you can grace a pedestal that becomes you. Then you will be truly happy, and far more easily brought into communion with your Creator than while you are embittered by the religious error and intolerance prevailing around you here. The people are hostile to you, because they believe you hostile to what they hold most sacred,--their religion. Whoever, in their eyes, stands aloof from Christian fellowship, stands aloof from mankind,--ceases to be a creature of flesh and blood. And if they do not see condign punishment quickly overtake such a one, whom they regard as the chief of sinners, they believe that she must be under the protection not of God, but of the other power in their theology,--the devil! Forgive my frankness. I say nothing of their childish misconception of God's tender long-suffering. I only feel it my duty to show you the impassable gulf that lies between you and your surroundings. You are such a thorn in the side not only of the Catholic priest, but also of the evangelical pastor of our diocese, that he attempted to procure from the Protestant consistory a decree of banishment against you on account of your writings, and, failing in this, he has determined to drive you from this place, at all costs, by unceasing persecution. His Catholic associate seconds him, as you yourself know, most zealously, and I wish to save you, by timely warning, from all that, unfortunately, still threatens you here."

He paused, and endeavoured to observe with his dim eyes the effect of his words upon Ernestine's impassive features. Her look was still riveted on the ground, and she said nothing, so he respectfully took her hand, saying, "Dear Fräulein von Hartwich, forgive me if I am too bold and have wounded you. I am a plain man, ignorant of the forms of polite society, grown old among peasants, and accustomed to speak out my thoughts openly. I hold truth to be my first duty, but it would pain me to think that, in fulfilling this duty, I had unintentionally wounded you!"

"Dear, dear!--yes!--oh, yes!" ejaculated his kindly old wife, really distressed by the inscrutable expression upon Ernestine's face.

Suddenly the latter started up, shook the old people by the hand, and said gravely but cordially,--

"Thank you, thank you, Herr Leonhardt. You are a good man!"

"Oh, my dear, good Fräulein von Hartwich!" cried Frau Brigitta with emotion.

"I must go home now," said Ernestine, covering her black braids with her hat, "but I will see you soon again. Farewell!"

When the old couple had accompanied her to the door, and followed her with their eyes as she walked away apparently lost in thought, they both remembered for the first time that she had not alluded in any way to Johannes.

"How strange!" said the schoolmaster, as he went for his garden-shears to trim the luxuriant hedge before his house.

## **CHAPTER IV.**

### **THE GUARDIAN.**

When, on the evening of the same day, Leuthold returned from town, he heard that Ernestine could not see him,--she was not well, and had retired to her room. Slowly and cautiously he sought her study, and there attempted to find what and how much his ward had accomplished during the day. To his astonishment, he found nothing. He slipped into the laboratory, and there lay everything just as it had been left the day before. Nothing had been touched. What did it mean? It was the first day for years that had been passed by Ernestine in idleness. Then, creeping along the corridors with the stealthy step of a cat, he sought Frau Willmers. She, too, was just about going to bed, and looked very sleepy when Leuthold, fixing a searching glance upon her, asked, "What has Fräulein von Hartwich been doing to-day?"

Frau Willmers yawned: she needed an instant for reflection. "Fräulein von Hartwich has been quite unwell to-day," she replied.

"Indeed! what was the matter with her?"

"Why, just what is always the matter, more or less. Heart-beat, faintness, headache. Is it any wonder, considering the way she is always at work? She could hardly hold up her head to-day----"

"Has any one been here?"

"Not a soul: who could----"

"No letters?"

"Two for you, Herr Professor, and one for Fräulein von Hartwich from the schoolmaster."

"What did he want?"

"He asked for some linen-cambric rags for his weak eyes. She took him some."

"She herself? Why?"

"She was tired because she could not study, and she wanted to see Herr Leonhardt's eyes. She thought she might learn something from them."

"Very well,--that will do. Good-night, Frau Willmers."

"Good-night, Herr Professor," said the cunning housekeeper, hastening to tell Ernestine how slyly she had managed matters and contrived to pay due honour to truth by mixing up some of it with her falsehoods.

Ernestine sat in an easy-chair, her eyes fixed upon the flame of the lamp. A book lay open in her lap,--"Andersen's Fairy Tales."

She could not smile at what Frau Willmers told her. There was something in it that filled her with uneasiness. For the first time since she had lived with her uncle, she felt that she was a prisoner, watched and guarded as such. She was obliged to conceal, as if it were a crime, the fact that she had become acquainted with a true, noble human being. She had to account on the plea of interest in science for visiting a poor suffering man. The lie disgraced her, and the necessity that had prompted it was a galling chain! All this she felt to-day for the first time. One day had aroused within her the longing for independence!--the greatest misfortune that could have befallen her unsuspecting uncle, but not the only one that this day was to bring him.

When he went to his room, he found there the letters of which Frau Willmers had told him. The first that he took up he opened instantly. It was from his daughter Gretchen, and ran thus:

"MY DEAREST FATHER:

"In a week I shall be fifteen years old, and next month my course here will be finished, and I shall be fitted to take my place in the school as a teacher. Once more I turn to you and entreat you, dear father, let me come home to you! I will not be any burden to you. My teachers will tell you that I know enough to enable a young girl to earn her own living. I thank and bless you a thousand times, dearest father, for having me educated to be a useful member of society. I will be my cousin's maid, and work for her for my support, if I may only be near you! Oh, I pray you yield to my entreaties! You have always answered my request by telling me that her bad example--her irreligion and hardness of heart--would have a ruinous effect upon me. But indeed, dear father, this could not be. Thanks to my good, kind teachers, I am so firm in my faith, I have been so well trained, that this one bad example could not have any effect upon me, especially when I should daily see how my poor father suffers in discharging his guardianship of so stubborn a creature. Why did my dead uncle Hartwich bequeath to you such a thankless office? Indeed, dearest father, it would be easier if you would let me help you. I would leave nothing untried to soften her heart and turn it to good, and, however angry she might be with me, I would disarm her by patience and submission; and, even although I could have no effect upon her, I could be something to you, dear father. Oh, how heavenly it would be to sit alone together in your room after the day's work was finished! I could sit at your feet and show you my sketches and drawings, drinking draughts from the rich treasures of your mind and cheering you with my ever-ready nonsense. And sometimes I could lean my head upon your heart, that no one understands as well as the child to whom you have shown all its depths of tenderness, and sleep as peacefully as in those dear childish days when you cradled me in your arms with all a mother's care! Oh, father, you are everything in the world to me! My mother, who forsook me when I was so young--who left you for another so immeasurably your inferior, I do not know--I can form no image of her, unlovely as she must be, in my mind. You are mother, father, everything, to me! My cradle stood by your bedside; your eyes smiled upon me when I awoke. You never spoke a harsh word to me, you never looked unkindly at me. You treated the wayward child, who must so often have vexed you, with unvarying gentleness and patience; and at last you sent me from you, that I might be thoroughly trained and educated, since it is our fate to earn our daily bread. You sent me from you, but I saw plainly, when we parted, that this was the greatest sacrifice of all,--that I carried away your whole heart with me. You did it for me,--out of affection for me. You have given me up now for almost seven years, and I have worked and studied as hard as I could, so that I might soon be with you again; and now, when I have learned enough to be able to repay you a very little for all that you have done and suffered for me, you refuse to let me fly to your dear arms, for fear of the miserable influence of your ward. Father, you will--you must--hear and heed me. The tears that blotted your last letter to me fell hot into my very soul. They were tears of longing--do not deny it-

-for your child, and I will never rest until you give heed to your own heart! Ah, father dear, you will be pleased when you see me! I am taller and stronger than our governess! Every one says I am very tall for my age--I might be taken for eighteen years old! When we go to walk together, you will have to give me your arm! Ah, what a delight that will be! I shall be too proud to touch the ground! and, depend upon it, I shall be able to do something with Ernestine! She never used to be cross to me as a child; I cannot think how she can have altered so. How could she become so changed with such a guardian? In spirit I kiss his dear, kind hands! Happy girl!--to have my father for a teacher! Shall I not grudge her a happiness of which she has proved herself so unworthy? Yes; I do grudge it her! I do not envy her for her talents or her wealth, but I do envy her for my father!--I must envy her for that! You give her your time--your care; you devote yourself to her, and let your own child grow up far away from you, among strangers,--your own child,--who would give all that she possesses for one look from her father's eyes!"

Leuthold could read no further. He writhed like a worm on the ground beneath the weight of reproach with which this artless creature thus heaped him. The thunderbolt of a god could have inflicted no such punishment upon him as the pure, sweet, angelic love of his child.

He sunk upon his knees, and kissed the letter again and again. "My child! my child!" he cried aloud, racked almost to madness by intense feverish longing. At this moment of weakness he was overwhelmed with remorse. He had banished from his side his dearest possession,--his Gretchen. And why? Because he loved her too dearly to expose her to contact with the ideas that he sought to impress upon the mind of his ward,--because he would not allow his child to breathe the poisoned atmosphere of falsehood in which he chose that Ernestine should dwell. And why had he thus chosen? Because, he loved Gretchen too much to have her always poor and dependent, because he determined to win back the inheritance that he had once thought his own, but which had been so unexpectedly lost to him, and because there was only one way, in his mind, in which this could be done,--by making the possessor of this inheritance so utterly unfit for the world that nothing might wrest her person or her property from his grasp.

But, when he received such a letter as the above, overflowing with the devoted love, the pain at separation, of his exiled child, something stirred in his breast that would not be quieted, demanding whether he might not have expressed his paternal love in another way, whether it were not a desecration of this angel to attempt to make her future happy by a crime? Whether the joy of educating such a child himself would not have outweighed the wealth of the world? And then he began to reckon and compare,--and the account was never balanced,--for the years of separation from his daughter there was no equivalent. These were rare hours when, like a criminal before his judge, he was arraigned in spirit before the pure eyes of his child; but they cost him months of life.

His hair had grown grey,--his powers of mind were enfeebled by all these years of self-control and hypocrisy,--of crime and dread of discovery. He had nothing to hope for for himself--but for Gretchen? And what if he had failed in his reckoning? What if a mischievous chance should again deprive him at the last moment of the fruit of all this sacrifice? The path of sin had separated him from his daughter hitherto. Was it possible that it could ever lead him to her?

His high, narrow forehead was covered with a cold dew as he passed his hand over it. He was indeed to be pitied,--a man who had not the courage to be wholly good nor wholly bad!

The night breeze blew fresh through the open window, and the miserable man was thoroughly chilled. He arose, wrapped himself in his shawl, closed the window, and went to the table where lay the other letter. It was directed in the handwriting of the overseer of the Unkenheim Factory. Leuthold put it down--he had not the courage to read it "What can he have to tell me?" he moaned, utterly dispirited.

At last he roused himself. "What must be, must!"

He unfolded the coarse paper and read--while his face grew ashy pale.

"UMKENHEIM, July 30, 18--.

"HONOURED SIR:

"You should have believed me when I told you that there was nothing to be done with bringing the water from that miserable spring. Twenty years ago you placed me at the head of this factory, and I think I have shown that I understand my business. It is a ruinous thing to conduct such a huge undertaking from a distance. I told you so when you got back the factory again, but you never believe what I say. If the business had been allowed to proceed as usual, we should have made a sure, although small, profit from it. But you were in such a devil of a hurry to make the capital yield a hundred per cent., because you were always afraid lest your ward should smell a rat and require her own again,--or lest she should marry, and you would have to render an account to some suspicious husband, who would be less forbearing even than Fräulein Ernestine. Therefore these giant speculations were set on foot, and everything was to be accomplished in the twinkling of an eye. I told you we had not sufficient sewerage for such an enormous enlargement. Then you never rested until that expensive drain was dug, and we very soon found

that it had too little incline and the refuse all stuck fast in it. Then you thought we could carry it off by a stream of water turned into the drain. More money was spent, and again spent in vain. The dry summer had exhausted the spring,--it was always small, and now it has entirely disappeared. The large supply of raw material, not yet paid for, cannot be worked up, for the villagers are beginning to talk again of 'poisoning the springs,' and the drain has begun to leak. If the necessary amount of water cannot be procured, I shall be prosecuted, and then nothing will shield either you or me from discovery. The people already think it strange that the Italian gentleman, who pretended to buy the factory by your advice, has disappeared. It is whispered about that he is not the real owner, and Heaven only knows what it all means. We have, therefore, more need of caution than ever!

"There is nothing for it but to face the worst and continue the aqueduct to the forest,--then we shall be safe. Digging ditches and hunting for springs is of no use,--more money is frittered away so than in large undertakings. I do not know what cash you have on hand; if you have not enough to lengthen the aqueduct, in a few weeks you will be bankrupt. It will not be my fault!

"I have no more money for the workmen's wages,--and it would be well, now that work must be suspended for a time, to pay them up. It might keep them in good humour. I know that you will vent all your anger upon me again, but I tell you I will put up with nothing more. I was an honest man until you tempted me and made me your accomplice. Still, I have not played the rogue to you, my principal, although I have, more's the pity, made myself amenable to the law. You have gone on just like Herr Neuenstein, who became bankrupt too, because he would not listen to me; but he was an honourable man, and paid up every penny that he owed, so that he was not afraid to look any one in the face. If you fail, you drag down your ward, whose money you have been using, with you,--and me too,--poor devil that I am! There is truth in the proverb 'Ill-gotten gains never prosper.' God help me!

"Yours, etc.,

"Clemens Prücker,

"*Overseer.*"

It was too much. "My child! my child! I have sinned, forged, embezzled, for your sake, in vain! Can you be sufficiently proud of such a father?" he moaned,--his head fell back in his chair, and he lost consciousness.

The day had dawned when he opened his eyes; the atmosphere was full of the disagreeable odour of the dying candles, his limbs were stiff and numb from his uneasy posture, and he was shivering with cold. When he tried to walk, his hands and feet were asleep, and he staggered like a drunken man. At last his eyes lighted upon the letters. He picked them up and went to his writing-table. There he put them away in a secret drawer, then drew forth a safe and investigated its contents. It contained certificates of stock and some rolls of ready money.

The sun shone brightly into the room, and still the pale man sat there counting and calculating. At last he put all the contents of the safe into a leather travelling-bag. Then he rang the bell and ordered the servant, who appeared, to have the carriage brought round and to pack up for him sufficient clothes to last during a journey of several days.

When he heard that his niece had arisen, he went to her. "Good-morning, Ernestine," said he. "How are you to-day?"

"I should put that question to you, uncle," she replied. "You look as if you had just arisen from the grave!"

"Oh, there is nothing the matter with me. I did not sleep much. The overseer at Unkenheim writes to me on the part of my Italian friend, begging me to come as soon as possible to the factory, where everything is going wrong. I think it my duty to do what I can in the matter, as I know all about the business, and unfortunately advised my friend to make the purchase."

"Are you going, then?" asked Ernestine, with a feeling of secret delight that she could not explain to herself.

"Yes, I must leave you for a few days, hard as it is for me. But promise me before I go that you will have that treatise that you are at work upon completed by my return. Let nothing prevent you from finishing it. If you feel unwell,--you know that is of no real consequence,--you can readily overcome all your ailments by resolutely willing to do so. Take quinine, if you must. Now may I rely upon finding the essay complete when I see you again?"

"Yes, uncle, I promise; and if I do not keep my word, it will be for the first time in my life."

"Farewell, then, my child,--I must hurry to catch the train. Let nothing interrupt you,--do you hear?--nothing!"

He hurried out, and sought the housekeeper. "Frau Willmers," he said, "I rely on you to

prevent Fräulein von Hartwich from receiving any visitors, be they who they may. If I find, upon my return, that you have permitted the least infringement of my orders, you may consider yourself dismissed. I cannot tell you when I shall return. Conduct yourself so that you need not fear my arrival, for it may take place at any moment."

"Rely upon me entirely, Herr Professor," replied Frau Willmers; and Leuthold got hastily into his vehicle.

"Now, that sly master of mine thinks all is secure, and that he has the heart of a girl of two-and-twenty under lock and key. How stupid these clever folks often are!" After this fashion Frau Willmers soliloquized, as her master drove off.

## **CHAPTER V.**

### **FRUITLESS PRETENSIONS.**

"Your new dress-coat has come from the tailor's," was Frau Herbert's greeting to her husband, upon his entrance.

"Indeed! where is it?" he asked gruffly.

"In the next room, on the bed."

"On the bed!" her husband snapped out. "So that it may be covered with lint? How careless!"

Frau Herbert looked down, and was silent. Herbert hurried into the next room to rescue his slighted property.

Professor Herbert's dwelling-room was rather small and low, but there appeared, at a cursory glance, an air of elegance about it. The chairs and lounges were covered with fine woollen stuff, the curtains were richly embroidered, and an elegant cabinet, with mirrored doors, closely locked, apparently contained silver plate. Upon a closer inspection, however, the furniture was found to be stuffed with straw, the curtains were shabby, with the holes in them not even darned, and the cabinet contained only broken household-utensils, with the remains of the previous meal, locked up there to be safe from the hungry servant-maid. Even the arm-chair by the window, occupied by Frau Herbert, evidently an invalid, was as hard as a stone. The only thing in the room of real and decided value was a collection of old English copper-plates that decorated the walls of the apartment, representing scenes from Shakspeare's plays and Roman history. These old pictures were one of Professor Herbert's fancies; and he belonged to that class of men with whom the necessities of a wife and of the household are never considered in comparison with the gratification of their fancies.

Frau Herbert was one of those unfortunate women who, in the consciousness that they are burdens to their husbands, believe themselves called to endure everything, even the grossest injustice, with meekness, and who hold it their duty to entreat forgiveness of their lords and masters for continuing to exist at all. The sight of that quiet woman, with her sad face, upon which pain had ploughed deep furrows, sitting at the window mending the straw-coloured gloves in which her husband was, in the evening, to play the part of an æsthetic exquisite, while she lay suffering at home, would instantly suggest the complete picture of an unhappy wife tied to the side of a cold-blooded egotist.

"Poor Professor Herbert!" people were wont to say, "what a misfortune it is for a man to have such an invalid wife!"

But a closer observer of the pair would have said, "What a misfortune for an invalid wife to have such a husband!"

The miserable woman, however, had no such thought; she would gladly have died,—not only to be free from suffering, but that her husband might be rid of her presence. In her inmost heart she despised his selfishness and want of feeling. She knew that a worthier man would have had consideration for her and patience with her, as her burden was surely the heavier; but she was too much afraid of her husband to put such thoughts in words, even to her own mind. Suffering that is incessant, and that undermines the physical frame, must gradually weaken the mind; and thus the only strength of the hapless wife consisted in hopeless endurance.

Professor Herbert entered in his new coat, and surveyed himself attentively in the large mirror.



"It fits well,--does it not?" he asked.

"Very well! but it is very expensive."

"Did the bill come with it?"

"Here it is."

"Oh, that is not so bad. Hecht is certainly the best tailor in the city."

A shade of bitter feeling passed across his wife's face and she could not refrain from saying, "When I recollect that you lately refused to let me have the shawl I so needed, that did not cost half so much, and----"

"The money for your dress all goes to the apothecary, my dear," Herbert replied, with a sneer.

"My dress!" his wife repeated,--"you would be ashamed to walk in the street with me,--my clothes are so shabby."

"No one expects much elegance from an invalid whose illness costs her husband so much money."

Frau Herbert cast a glance at her husband, but she said not a word more. For one moment she leaned her weary head against the back of her chair, but the position was too uncomfortable, and she resumed her work, thinking with pain how the physician had imperatively recommended her to procure a more comfortable chair, in which she could sleep sitting up,--but now this small luxury, as well as all the rest, had been denied her!

Suddenly the door opened, and in rustled and fluttered a creature half child, half old maid,--half butterfly, half bat. Around her head floated a mass of very light curls. A *nez retroussé* gave to her face a naïve air of youthfulness, which, however, the crafty, eager expression of her small eyes contradicted. Just so her teeth, short and wide apart, resembled those of a young child who has shed his first set, while the wrinkles about her thin, open lips indicated an age of thirty years at least. The figure, crowned by this strange head with its huge mane of curls, was delicate and slender as that of a half-grown girl. Her hands were small, but wrinkled like those of an old woman. She was dressed in thin, flowing garments,--her round straw hat was adorned by long, light-brown ribbons. Her gait, bearing, and address were light, airy, sylph-like. It was evident at the first glance that she was a creature who believed herself highly poetic, richly gifted, breathing a charmed atmosphere, and that although she might in reality be thirty years old she had in imagination never passed sweet sixteen. Such a creature is only conceivable with a sheet of music or a sketch-book in her hand; and, in obedience to a mysterious law of nature, this too was not wanting in the present instance. "Brother, darling!" she cried, skipping up to Herbert, "how charming you are in your new coat! Aha, are you going to the Möllner's reception this evening? Yes!" Trilling a little air, she laid aside her book, hat, and gloves. "Tra-la-la-la--oh, I am so happy to-day I cannot talk, I can only sing." And she hummed the refrain of the charming song by Taubert, "I know not why, but sing I must!" Then she remembered that she had not yet spoken to her brother's wife. "Oh, dear Ulrika, forgive me for not asking how you are. No better yet? Ah! your little Elsa is so agitated to-day! I feel--I can't tell how--my bosom heaves and thrills as with the breath of May! I must go to my work. To-day I feel sure, in my present frame of mind, I must create something!"

And she was about to hover away to the blissful retirement of her own room, when Herbert, who had meanwhile exchanged his new coat for a light summer sacque, cried after her, "Stay here a moment, and speak at least one sensible word before you go."

She paused.

"What are you going to attempt now? I am really afraid to trust you by yourself."

She skipped up to her brother again and roguishly laid her finger on his lips, looking archly in his eyes. "Dearest brother, I shall surprise you! I have an idea!"

"Pray cease your folly for the present. You do not want to flirt with your brother, I hope? Tell me, what is your idea? If it is good for anything, it will be the first of its kind that you have ever had in your head."

"Oh, you discourteous brother!" pouted the fair indignant, "to grieve your sister so! But, since you bid me, I will obey you, and give you a glimpse into the transparent depths of an artist's soul. Every maiden must practise the sweet duty of obedience, that she may one day gladden a husband's heart by her submission."

"Well, well, to the point!" cried Herbert impatiently.

Elsa bashfully cast down her eyes, and, stammering with the charming embarrassment of an artistic nature, said, "When, a few days ago, I asked Professor Möllner what lady author was his favourite, he answered me in jest, 'She who has written the best cookery book!' I am going to show the mocking man that I can do that too. Oh, how amazed he will be when he finds that the

wealth of fancy in my soul can beautify and transfigure what is so prosaic! This it is that he deems the charm of womanhood,--the power to seize and mould to beauty the commonplace and sordid. I am going to publish a cookery book in verse, with illustrations, and entitle it 'The German Wife at the Hearth of Home.' Only think what splendid initial letters and arabesques I can have! I will show that a bunch of parsley can be as gracefully arranged as roses or violets. Such lovely green borders to the pages must always be beautiful, whether composed of parsley, lettuce, or sorrel; and, if a warmer colour is desirable, I will paint a couple of blushing radishes peeping, half hidden, from among the leaves, and there you have as perfect a picture as any of our famous artistes have produced of Spring. Is not the meanest kitchen-stuff the work of the Creator, and as beautiful as any other of his creations? And there can be such variety in the volume. For example, the chapter of receipts for cooking fish can have a title-page of its own, after the style of the engravings in Schleiden's 'Wonders of the Deep.' Beneath a placid crystal lake may be seen sporting together all the fish alluded to in the ensuing chapter. Branches of coral are wreathed in and out, and, illuminated by the rosy light of the setting sun, water-lilies float upon the calm surface of the water. Every chapter will have a suitable title-page, displaying in its native element the animal to be cooked,--game in the forest, fleeing from the pursuing huntsman and hounds,--the dove hovering above the ark, with the olive-branch in her beak,--domestic fowls, in the Dutch style, cooped in their accustomed poultry yard. Fruit and vegetables can be treated as still-life, in arabesques, and decorating the margins of single recipes. At the end of the book a picture representing a family seated at dinner. Over their heads, in gothic letters, the line, 'Lord Jesus, come and be our guest.' And, in pursuance of this invitation, he must be seated at the head of the table, in the midst of a brilliant halo of glory. On either side of the table sit the children, and at the foot the happy husband and wife, each offering food to the other. Angels are in attendance upon the able,--the angels of harmony, peace, and content. The wife sits with her face turned from the spectator, but the husband--and this is the grand point--the husband will be a portrait!"

She paused, carried away by her poetic dreams, and by the thought of the immense success that the book must command.

"Well, and whom is the portrait to represent?--me, perhaps?" asked Herbert with a sneer.

"You? Oh, no. Ah, rogue! can you not guess? Heavens! do not look at me so,--you know whom I mean!"

"Möllner?" asked her brother.

"Yes,--you have guessed it. Oh, when I think of the smile that will play around that proud mouth as he beholds his portrait drawn by my hand, as he sees how his image is present with me everywhere in all that I think and do! Oh, it will, it must touch him!"

"Yes, it will touch him uncommonly," remarked Herbert; "and there will be a charming scene when he presents his innamorata, the Hartwich, with the work, that she may learn cookery from it. Do not forget to add a receipt for broiling frogs' legs, by which she can dress the frogs that they use together for their physiological experiments."

"Oh, Edmund!" exclaimed Elsa, startled and a little vexed, "your words are full of wormwood to-day. Go,--your caustic wit destroys all my flowers of fancy. This is why I always avoid you when I am about to begin a work. What pleasure can it give you to thrust me from my paradise? Is it right? Let the soul that can find no home on this rude earth seek it in brighter realms."

And she raised her eyes to the ceiling, and laid her wrinkled little hand upon her breast. "Mine is a modest, shrinking soul,--its childlike trust and hope are all that I possess. Dear brother, do not you rob me of them, as long as no other hand snatches them from me."

"But you must find out at last that your hopes are vain, and therefore I wish to warn you, that you may not make yourself ridiculous by an untimely parade of your feelings. I know, from the most trustworthy sources, that Möllner has been to Hochstetten to see the Hartwich, and that he spent two hours with her. Rhyme that with his enthusiasm for her at the meeting the other day, and complete the verse yourself."

Elsa looked down and thought for a minute or two, then she sighed and shook her flowing mane, saying, "No, it cannot, cannot be! That man-woman may excite his curiosity, she cannot win his heart! No, no, Elsa has no fear that Lohengrün will be misled by Ortrude! And now to work, that the day may soon come when he will ask, 'Elsa, whose is the face of the wife who sits at table by my side?' Then I shall avert my face and reply, 'That you know best.' Oh, darling brother! dearest sister! he will turn my blushing countenance to him then, and say, 'This is her face!' Oh, I must go: the breath of spring is wafted towards me from my studio. Yes, yes, I feel that the Muses await me there." With these words she rustled and fluttered away to her room.

Frau Herbert looked after her with a sad, almost a compassionate, glance. "Tell me, Edmund," she said to her husband, "did you ever for one moment believe that such a man as Möllner would marry that girl?"

"Why not? There are many more unequal matches made every day: the only thing is to manœuvre the matter skilfully. If poor Elsa had as managing a mother as you were blessed with,

the affair would certainly not be beyond the bounds of possibility. But the poor thing has no one to help her but myself, and we men are clumsier at match-making than the most stupid of women."

Frau Herbert looked pained and crushed by this attack upon her mother and herself. She thought it, however, beneath her dignity to reply to it. She only said very quietly, "I am glad, Edmund, that there is one creature in the world for whom you have some regard, or even blind affection. Well, she is your sister. I, too, love the poor thing, but I cannot believe that she will ever succeed in kindling one spark of interest in Möllner's breast."

"You have always regarded her with jaundiced eyes," Herbert went on to say. "You talk as though she were a monster. She is no longer young, but there is still something youthful about her. She is not, it is true, a genius, but her nature is really artistic. She is not pretty, but an enthusiast like Möllner is more observant of inner graces than physical beauty, and he cannot fail to be impressed by her beauty of soul. It certainly is true that he always distinguishes her in society. Does he not always take her to supper when she is unprovided with an escort, as is usually the case? When all the others avoid her, is not Möllner sure to sit and talk with her? Such a conscientious prig as Möllner would not do that unless he had some object in view; and if she has no other charm for him, her undisguised admiration of him would attract him to her, for he has a due amount of vanity, and every one must take pleasure in being so fanatically adored. If it were not for that confounded Hartwich, who knows how far he might be brought! But I will be revenged upon her, she may rely upon that!"

"Why visit your anger upon the innocent? How can it be this stranger's fault that Möllner is more interested by her genius than by our Elsa's sentimental dilettanteism, her perpetual attempts and failures? His courtesy to her in society always seemed to me prompted by his humanity. She certainly makes herself very ridiculous,--you must see that; and a man of Möllner's kindly, chivalric character cannot permit an innocent, harmless girl to be made sport of, and, accordingly, he constitutes himself her protector, and tries generously to indemnify her for the neglect of others. He does not dream that Elsa's vanity builds all kinds of schemes upon his conduct, or he would never forgive himself----"

"Enough, enough!" Herbert interrupted her angrily. "I cannot see how, with the pain in your face, you manage to talk so much. I can understand that Elsa is disagreeable to you because I have educated her, but I cannot understand how, tied to your invalid chair as you are, you have contrived to fall in love with this Möllner. Indeed, if I had not had hopes of marrying him to my sister, I should have broken with the arrogant pedant long ago, for I hate him as much as you women, old and young, adore him."

Frau Herbert looked with a quiet, thoughtful expression at the speaker, who had worked himself into a violent rage, and then she silently resumed her work, suppressing the words that rose to her lips,--for she possessed the rare talent of knowing when to be silent.

Herbert waited for some minutes for a reply which might afford him further opportunity for venting his spleen, but, receiving none, he turned away, and was about to seek his study.

Just then there was a knock at the door, and the postman entered, with a thick square parcel in his hand. Herbert grew pale at sight of it, and his wife too looked sad and sorry.

"Your manuscript?" she asked.

"My manuscript," he said, writing his name in the mail-book with an unsteady hand.

"There's a gulden and twenty-four kreutzers to pay," said the messenger.

"So much?" growled Herbert, counting out the money carefully by groschen and kreutzers. When the man had left the room, Herbert hastily tore open the envelope, and a letter appeared, which he hurriedly looked through and handed to his wife with a look of despair. The letter was from the manager of the royal court theatre at X---, and ran thus:

"To HERR PROFESSOR HERBERT, of N----:

"I am greatly concerned, sir, to be obliged to return you your tragedy of 'Penthesilea,' as it presents insurmountable difficulties for scenic representation. The secrecy enjoined upon me shall be inviolably preserved.

"With great respect, etc.,

"W----."

Frau Herbert looked up with a sigh at her husband, who stood pale and trembling beside her.

"There goes my last hope," he said, tearing up the letter. "I forgave all the other managers and directors for sending back the manuscript, for they are incapable of appreciating the value of

such a work. But no one can accuse a man like W---- of not appreciating genuine art, and if he refuses to bring it out he must be actuated by envy. However that may be, in these lines he has written his own death-warrant." He raised his hand containing the crushed letter with something like solemnity, and continued: "I now declare war upon the German stage and its supporters. If I have nothing to hope, I have nothing to fear. I have written six tragedies for the waste-paper basket. I will not write another. Having nothing to fear, I may allow myself the delight of revenge. Criticism is an all-embracing friend, affording a sure refuge for every one who is misunderstood and depreciated. I will throw myself into its arms from this moment. Our public is degenerate. I give up composing for a people who crowd to a farce, shout applause at the commonplace jests of the hero of a modern comedy, and dissolve in tears at a sensation drama from a woman's pen. Shakspeare's, Schiller's, and Goethe's works would be rejected to-day as 'pulpit eloquence,' if past ages had not stamped them as classic. This degraded generation must be educated anew by criticism. They sneer and jeer, and jingle the money in their pockets, these traders of the drama, who demoralise the public; but I will so scourge them that I shall be called the Attila of the German stage."

He paused, for breath failed him to continue his philippic, and he began to read over his manuscript, murmuring to himself, "This is for the future."

Frau Herbert, as was her wont, suffered him to rage on without interruption; but at last she was compelled, out of regard for truth, to attempt to check the outpourings of the angry man. "It is a mournful office," she began, "that of literary executioner, and one I should be sorry to undertake. There is no good done to anybody by it. Many a blossoming genius is destroyed in the bud, and the critic brings upon himself the curses of those who have been striving and labouring honestly, night and day, only to see the offspring of all their pains ruthlessly murdered by the cold steel of his criticism. And the public do not thank you for degrading in its eyes what it had taken pleasure in, and thus robbing it of much enjoyment. Schiller and Goethe never practised criticism after this fashion. They knew how to live and let live, for they were too great to wish to aggrandize themselves at the expense of their contemporaries, and too good to destroy the results of the painful labours of others. Oh, Edmund, how small the man must be who can seek to exalt himself by depreciating others!"

"You are preaching again without sense or reason," Herbert said angrily to his wife. "It was very easy for Schiller and Goethe to play at magnanimity, for they were never misunderstood,--the wiser generation of their day did not refuse them the crowns that belonged to them of right. A king by election would be a fool to make war upon the vassals of his realm. But the nation refuses me my right, and therefore I shall make war upon it."

"Are you so sure of this right?" Frau Herbert asked in a low tone. "Are you so sure that your works are of equal value with Schiller's and Goethe's, and deserve the same applause?"

Herbert stood as if petrified at the presumption of such a speech. "I really think the pain must have gone from your face to your brain. We had better discontinue this conversation."

Frau Herbert went on with her work. A slight flush tinged her bloodless cheek, but she was too used to such attacks to reply to them. She had already said too much of what she thought, and when she looked at Herbert's anxious face she was seized with compassion. Poorly as he bore it, he had met with misfortune, and she would not add to his pain. "Pray, Edmund," she said, after a pause, occupied by Herbert in seeking and finding consolation in the beauties of his manuscript, "make up your mind now to read the piece to your friends. There are so many intellectual people here who will give you their opinion honestly,--then you can see what impression your work makes as a whole, and perhaps their criticism may enable you to improve it here and there."

"I desire no one's opinion. I know perfectly well myself what the tragedy is worth. Shall I give occasion to have it said that I needed the assistance of others to enable me to complete my work? And then to have it reported that I composed dramas that were always rejected! No, I will not acknowledge a work that has met with no applause; neither my brother professors nor my students must hear of it."

The handle of the door was turned, and through the opening smiled another opening,--Elsa's large mouth. When she saw the gloom overspreading her brother's countenance, her snub-nose, too, made its appearance, and, finally, her entire lovely person. She wore a white apron with a bib, calico over-sleeves, and had one pencil in her hand and another behind her right ear.

"Your voices disturbed me at my work. Why contend thus? You know that my exquisite fancies are scared away, like timid birds, by the slightest noise."

"It is a fine time to consider your nonsense, when such a work as my 'Penthesilea' has been returned to its author as 'unserviceable!'" thundered her brother.

"Heavens!" cried Elsa in dismay. "Penthesilea rejected by W----! Oh, who would have thought it! I so revered that man! My poor brother, this is hard! But, brother, dear Edmund, do not be too much depressed! Oh, I feel with you entirely. Any one who knows as well as I do what it is to have works rejected, can understand your pain. And what says my poor Ulrika? She looks so disappointed."

"Oh, you need not pity her!" observed Herbert bitterly. "Her husband's incapacity alone, not his misfortune, troubles her."

Frau Herbert turned her face towards the window, as if she had not heard him.

"Oh, you must forgive her, brother dear--she has never done anything but translate. She cannot know a poet's finer feeling."

At this disparaging remark, Frau Herbert looked calmly and gravely at Elsa. "And yet my unpretending translations for the periodicals supply us with the only means upon which we can rely, apart from Edmund's salary and the small interest of my property. That is because I never attempt what lies beyond my reach. No undertaking, however humble, that keeps pace with one's ability, can fail to produce some fruit, small though it may be."

Elsa turned away, rather taken aback by this turn of the conversation, and her brother muttered, "Of course this is the sequel to the fine talk about attempting and failing."

Elsa threw herself down upon a cushion at his feet, in Clärchen's attitude before Egmont, patted his smoothly shaven cheeks, and taking the thick manuscript out of his hand, pressed it to her bosom, saying, "Take comfort, my poet. Your 'Penthesilea' must always live! Here,--here,--and in the hearts of all. Print it, and publish it as a dramatic poem. It will find readers among the most intellectual people of the country."

"You are a good sister," said Herbert, flattered. "But you know that I have never yet been able to find a publisher enlightened enough to bring out my tragedies. And my own means are not sufficient to enable me to print the work."

"Oh, brother dear, I cannot believe that 'Penthesilea' would not find a publisher. It is the greatest thing you have ever written. The coarsest of men must be touched by such elevation of thought. There may perhaps be some difficulty in representing fitly upon the stage the conflict between Trojans, Greeks, and Amazons in the presence of the gigantic horse. But I cannot think that any one would refuse to print such a gem,--no--never! Yet, even in case of such incredible obtuseness, do not despair. My cookery-book will bring me in such a large sum that I shall be able to help you. Oh, what a strange freak of destiny, should I be permitted by means of a cookery-book to afford the German nation the knowledge of this immortal work! The ways of genius are inscrutable, and perhaps 'Penthesilea' may one day be born from the steam of a soup-tureen, as Aphrodite was from the foam of the sea. There, now, you are smiling once more. May not your sister contribute somewhat to her brother's success?"

"You are a dear poetical child. Although I do not share your anticipations, your appreciation of my efforts does me good. Thank you!" And darling Edmund laid his hand upon his sister's curly head as it lay tenderly upon his breast.

## **CHAPTER VI.**

### **EMANCIPATION OF THE FLESH.**

On the evening of this eventful day, Professor Herbert, before going to the Möllners', entered a splendid boudoir in a retired villa on the outskirts of the city. The entire room formed a tent of crimson damask shot with gold and gathered in huge folds to a rosette in the centre of the ceiling. Around the walls were ranged low Turkish divans of the same material. The floor was covered with crimson-plush rugs as thick and soft as mossy turf. Turkish pipes and costly weapons of all kinds,--shields, swords, pistols, and daggers,--adorned the walls. In the background of the apartment slender columns supported a canopy above a lounge, before which was spread a lion's skin, with the head carefully preserved. Upon the floor beside it stood an elegant apparatus for smoking opium. A riding-whip, the handle set with diamonds, lay upon a table of bronze and malachite. A Chinese salver, heaped with cigars, was upon a low stand beside the lounge. Upon a polished marble pedestal in the centre of the room stood a bronze of the Farnese bull, and to the right and left of the lounge were placed bronzes of the horse-tamers of the Monte Cavallo at Rome. The rich hangings of the walls were draped over candelabra holding lamps of ground glass.

The smoke of a cigar was circling in blue rings around the room, that was far more fit for a Turkish pasha than for a lady. And yet it was the abode of a lady, and it was the smoke from her cigar that encircled Herbert upon his entrance.

At first he only saw, resting on the lion's skin, two beautiful little feet in Russian slippers embroidered with pearls. The drapery of the canopy above the lounge concealed the rest of the

figure. He advanced a few steps, and there, stretched comfortably upon the swelling cushions, reclined a woman beside whom all other works of nature were but journey-work,--such a woman as appears in the world now and then to cast utterly into the shade all that men have hitherto deemed beautiful. Herbert stood dazzled and blinded by the apparition before him. He was dressed in his new coat, and had an elegant cane in his hand, that was covered by a glove, upon which his wife had that morning employed her skill. But what was he, in all his elegance, by the side of this woman! He stood there dumb "in the consciousness of his nothingness." What could he be to her, or what could he give her? She was the woman of her race! She must mate with the man of her race, as the last giantess in the Nibelungen Lied could love only the last giant. Was he in his fine new coat this man of men,--the Siegfried to conquer this Brunhilda? Ah, he was but too conscious that he was nothing but a poor weakling, whose only strength lay in his passionate admiration of her!

"Aha, here comes our little Philister," said the fair Brunhilda in broken German with a yawn, holding out her soft hand to him and drawing him down upon the lounge beside her like a child. Herbert sank into the luxurious cushions, that almost met, like waves, above him. The position did not at all suit his stiff, erect bearing, which was entirely wanting in the graceful suppleness of the born aristocrat who lolls with ease upon silken cushions. Such a seat would become a man in loose flowing costume, with an opium-pipe between his lips, and ready when wearied to fall asleep with his head pillowed upon the lady's lap. Poor Herbert was not one of these favourites of Fortune. He sat there stiff and wooden as a broken-jointed doll,--his pointed knees emerging from his downy nest, and his tight-fitting clothes stretched almost to their destruction by his unusual posture. He timidly placed his hat upon the stand beside him, and envied it its loftier position.

"How now, my learned gentleman?" the lady began again. "What! dumb? What is the matter now?--what ails you?--domestic misery? Pardon! I mean conjugal bliss."

"That is my constant trouble, dearest countess," Herbert replied, "although its dust never cleaves to my wings when I am with you. It is not that that worries me to-day. My Penthesilea----"

The countess laughed loudly, and puffed out a cloud of smoke to the ceiling. "Here it comes! It is either his wife or his Penthesilea that teases him! I hope both may rest in eternal peace before long, for an unhappy husband and a tragedy are as much out of place in this boudoir as the fragrance of eau de Cologne or chamomile-tea--those horrid accompaniments of a sick-room!"

"And yet it was you, fairest countess, that inspired me to embalm in classic verse that bold Amazon of antiquity."

"That may be, and yet, my good fellow, believe me, Penthesilea herself would have considered it a terrible bore to have to read of her glory in a German tragedy. Come; don't be offended. Have a cigar. Do you want fire to light it? Here; I will give you more than you need." And, with a laugh, she leaned towards him and lighted his cigar by her own.

"You know you can do whatever you please with me," said Herbert, making a feeble attempt to twist his legs into a more comfortable position. "But take care not to go too far!"

"Oho! my Herr Professor would fain mount his high horse?"

"No, only take a higher seat," said Herbert involuntarily.

"Well, then, sit on this ottoman, you wooden German with no sense of Oriental ease. There! will that do? When you really wish to mount a high horse, I pray you take mine. How often I have placed my Ali at your disposal! Do let me enjoy the delight of once seeing you on horseback! Will you not? Oh, it would be delightful!"

"Thanks! thanks! I would do all that you desire,--even go to the death for you,--but it is rather too much to ask me to make a laughing-stock of myself."

"Well, then, just take one walk with me, arm-in-arm. Oh, what a face of alarm my honourable gentleman puts on! He will go to the death for me, but not across the street. Ah, what a glorious hero for a tragedy he looks now! Hush! I know just what you would say,--wife, sister, cousins, aunts, good name, reputation as professor,--'great dread,' as Holy Writ hath it, would 'fall on all!' Every coffee-cup and tea-cup in the city of N--- would rattle abroad the startling news that Professor Herbert had been seen escorting the wild countess across the street. But it is all *en règle* to slip around here in the twilight, and kiss my hands and feet, and then, at your evening party afterwards, shrug your shoulders at the mention of my name. For shame, Herbert! you are a cowardly fellow, fit for nothing but to be a *messenger d'amour* between myself and Möllner."

"Countess," said Herbert menacingly, "do not goad me too far, or you will repent it! You know my passion for you--know that I would dare all for a single kiss from your lips; but you leave me thirsty at the fountain's brink,--hungry beside a spread table,--and you heap me with scorn. No living man could endure such treatment!"

"Well, then, *point d'argent, point de Suisse*," cried the countess. "For every piece of good news of Möllner that you bring me, you shall have a kiss. For the sake of that man I would hold an asp to my breast! Why should I refuse a kiss to a German Philister like yourself? But you must first taste all the torment of rejected love, that you may make all the more haste to put an end to

mine."

"This is a poor prospect for me, countess; for I hardly think I shall ever be able to bring you good news. All that I can do is to bring you news of him; and if you refuse to reward the bad, as well as the good, my lips shall be sealed--you must seek another confidant."

He rose, as if to go; but she took his hand, and looked beseechingly at him with her large, lustrous eyes.

"Herbert!"

The poor professor could not withstand that look, nor the tone in which she uttered that one word. He sank upon the lion-skin at her feet, and pressed his lips upon the pearls and silk of her embroidered slipper.

"See, now, you are not as unkind as you would have me believe you," she said, looking down upon him with a contemptuous smile, that he, fortunately, did not perceive.

"Oh, have some compassion upon me," he moaned. "I am most miserable! My home is a scene of ceaseless complaint. A wife disfigured and crippled by disease, so that she fills my soul with aversion, and, whenever I need rest from the thousand annoyances of my profession, only adds to their number. Then I am overwhelmed by vexations of every kind,--my talents are slighted,--whatever I attempt fails. And then this contrast when I come to you! Before me here lies all that is fairest and loveliest that earth has to offer; but the delight that I feel in beholding it is an insidious poison, eating into my very life,--for nothing--nothing of all this splendour is mine. I stand like a boy before the Christmas-tree that has been decked for another,--I am here only to light the lights upon the tree, that another may behold his bliss; and when I have induced that other to appreciate and take possession of his wealth, then--then I must turn and go empty away! Oh, it is dreadful!" He buried his face in the lion's mane, and, by the motion of his shoulders, he was plainly weeping.

The countess looked down upon him with the compassion that one feels for a singed moth. Had it been possible, she would have crushed him beneath her foot for very pity,--just as we put an end to the insect's sufferings; but, as it was not possible, and as, moreover, she had need of the man, she raised him graciously, and again seated him upon the cushions beside her. "You shall not go away empty-handed, my good fellow. I told you before I will make you a rich man. If you only bring Möllner to my side, my banker shall give you, as long as I live----"

"Countess!" he exclaimed, "do not carry your scorn of me too far. I am sunk low enough, it is true, since I thus chaffer and bargain with you to sell you my assistance for a single kiss. For this single caress I would resign my life! The thought of you is the madness that robs me of sleep at night, makes me hesitate and stammer when I stand before my pupils in the lecture-room, and prevents me from enjoying the food that I eat. A single kiss from you is more bliss than such a wretched man as I should hope to enjoy. But I am not yet sunk so low as to hire myself out for money, and although you may hold me in contempt, you shall at least pay some respect to the position of German professor, which I have the honour to hold!"

The countess was silent for awhile, struck by his words. But such embarrassment could last but a moment with a woman conscious of the power to atone by a smile for the grossest insult. "Come here! Forgive me! I have erred, but I repent."

"Oh, light of my life!" cried Herbert, seizing her offered hand, and pressing it to his breast. "Forgive--forgive you? With what unnumbered pains would I not purchase the joy of such a request! The only thing I cannot forgive you is that such a woman as you should love this Möllner."

"Indeed!--and why?"

"Because he is not worthy of you. Look you,--were you to give yourself to an emperor or a king, I could bear it without a murmur. Crowned heads are entitled to the costliest of earth's treasures,--how could I covet what kings alone could win? But that one of my own class should call you his,--one with no special claim of birth, culture, or intellect,--with nothing that I too do not myself possess, except a physique that is his in common with any prize-fighter,--the thought is madness!"

A dark flush coloured the beautiful woman's brow. "I have not even acknowledged to myself why I love this Möllner. I never hold myself responsible for my impulses--every passion bears its divine credentials in itself. But you have just revealed to me what so enraptures me in this Möllner. Yes! it is nothing else than what we admire as the highest attribute of humanity--a noble, genuine manhood. I think I have read in some poet, 'Take him for all in all, he was a man!' But this man is more; he is what I have never in my life seen before,--a virtuous man. This, my good little professor, is his charm, his advantage over monarchs even,--enabling him to buy what is his now and forever,--my heart! Oh, there can be no more exquisite flower in the garden of Paradise than this which I hope to pluck--the devotion of this virtuous man. It is the bliss of Eve when she breathed the first kiss upon the lips of the first man and marked his first blush!"

The beautiful woman, speaking more to herself than to the miserable man by her side, leaned

back upon her lounge and exclaimed with a heavy sigh, "Oh, what a divine office for a woman--to teach a man like this to love!"

Herbert reflected for a moment. He had been playing the traitor here, and, in the hope of winning Johannes for his sister, had never said anything to him in favour of this woman. He had deceived her with falsehoods, that he might be retained as her confidant as long as possible, and perhaps profit by her waning interest in his colleague. But now all his hopes and plans were ruined. Möllner loved the Hartwich, and was lost for Elsa,--who might, at all events, be avenged of her hated rival by means of the countess. The all-conquering charms of the Worronska should subdue Möllner, and he, Herbert, would receive--all that was left for him in the general shipwreck--the gratitude at least of the countess.

He began at last, after a severe inward conflict. "I have a communication for you, but it will make you angry. I cannot, however, feel justified as your friend in withholding it from you."

"Well?" inquired the Amazon, lighting a fresh cigar.

"I have discovered that Möllner is in love."

The countess started, and looked at Herbert as if in a dream. The smoke from the freshly-lighted cigar issued in a cloud from her half-opened lips, and she looked like a beautiful fiend breathing fire.

"Whom does he love?" she asked, her eyes flaming as if she would force the name from Herbert before his lips could find time to utter it.

"Have you ever heard of a learned woman called Hartwich?"

"Yes, yes! she too is emancipated."

"True, but not at all after your fashion, countess," Herbert corrected her, maliciously enjoying the torture to which the haughty woman was put. "You are emancipated for the sake of pleasure--she is emancipated for the sake of principle. She is a rare person, and fills Möllner with admiration of her genius!"

"Well, and it is she?" she cried, stamping her little foot upon the soft carpet.

"He is in love with her!"

For the first time, the countess sprang up from her lounge, and stood before Herbert in all the majesty of her person. Her gold-embroidered Turkish robe hung in heavy folds around her. Her dark hair fell in loosened masses upon her shoulders. The glitter of her long diamond ear-rings betrayed the tremor that agitated her whole frame. Her low, classic brow, with its bold, strongly-marked eyebrows,--her mouth, shaped like a bow, with lips parted,--her firm, massive throat,--the whole figure, so powerfully and yet so perfectly formed,--all suggested the Niobe, only the passion that swayed her was rage, not suffering. "Is this true? Is it really true? I must hear all."

Herbert told her all that he had seen and heard.

The countess was silent for one moment, as if paralyzed by astonishment. Then she muttered, as if to herself, a few broken words that Herbert could not understand, but at last her rage overflowed her lips and reached his ears.

"There is a first time for everything. This is the first time that a man honoured by my notice has loved another." She strode up and down the room so hurriedly that the flame of the lamps flickered as she passed them. She threw her cigar into the fireplace. "Must I endure it? I? Oh, cursed be the day when the count came here for his health! For this I have spent my months of widowhood since his death, in this hole, away from all the enchantments of the world, even timidly waiting and hoping like a bride,--no society about me but my horses, dogs, and--you! For this, for this,--that I might learn that there lives a man who can withstand me. The lesson, it is true, was well worth the trouble!"

She struck her forehead. "Oh that I had never gone to that lecture! then I might never, perhaps, have seen him. Why did I not stay away? What do I care about physiology, anatomy, or whatever the trash is called? I heard this Möllner was distinguished among his fellows, and curiosity impelled me to go. Fool that I was, to imagine that he saw me there and admired me as I did him!" She stood still, and involuntarily lost herself in thought "Ye gods! how glorious the man was that evening! The brow, the hair, the eyes, were all of Jove himself. I felt myself blush like a girl of sixteen, when I met his eye. And such grace, such dignity! His voice, too,--melodious as a deep-toned bell. I did not understand what he said; but there was no need, his voice was such harmony that no words were wanting to the charm. It was a symphony,--no, finer still, for that we only hear, and in him the delight of sight was added. The movements of those lips--how inimitable! And then his smile!" She paused,--her cheeks glowed, her eyes sparkled. It was a delight to her to lay bare her heart for once, careless as to what were the feelings of her auditor.

"And if that voice is so enchanting when it discourses upon dry, unmeaning topics, what must it be when it comes overflowing from his heart!" She leaned against the pedestal of one of the



bronzes, and covered her eyes with her hand.

Herbert sat as if upon the rack,--he could not speak,--his voice denied him utterance.

"No man has seemed to me worthy of a glance since I saw him first. Bound by no vow, no duty, no right, I have still been true to him. Since loving him, I have first known a sense of what the moralist would call decorous reserve. For a woman who for the first time truly loves is in the first bloom of youth, whether she be sixteen or thirty. I was a wife before I was a woman, and the spring, that I had never known before, began to breathe around me beneath the magic influence of that man,--the maiden blossom of my life, crushed in the germ, budded anew. Oh, what would I not have been to him! I, with the experience of ripened womanhood and the first love of a girl! And scorned! I, for whose smile monarchs have contended, scorned by a simple German philosopher! Oh, it stings, it stings!"

And she hid her face again.

Herbert timidly approached her and touched her shoulder lightly with a trembling hand. "Would that I could console you!"

She shrank from his touch as if a reptile had stung her.

"What consolation can you give me, except the relief that I have in pouring out my soul before you?"

She moved away, and again strode restlessly to and fro like a caged lioness. "Fool, fool that I was! How could I suppose that the interest he took in my husband's case was due to my attractions? It was inspired by a hateful disease,--for this he came hither, and I thought he came for my sake! Oh, fie, fie! I stayed for love of him by that terrible sick-bed, and he had eyes only for the sick man,--he never even saw me standing beside him. Is he man, or devil?"

"Oh, no," Herbert interrupted her, with malice, "he is only--a German philosopher."

"And once, when I sank fainting in that room, what an arm supported me, strong as iron, and yet tender as the arm of a mother! He carried me like a child from the apartment. I held my breath, that nothing might arouse me from that enchanting dream. He laid me on a couch, saying, with icy composure, 'Allow me, madam, to call your maid. I must return to the patient.' My cheeks burned with mortification; for one moment I hated him, but when the door had closed behind him I revered him as a saint. I could have knelt at his feet, and, clasping his knees, bedewed his hands with penitential tears. But I restrained myself. I suddenly knew that this pure spirit could love nothing that he did not respect,--that I must first win that before I could hope for his love. I determined to begin a new life, to break with all the past. For no sacrifice would be too great to win the love of this man, and I sowed renunciation that I might reap delight. Fool that I was! I reap nothing but the reward of virtue!"

She laughed bitterly, and a violent burst of tears quenched the fire in her brain. She threw herself down upon the lion's skin, unconsciously representing the Ariadne.

"Loveliest of women!" murmured Herbert, intoxicated by the sight. "Is it not monstrous that such a woman should mourn over an unrequited love? Does he who could withstand such charms deserve the name of man? No, most certainly not. He is an overstrained pedant, the type of a German Philister, and if blind nature had not endowed him with the head of a Jove and the form of an athlete, the Countess Worronska would never have wasted a tear upon him!"

"Herbert, you shall not revile him! You cannot know how great he seems to me in thus coldly despising my beauty, as though he might choose amongst goddesses,--as though Olympus were around him, instead of this insignificant town filled with ugly, gossiping women. What a lofty ideal must have filled his fancy,--an ideal with which I could not compete! When he saw me first, he did not know this Hartwich. I remember how cold his eye was when he first saw me. He looked at me with the cool gaze of an anatomist. And it was always so. Whenever he visited my husband, he always treated me with the strictest formality. Always the same gentle, inviolable repose,--the same calm scrutiny that one accords to a fine picture, but not to a lovely woman. Oh, there is something overpowering, in all this, for a woman used to seeing all men at her feet!" She sank into a gloomy reverie. At last she seized Herbert's hand. "Herbert, who is she who has power to enchant this man? Is all contest with her useless? Must I resign all hope?"

Herbert, as if electrified by her touch, whispered scarcely audibly, "Will you grant me that kiss if I show you how to annihilate the Hartwich in Möllner's eyes?"

A pause ensued.

"It is my only price. Without it I am dumb."

"Well, take it, then!" cried the countess, driven to extremity; and she held up to him her lovely lips.

But, as Herbert approached her, with the expression of a jackal thirsting for his prey, disgust overpowered the haughty woman, and she thrust the slender man from her so violently that he

fell to the ground. She was terrified,--perhaps her impetuosity had ruined everything. She went to him and held out her hand. "Stand up and forgive me."

Herbert stood up, pale as a ghost, with sunken, haggard eyes, and readjusted his dress, disordered by his fall. He wiped the cold drops from his brow with his handkerchief, and, without a word, took up his hat.

The countess regarded his proceedings with alarm. "Herbert," she said with a forced smile, "are you angry with me for being so rude?"

"Oh, no," he answered, in a hoarse, hollow tone.

She held out her hand, but he did not take it.

"Do not bear malice against me. I--I am too deeply wounded. I do not know what I am doing."

Herbert was silent. He shivered, as if with cold. His look--the expression of his eyes--alarmed the countess more and more.

"Now you will revenge yourself by not telling me how I can annihilate the Hartwich?"

"Why should I not tell you?" stammered Herbert, with blue lips. "I keep my promises." He fixed his eyes upon the countess. "Make the Hartwich your friend, and you will make her an object of aversion in Möllner's eyes."

The countess started; her terrible glance encountered Herbert's look of hate. They stood now opposed to each other,--enemies to the death,--the effeminate man and the masculine woman. She had offended him mortally, but Herbert's last thrust had gone home; and softly, lightly as an incorporeal shade, he passed from the room.

When the countess was alone, she fell upon her knees, as though utterly crushed.

"Thus outraged Virtue revenges herself! Artful hypocrite that she is! When I left her, she gave me no warning,--I sinned unpunished,--and now, when I would return to her repentant, she thrusts me from her with a remorseless 'Too late! Too late!--my ships are burned behind me, and there is nothing left for me but to advance, or to repent,--Repent?' She writhed in despair. 'No! O Heaven, take pity on me,--I am still too young and too fair for that!'"

## **CHAPTER VII.**

### **EMANCIPATION OF THE SPIRIT.**

High up upon the platform of her observatory, fanned by the pure night-breeze and bathed in starry radiance, stood Ernestine, waiting for the moon to rise. On her serious brow and in her maidenly soul there was self-consecration, and peace. The heated vapour of passion that was gathering like a thunder-cloud about her name in the world beneath her, the poisonous slander of lips that mentioned her only to defame her, could not ascend hither. Unconscious, assailed by no sordid temptations, she stood there in vestal purity,--elevated physically but a few feet from the earth, but soaring in mind worlds above it.

Slowly and solemnly the moon's disc arose from the horizon and mounted upwards, lonely and quiet, in soft splendour. Thousands of little moons were reflected in the telescopes of astronomers in thousandfold diversity of aspect; but they were all images of the one orb slowly sailing through the air. Ernestine was not busied with her telescope, for no mortal quest could aid her in what she was seeking to-night. It was to be found only in her own breast. It was not the material, but the immaterial, that she was now longing to grasp; no single sense could be of any avail. She needed all the powers of her being harmoniously co-operating. And, as she gazed there, full of dreamy inspiration, it was as if the moon had paused in its course to mirror itself in those eyes. Oh that we could die when and as we choose! that we could breathe out our souls in a single sigh! No human being could pass away more calmly and blissfully than Ernestine could have done at that moment, as she gazed at that serene moon and breathed forth a yearning sigh after the Unfathomable.

Happiness, pure and unspeakable, descended into her soul from the sparkling canopy of night. This was her holiday, her hour of enfranchisement from the fetters of toil and study. She was alone beneath the starry sky,--a lone watcher, while all around were sleeping,--thinking while others were unconscious. She seemed to herself appointed to keep guard over the dignity of humanity, while all beside were sunk in slumber. She could rest only when others were roused to

consciousness. The fever of night, that brings remorse to so many tossing upon restless couches, never assailed her. All earthly phantoms recede from the heart bathed in starlight, for in that light there is peace. In view of immensity, eternity is revealed to us, and every earthly pain vanishes like a shadow before it. But when star after star faded, and the moon had paled, the first rosy streak of dawn kissed a brow pale as snow, and a weariness as of death assailed her. The sacred fire of her soul had devoured her bodily strength and was extinguished with it. Then she sank to rest silently and uncomplainingly, like the lamps of night at the approach of day. So it was at this hour. As the darkness vanished, she descended to her apartments, and sought in brief repose the strength that would suffice for a day of constant labour.

"The more time I spend in sleep, the less of life do I enjoy," she said in answer to the remonstrances of her anxious attendant. "Everything in the world is so beautiful that we should not lose one moment of it,--so short a time is ours to enjoy it."

"Enjoy! Good heavens! What do you enjoy? you do nothing but work."

"That is my enjoyment, my good Willmers. For my work is nothing less than the constant study and discovery of the beauties of the world. An immortality would not suffice to enjoy it all,--and what can we accomplish in our brief span of existence? Shall we curtail it by sleep? Has not nature, who gives us eighty years of life, robbed us of almost half of it by imposing upon us the necessity of spending from seven to nine hours out of the twenty-four in a state of unconsciousness? I will defy her as long as I can, and maintain my right to enjoy her gift as I please, and not as she please."

Frau Willmers looked with intense anxiety at the pale cheeks of the speaker. As she lay in her bed, white as the snowy draperies around her, her thin hands fallen wearied upon the coverlet, her breath coming short and quick, the faithful servant's heart misgave her; for she saw that nature had already begun to revenge herself for the disobedience of her laws. She covered her up carefully in the soft coverlet. "Do not talk any more, my dear Fräulein von Hartwich,--you are worn out."

"And you are wearied too, my good Willmers. Why do you rise whenever you hear me going to bed?"

"Because I always hope that I may force you, out of consideration for me, to do what you will not do for yourself,--retire earlier and grant yourself the repose which is needful even for the strongest man,--how much more so for such a delicate creature as you are!"

Ernestine languidly held out her hand. "You are kind and unselfish, my dear Willmers, but you cannot understand me. And, if you will insist upon sacrificing your night's rest to me, I must give you a room at a distance from mine, where you cannot hear what I am doing. Thank you for your care. Good-night."

"Good-night," replied the housekeeper sadly, delaying her departure for a moment to draw the curtains closely around Ernestine's bed, that they might exclude the first golden rays of sunlight.

That same night the countess spent tossing, like one scourged by the furies, upon her restless couch. She could hardly wait for the day that should take her to see her rival, and the same rising sun that filled Ernestine's sleep with friendly dreams,--for even in slumber the eye is conscious of light, and communicates it to the soul,--the same rising sun drove the tortured woman from her silken bed. She knew no weariness. Her healthy physical frame, hardened by exercise, withstood every attack of weakness. She owned no restraint, physically, morally, or mentally. She was talented, but she refused to think. Thought was in her view a fetter upon self-indulgence. Knowledge had limits which those who knew nothing were unconscious of. She would be free as the air, and therefore avoided everything that could disturb her superficial security. And she had sufficient intellect to feel that thought might lead to conclusions most dangerous to her theory of life.

"Man's destiny is labour, woman's enjoyment" This was her motto, and she lived up to it. She dazzled the world with the rare spectacle of beautiful power and powerful beauty carrying away like the hurricane in its mad career whatever lies in its path, stripping the leaves from every flower, uprooting every young tree, and bearing them on perhaps for one moment before casting them aside, crushed and dying. A glorious spectacle for exultant Valkyrias, but one at which the common herd cross themselves. Every destructive force of nature--and such was this woman--possesses a shuddering poetic attraction for the on-looker who is himself secure. He admires what he fears, he revels in the sight of what he knows to be destructive. This was the position held by the inhabitants of the little town of N--- towards the beautiful Russian since she had arrived there with her sick husband. With her wild manner of life, she was a wonderful apparition in their eyes, a constant source of interest, yet always provoking sternest disapproval. When the magnificent woman galloped through the streets upon her fiery Arabian, or held the reins behind her pair of horses with a skilful hand, like Victory in her triumphal car, no one could refrain from rushing to the window to enjoy a sight not to be forgotten. Strength, health, and beauty seemed to be her monopoly and the firm foundation of her joyous existence.

"The woman who desires to be emancipated," she was wont to say, "must have the true stuff in her. And as there are so few who possess it, there are but a few who are emancipated. If you cannot compete with a man, do not try to rival him. But she who has been baptized, as I have, in the ice-cold Neva, can afford to laugh at the whole tribe with their masculine arrogance."

In Russia, where she had played her part in a community far less strict, she had had an excellent field for displaying her grace and agility in all knightly exercises at the tilting-school which had been instituted by the Russian nobility. There she made her appearance usually in a steel helmet and closely-fitting coat of mail of woven silver that shone in the brilliant sunlight, enveloping her as it were in splendour. When she rode into the lists thus arrayed, a crooked scimitar by her side, pistols in her belt, and mounted upon her Arabian steed, nothing could restrain the loud applause of all present. She rivalled the most distinguished sons of the Russian nobility in the grace and skill with which she managed her horse, the precision of her aim in shooting, and the boldness of her leaps. She knew no fear and no fatigue.

She had the strength and vigour of a Northern divinity, with the glowing temperament of an Oriental. What wonder that, from Emperor to serf, all were her admiring slaves?

Her father, Alexei Fedorowitsch, was a poor and uneducated noble, who had distinguished himself by his bravery in the war with Napoleon, and, invalided at its close, retired to his small estate in the country, where he lived upon his pension. His wife, a sickly aristocrat, who had condescended to marry him for want of a more desirable *parti*, was the torment of his life. In despair at the trouble and annoyance caused by his wife's delicate health, sensibility, and affectation, he made a vow, when she bore him a daughter, to educate his child to be an utter contrast to her mother. Better that the child should die than live to be such an invalid as his wife. And he began by causing his little daughter to be baptized, like the children of the poorest Russians in that part of the country, in the icy waters of the Neva. The little Feodorowna outlived her icy bath, and her entire education corresponded with this beginning. Her mother died a few days after this cruel baptism; anxiety for her child put the finishing stroke to her invalid existence. And so her rude, uncultured father was her only guide and instructor. He loved her after his fashion, and made her his companion in all his amusements, riding, training horses, and the chase.

She was scarcely sixteen when he married her to a wealthy landed proprietor in the neighbourhood, ruder and more illiterate even than himself, and to the girl an object of aversion. As his wife, she lived on his lonely estate like a serf. Her husband was cruel and suspicious, and made her married life perfect torture. She was compelled to resign her free habits of life, which she loved better than all else in the world. Every extravagance, even the most harmless, was forbidden by her husband. The joyous girl who had been used to fly upon the back of her spirited steed over steppe and heath was not allowed to mount a horse, but was made to sit with her maid-servants and spin by the dim light of a train-oil lamp until her husband came home to compel, perhaps by the *kantschu*, her reluctant attention to his wishes. She bore this martyrdom for one year in silence. At last she made a confidant of a neighbouring nobleman, and implored his aid in her great need; but she found no sympathy,--no assistance. He called her a fool, who did not appreciate her good fortune,--told her that to think of a divorce was a crime, and that her husband was perfectly right. In her utter loneliness, longing for love, if it were only the love of her old father, a desire for freedom and hatred of her tormentor gained the victory, and she fled, without taking anything with her but the few clothes that she had possessed at her marriage. She travelled the greater part of the way on foot, and arrived at her father's in such a wretched condition that he was touched by compassion, received her kindly, and took her part against her husband. Her suit for divorce left her wholly without means, but free, and when shortly afterwards she came to know the old diplomat Count Worronska, and he laid his rank and his millions at her feet, offering a field for her beauty at court at St. Petersburg, she could not withstand the temptation. She became his wife, and was transplanted from the midst of half-savage serfs to one of the most magnificent courts in the world,--from the Russian forests and steppes to apartments gorgeous with every luxury of life. At first dazzled and confused, she won all hearts, even those of the women, by her innocent beauty and graceful diffidence. At last her unbridled nature broke forth all the more impetuously for the long restraint under which it had lain, and, with no guidance but that of her imbecile husband, who adored her, she rapidly degenerated in every way. Society always looks more leniently upon those errors that are gradually developed before its eyes and under its protection than upon those that it observes outside of its sphere, because it is cognizant of the excuse for the faults of those within it, and it was all the more willing to pardon the delinquent in this instance for the sake of the high rank of her husband. It therefore ignored escapades that the distinguished position held by the old count forbade it to punish, and the beautiful and enormously wealthy Countess Worronska, in spite of her dissipation, was and continued to be the centre of the most brilliant, if not the best, circle of society in St. Petersburg. All this she had resigned for the last six months, and she had lived like an outlaw, avoided by prudent "German Philisters," in the town of N---, for the sake of the only man whom she truly loved, and who--despised her.

Before the death of her husband she had always been surrounded by a brilliant crowd of gentlemen who had sought her society from the neighbouring famous baths,--acquaintances from St. Petersburg, distinguished Englishmen, Italians, Poles,--in short, the gay, wealthy idlers of every nation that invariably flock around a beautiful woman upon her travels. With these she smoked, rode, and drove,--proceedings that had excited no outcry in the gay world at St.

Petersburg, but that called forth shrieks of horror from the women in the little German University-town and greatly excited the students, who were never weary of caricaturing her,--harnessing four horses, and, disguised as women, driving them wildly through the streets, mimicking her foreign admirers, making her bearded servants drunk, and playing many other madcap pranks in ridicule of her.

The universal horror culminated, however, when she did not dress in black after the count's death. People said with a shudder that she had declared that "it seemed to her despicable to play such a farce, and simulate a grief that she did not feel." How could any one so scorn conventionalities, and lay bare the secrets of the heart to the public gaze? Yes, it was even suggested that she had never been married, and they called her the "wild countess,"--much as we speak of wild fruit to distinguish them from those that are genuine. Although injustice was done her in this respect, she deserved the epithet "wild" in every other, and the name clave to her. Even Möllner, who was always ready to find some magnanimous excuse for feminine failings, thought that she ought to show more respect for her septuagenarian husband, and pronounced her conduct heartless ostentation. From that moment she lost all interest, if she had ever possessed any, in his eyes. He never noticed that for months no gentleman had been allowed to enter her doors, for he did not think it worth while to observe her actions. Whoever did observe it ascribed it to chance. The report of her improvement was drowned in the billows of scandal that had been lashed up by her previous conduct. No one believed in her reformation, least of all he for whom she made such sacrifices.

And now the moment had arrived when, for the first time, she found herself helpless, opposed to a higher power,--and the effect of this first collision with invisible barriers upon the untrained heart of the countess was terrible. Hitherto she had recognized only the laws of decorum, and had transgressed them with impunity whenever they had oppressed her. Decorum is almost always subject to the will of individuals and to fashion. But the higher law that hovers over the universe, subject to no human will, to no change,--unchangeable, as is all that is divine,--is the law of *morality*. It was this against which the countess was now struggling, of the existence of which she seemed now first to become aware.

But such a woman could not give up the battle. It was a law of her nature to resist. She could not yield. How could she?--she had never learned submission. She would battle for her desires. As a girl, she had endured hunger and cold for days in the pursuit of the chase, while food and warmth waited for her at home. From her earliest childhood, her will had been trained to iron persistence, and now, when she had again left the comforts and delights of home in pursuit of a far nobler prey, should she desist from the chase because the game belonged to another? Such a course was impossible for such a woman, and, as strength could not avail her here, she resorted to the commonest weapon of the merest flirt,--cunning.

Herbert's malice contained a seed that swiftly ripened and bore fruit in the fertile brain of the countess, for she knew only too well how much truth there was in the charge that her friendship was a dishonour to a young girl. It was a terrible thought for her that there was no means left for her whereby she could crush a rival except by so poisoning her with her own infection that she might become an object of disgust to her lover. But, if she could gain nothing by such a course, she could at least revenge herself. She turned over the leaves of Ernestine's publications. They were too learned for her. She understood nothing from their pages, except that they contended for the emancipation of women,--that was enough for her. She too was "emancipated." It was enough to establish an understanding between them. Perhaps a meeting with Möllner might grow out of a visit to Ernestine. She was determined to make use of Herbert's malicious hint, his last bequest to her; for she had mortally offended him, and he no longer came near her. She hastily studied a few papers upon the emancipation of women, that she might comprehend what Herbert had said of "principle" in connection with the subject, and this was the day upon which she was resolved to see her victim. She selected Wednesday for her expedition, because Herbert had told her that Möllner had been with Ernestine on the previous Wednesday. Perhaps his visit might be repeated on the same day of the week.

As soon as she rose, she blew a shrill whistle upon a little silver call. There instantly appeared--not a dog--a maid with a large bucket of spring-water, which was dashed over her beautiful mistress in a little bathing-tent.

The maid then silently withdrew, and brought coffee and the newspapers. The countess, wrapped in a rich brocade dressing-gown, lighted a cigar, and, while drinking her coffee, looked carelessly through the papers.

Afterwards she went to her dressing-room, and called to the dressing-maid in attendance there, "Riding-habit!" and, after a short delay, the maid brought her all she required. "Ali!" said the countess, which meant, "Go tell the groom to saddle Ali for me."

The brief order was understood and obeyed with rapidity. Like a shadow the attendant glided from the room, appearing again like a shadow in the presence of her dreaded mistress. The servants of this woman must have neither mind, soul, nor heart,--only ears to hear, and hands and feet to obey. The poor dressing-maid did her best to fulfil all that was required of her,--she was all ear, hands, and feet. She scarcely breathed. It really seemed as if the powerful lungs of her mistress inhaled all the air of the apartment, leaving none for any other inmate.

She took her place behind the countess, who sat before the mirror, smoking, and began, as carefully as possible, to comb out her long hair. The lovely woman examined her own features critically to-day. One peculiarity of her face, otherwise faultless,--a peculiarity that reminded her of the Russian type,--irritated her excessively; she thought her cheek-bones somewhat too high.

Just as she was contemplating this imaginary defect, the maid slightly pulled her hair. It was too much for her patience.

"Maschinka!" she cried, starting up and snatching the comb from the poor girl's hand. A flash--a blow--and Maschinka stooped silently to pick up the pieces of the broken comb. The print of its teeth was left upon her pale cheek, but no word, no cry of pain, escaped her lips,--her eyes alone looked tearful.

"Get another!" ordered her mistress, as if nothing had happened, and she sat down again.

Maschinka obeyed, and finished the coiffure, and the rest of the toilette, without further disaster. Then she brought riding-whip, hat, and gloves, and the countess descended the richly-carpeted stairs. Suddenly she stood still, and called, "Maschinka!"

"Madame!"

"Does your cheek hurt you?"

"Oh, no!" whispered the girl.

"What? Don't lie! Well, then, rub it with cold cream, from the silver box on my dressing-table; and keep the box,--I give it to you."

Without listening to the girl's thanks, she passed on. Her magnificent Arabian was led, snorting and foaming, around the court-yard. She beckoned to the stout, bearded Russian, who could scarcely restrain it, and he led it towards her. Another servant, in a rich livery, brought sugar upon a silver plate. She fed the noble animal, who was instantly soothed, kissed its smooth forehead, patted its neck, and mounted lightly to her place upon its back.

"What o'clock?" she asked, as the servant handed her the whip, and she rose in the stirrup to arrange the folds of her dress.

"Past five o'clock, madame," was the answer.

"I shall return at eight. The carriage must be ready by twelve. Tell Maschinka to have my dress prepared."

"As madame pleases," replied the servant.

"Open!" cried the countess, and a third groom, who had been waiting for this order, threw open the double gates of the court-yard, letting in a flood of morning sun-light. All reared beneath his lovely burden, as if he would soar with her into the clouds, but a quick cut from her whip somewhat cooled his Pegasus ardour, and he sprang forward, almost running over a servant, who had not moved aside quite quickly enough, and gained the street. Here, however, his mistress reined him in.

"The dogs!" she called.

The servants all hurried into the court-yard, and a frightful noise was heard. The barking, howling pack came rushing from their kennels, and leaped around their mistress with all the signs of delight that their mad gambols can evince. And now a wild race began. Away tore the Arabian, tossing the foam from his mouth. As he flew rather than galloped along, he tossed back his head, pointed his ears, and distended his nostrils, striving to outstrip the yelling pack at his heels. The beautiful hounds followed hard behind, in long leaps. The servants stood grouped about the gateway, looking after their mistress.

"Aha," muttered the chief among them to himself, "she is turning into the Bergstrasse. The dogs must waken Professor Möllner again, and bring him to the window."

But the bearded old Russian observed sadly, "She'll break her neck some day."

Peaceful, and buried in slumber, lay the quiet little town. The windows,--eyes of the houses,--were closed, as were those of their inmates; but, as the countess dashed by in her mad career, one after another was opened, a curtain drawn aside here and there, and a sleepy, curious face appeared.

The countess laughed at the crop of night-capped heads which her ride past their windows suddenly caused to appear. The warm-blooded Arabian shivered beneath her in the fresh, dewy morning air, and she felt its bracing breath colour her cheek. "What a miserable race is this, that spends such hours in bed! They rise only when the smoke from the chimneys and the weary sighs of labourers have thickened the air. That is the atmosphere for their delicate lungs! They are afraid of the cold breeze of dawn!"

She passed by Herbert's dwelling, and, with a vigorous stroke of her whip, excited her dogs to a more furious barking. How should she know that his invalid wife, in that upper chamber, had just fallen into a refreshing slumber after a wakeful night of pain, a slumber from which the noise aroused her to a day of suffering?

Here, too, a curtain was drawn aside, and Elsa's dream-encircled head peeped out.

"That is his monkey-faced sister," thought the countess, and nodded in very wantonness. The face vanished in alarm. Herbert did not appear. And she galloped on through the silent streets. It was wearisome riding thus upon stony pavements, with a sleeping public all around, her only spectators the servants and peasants carrying milk and bread, and staring open-mouthed at the haughty horsewoman. Now and then a student in his shirt-sleeves, brush or sponge in hand, would appear at a window, and one poured out the contents of his washbasin upon her dogs, who had fallen fiercely upon an innocent little cur that was just taking his morning stroll. It was the only incident that varied the monotony of her ride, and she passed swiftly on towards the Bergstrasse, as the servant had prophesied.

At last she reached it, and the glorious view of the distant mountains lay before her. The rough pavement came to an end, for here the pleasure-grounds of the town were laid out, and the roads were strewn with fine gravel. She now gave her steed the rein, and the fiery beast flew along, *ventre à terre*, with the pack after him in full cry. The houses were all surrounded by charming gardens. There was one which for a long time riveted the attention of the countess. Look! there was an open window, and at it stood Möllner, gazing out upon the far-off mountains.

Just as the countess passed, he observed her, and answered her gesture of recognition by a respectful bow.

He looked after her, well pleased as he marked the finely-knit figure, with a seat in the saddle so light and graceful that she seemed part of her horse. She turned her head and saw him looking after her, and in her pleasure at the sight she reined in Ali until he reared erect in the air and curveted proudly. Then on she galloped, and was soon lost to sight. She had reached the foot of the mountains, and, allowing her panting steed to ascend a little hill more slowly, she paused to rest him on the summit.

Before her lay a golden, sunny world. It was an enchanting morning. Thin, vapoury smoke was beginning to rise from the chimneys, and the heavens were so cloudless that it ascended straight into the blue arch without being pressed down to the earth again.

Over the tops of the pine-trees that crowned the brows of the mountains, little white feathery clouds were still hovering. It seemed as if those mighty heads would fain shake them off, for they soared aloft and then settled again, then shifted from place to place, hiding sometimes in the forest, until at last they vanished before the increasing power of the sun's rays, and the dark, jagged outline of the mountains stood out clear and free against the blue sky. Who, with a heart in his breast, beholding and enjoying all this beauty and glory, does not involuntarily look above in gratitude to the unseen Giver and mourn over his own unworthiness of such bounty? And how many eyes look on it all without understanding it or rejoicing in it! Does it not seem that on such a morning the most degraded soul would gladly purify itself, as the bird dresses his feathers at sunrise before he lifts his wings to soar aloft into the glorious ether?

And yet the gloomy fire of the previous night still smouldered on in the countess's breast, and no cool breeze, no pearly dew, availed to quench its unhallowed glow. Her heart was desecrated,--the abode of the demons of low desire and hate. It could no longer soar to higher spheres. The beautiful woman gazed upon the landscape without one feeling of its beauty. She was far more interested in compelling the obedience of her impatient steed than in the grand prospect before her. In the gilded saloons of St. Petersburg she had lost all comprehension and love of nature, and she was so accustomed to consider herself a divinity that she was no longer conscious of the humility of the creature before its Creator. Although she might not deny Him, she was indifferent to Him, and if she sometimes visited His temple, she did it only as one pays a formal visit to an equal.

Thus she stood there upon the hill, inhaling the fresh, fragrant air with a certain satisfaction, but with no more interest in the lovely scene than was felt by her dogs, who judged of the beauty of the landscape chiefly by their sense of smell, as, lying on the ground around their mistress, they too snuffed the morning breeze. Now and then one was led astray by the scent of game in the thicket; but a call from the silver whistle of his mistress reminded him of his duty, and he returned to his companions,--only casting longing looks in the direction in which his prey had escaped him. Had his haughty mistress ever in her life practised such self-denial? Could she have seriously answered this question, she might have blushed before the unreasoning brute.

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It was ten o'clock when Ernestine stepped out upon her balcony. Gaily-dressed peasants were passing, pipe in mouth, along the road outside her garden-wall, for to-day was the Ascension of the Blessed Virgin,--a glorious opportunity for drinking to her honour and glory. The people were in their gayest humour, their morning libations had already had some effect. The peasant seems to know no better way of giving God glory than by enjoying His gifts; he believes that he thus

affords Him the same pleasure that a good host feels in seeing the guests at his table enjoy what is placed before them.

Ernestine smiled at the thought of this profane belief, which nevertheless springs from honest, childlike traits of human nature.

Leuthold had not yet returned from his journey, and these days of solitude had been,--she never asked herself why,--the pleasantest that she had known for a long time. She did in his absence only what she was used to do when he was with her; but her thoughts were very different. The man had so thoroughly imbued with his teaching her every thought and action, that when he was by she could not even think what he might disapprove. Since his departure she had, if we may use the expression, let herself alone. She allowed her thoughts to stray as they pleased. She was not ashamed to spring up from her work and feed the birds, or to spend an hour in the garden, or at the window in dreamy reverie. And she made various scientific experiments, that she might surprise her uncle upon his return with their successful results.

And this was not the only advantage of his absence. She could go to the school-house to see the good old people there; she could--receive a visit!--a visit of which her uncle knew nothing. Was that right? Oh, yes, it was right,--it was too sacred a thing to be exposed to his cool contempt. Why was he so dry and cold and stern, that she must conceal every emotion from him? To have told him of this visit would have been like voluntarily exposing her roses to be frozen by ice and snow. She still remembered and felt the pain that he had made her suffer when she spoke to him of God. Then he had taken her God from her, and now he would take from her her friend,--the first, the only one she had ever known. It was the pure, sacred secret of her heart,--as pure and sacred as the communion she held with the starry heavens at night upon her observatory.

Meanwhile the door had opened without her notice, and the Æolian harp sounded in the draught that swept across its strings. The birds, that had hopped close around her for their accustomed food, flew twittering away as a stranger appeared, and a deep, mellow voice asked, "Well, and how are you?"

Ernestine started as at a lightning-flash. She turned and looked at the intruder with a deep blush, but with undisguised delight.

"Why should you be startled?" he asked.

"I do not know,--you appeared so suddenly. I did not see you coming down the road."

"No, I took a cross-cut that was shadier; I came on foot."

"Oh, then you must be tired!" said Ernestine, entering the room with him. "Sit down."

"My dear Fräulein Hartwich, first shake hands with me,--there! And now tell me that you have quite forgiven me,--you do not think ill of me."

"No, sir,--doctor!--Can I call you doctor? We give names to everything, why should you be the exception?" And she smiled.

It was the first time that he had seen her smile, and it enchanted him.

"If, then, it is so hard not to call me by name, christen me yourself. There are kindly titles invented by friendship or good will. Am I not worthy, in your stern sight, of any of these?"

"Oh, none that I could find would be worthy of you, you are so kind, so--oh, yes! I have a title for you!"

"Well? I am curious."

"Kind sir!--will you allow that?"

"Ah, my dear Fräulein Hartwich, it is you who are too kind."

Ernestine smiled again. A fleeting blush tinged her cheek.

Johannes looked at her. "Do you know that you seem much more cheerful than when I saw you last?"

"Thanks to your skill, kind sir."

"Indeed?--spite of my bitter physic?"

"Yes, it did taste bitter, but good followed it."

"Then you felt the truth of what I said?"

She grew grave. "No, not that,--but I recognized a true, large heart, and admiration for that conquered my ailment,--delight in its sympathy overcame the pain of being misunderstood by it."

"That is more than I ventured to hope, after so short an acquaintance. Were you less



magnanimous than you are, you would hate me, for I deeply wounded your vanity, and, to be frank, I propose to do so still further."

"Not a pleasant prospect, but I will be steadfast. If you deny me the strength of a man, you shall at least not find me subject to women's weaknesses,--among which I hold vanity to be the most despicable."

Johannes smiled. "And yet you are not free from this weakness. You endure my assaults upon your pride because it gratifies your vanity to prove that you are not vain."

Ernestine cast down her eyes. "You are clever at diagnosis," she said with slight bitterness.

"I am only honest. Do you not see that I know, since you have received me so kindly to-day, that it would be quite possible to win your further confidence and esteem if I would only have a little consideration for your weaknesses? Let me confess frankly that a confidence so purchased would not content me. Trifling and jesting may have deceit for their foundation, for one will last no longer than the other, but the regard that I cherish for you, and that I would awaken in you for me, must--can--be founded only in the truth,--must grow out of the inmost core of our natures; and if our natures do not harmonize, any intimate relation between us is impossible, and an artificial tie between us would be, for us, a sin. If, then, my ruthless hand searches the hidden depths of your soul,--if I outrage your vanity, so that even the vanity of being magnanimously self-forgetting will not help you to endure it,--I only fulfil a sacred duty that truth requires of me, both to you and to myself,--a duty whose postponement might be heavily avenged in the future."

Ernestine looked at him inquiringly. She did not understand him.

"You are puzzled, and do not know how to interpret my words," he continued. "You cannot dream how far beyond reality my fancy soars. But you must feel that I am not a man to play the *bel-esprit* for my amusement,--to find any satisfaction in measuring my wits to advantage with a woman's,--to take delight in hearing the sound of my own voice. Before I seriously approach a woman, I must be clear in my own mind as to what I can be to her and she to me. You, Fräulein von Hartwich, cannot be to me much or little,--you can be to me everything or nothing. Our natures are both too real to admit of our passing each other by pleasantly, politely, but without enthusiasm, like ephemeral acquaintances in society. We have already, in defiance of conventional rules, formed an intimacy in which character is revealed, and the aim of our intercourse must be a higher one than that of mere amusement. Otherwise I were a boor and you are greatly to blame for enduring me. Only a deep personal interest in you could warrant my relentless treatment of you. I acknowledge that I feel this deep personal interest. More I will not say now, for all else depends upon the development of our relations towards each other, in the increase or decrease of accord in our views of life and its purposes."

Ernestine was silent. She began to have some suspicion of what she might be to this strong, upright character, and what he might be to her. But it was not that tender emotion that the first approach of love awakens in the heart of every woman, even the coldest; she was troubled and anxious. The decision with which he spoke convinced her at once that he never could be converted to her views,--that she must mould herself according to his,--that a transformation must take place in one or the other of them, if she would not lose what was already of such value to her. She was not accustomed to self-sacrifice, for her cunning uncle had so educated her, so trained her inclinations to accord with his wishes, that she always supposed she was having her own way, when in reality she was following his. She felt that this hour was a crisis in her life, that she was brought into contact with a will which would require of her great self-sacrifice, and of which she was almost in dread, because it was backed by superior strength.

Johannes waited for an answer, but none came. He saw what was going on in Ernestine's mind, and that his words had chilled her, kindly as they were meant. He took her hand and looked into her eyes. "Ah, you will not call me 'kind sir' any more?"

Ernestine was conscious of the true kindness of his look, she felt the gentle clasp of his hand, and involuntarily she held out to him her disengaged hand also, and said almost in a tone of entreaty, "No, you will not be cruel, you will not hurt me."

He stood silent for an instant, looking into her clear, confiding eyes, holding both her hands in his, and was for the moment unspeakably happy.

"I promise you I will not give you more pain than I shall suffer myself," he said gently. "But we must buy dearly the happiness that is to content us. We are not of those who innocently and artlessly take upon trust whatever the present throws into their laps. Constituted as we are, we must needs make conditions with Heaven, and accept its gifts only when we have proved them. For we cannot be satisfied with what many would call happiness,--we can take no delight in what would charm thousands of others. It is the curse of natures like ours that they erect a standard of happiness far above what is usual,--and how many are there upon whom Providence bestows unusual happiness!"

Ernestine smiled bitterly at Johannes's last words. "Providence!" she murmured, "we are our own providence. We shape our own destiny, create our joy or our misery,--the conditions of either are in ourselves!"

"And because we are so mysteriously gifted beyond other creatures, because we are mentally freer and more conscious of ourselves than other beings, our responsibility as regards ourselves and those whom we see around us is all the greater. There are natures that are eternally wretched, because they demand more of life than it can possibly afford them, and undervalue all that it offers them, although it makes their lot enviable in the eyes of all. Then we say, 'Their unhappiness is their own fault, they have everything to make them happy, no one injures them; why are they so exorbitant in their longings?' But this is wrong. They are not insatiate, they would perhaps be contented with a far more moderate lot. What fault is it of theirs that the demands of their innermost nature are such that they require just what fate has not bestowed upon them? Of what use is a glittering gem to the traveller in the desert languishing for a drop of water? How willingly would he exchange the bauble for what he longs for! Who would say to him, 'You have a precious treasure, why are you not content?' Who would reproach him with being a human creature that cannot live without drinking? The most one can say to him is, 'Since you know that you cannot live without water, why go into the desert?' There is the point where we are responsible. If we know what are the conditions of our existence, we must see to it that what we choose in life accords with those conditions, always provided that Providence gives us the right of free choice. If this right is ours and we choose falsely, it is our fault if we are wretched. I call it an unusual boon, therefore, when Providence permits us to choose a lot that harmonizes with our nature. If this is denied us, the man of the greatest freedom of thought is not responsible for his fate,--he is under the ban of a higher power."

Ernestine listened to him with undisguised interest. He saw it, and continued:

"We, Fräulein Hartwich, are free to choose, and are therefore responsible to each other, and it is incumbent upon us to be on the watch. A kindly Providence, you too must admit this, has brought us together, and left the decision as to what we will be to each other in our own hands. Let us show ourselves worthy of the trust; let us try ourselves. I am sure you feel with me that the moment must be a glorious one in which two human beings recognize each other as their embodied destiny. But it must be celebrated not by gushes of sentimentality nor by would-be transcendentalism, but in perfect peace of mind!"

He took her hand and gazed into her eyes. She stood quietly before him, and gathered calmness from his look. And again that significant silence ensued so dear to those whose hearts are full of what they cannot or dare not speak. Suddenly Frau Willmers softly opened the door.

"There is a lady without, who wishes to speak with you, Fräulein Hartwich."

"With me!" asked Ernestine in displeased surprise. "Who is she?"

"She refuses to give her name, and will not be denied. She says if Fräulein von Hartwich is not at leisure now, she will wait any length of time."

"Did you tell her I was engaged with a visitor?"

"No, there is no knowing whether the lady"--here she cast an embarrassed glance at Johannes--"might not tell your uncle!"

Ernestine looked down confused. "That is true--if it should chance--What is to be done? How very annoying!"

"I thought perhaps the gentleman would allow me to take him through the laboratory and down the other staircase?" said Frau Willmers in a tone of anxious entreaty.

"Shall I?" asked Johannes, not without evident vexation.

Ernestine looked at Frau Willmers. "Pray do," she begged, "out of pity for poor Frau Willmers, who will have to bear the whole burden of my uncle's displeasure if he should learn that she had connived at our meeting."

"I must comply with your wishes, but only for this once," he said, quietly offering her his hand. "When may I come again?"

"Next Saturday, will you not?"

Johannes knew perfectly well why she appointed that day, but he said nothing, and followed Frau Willmers. At the door he turned and looked at Ernestine. She saw something like displeasure in his face, and hastened after him.

"Pray do not be angry with me, kind sir."

Johannes was touched by the gentle entreaty from one usually so stern and cold. He pressed his lips upon her hand and whispered softly, "I shall never, never be angry with you. God bless you!"

The door closed behind him, and Ernestine, still agitated by the interview, half awake and half dreaming, went into the antechamber to receive the stranger waiting there.

The Worronska, in all her grandeur, stood before her.

Ernestine had never in her life seen so extraordinary a vision. She was actually dazzled.

The brown, Juno-like eyes were regarding her with strange curiosity, the black eyebrows were gloomily contracted; there was something so hard and haughty in her air and bearing that Ernestine took offence at it before a word had been uttered.

The way in which the lady measured her with her glance from head to foot recalled to her memory the pain that she had once suffered beneath the gaze of the Staatsrätin's guests. For one second she felt in danger of the same overwhelming sensation of embarrassment. She seemed to grow pale and wither in the presence of this dazzling and haughty person. But she was no longer a child, sensible only of her defects, and the next moment the pride of conscious power came to her relief. She knew that she stood in the presence of an enemy, but she felt herself the equal of her opponent. Who was this woman who thus assumed the right to look down upon her? Whence did she derive this right?--from beauty, wealth, or rank? Did she know as much as Ernestine? Had she written a prize essay? And, more than all, did she possess such a friend as now belonged to Ernestine? No, no, assuredly not. Ernestine was her equal, whoever she might be.

"Will you walk in?" said Ernestine with icy repose of manner and with a dignity that evidently impressed the countess greatly. Ernestine stood aside to allow her to pass, and motioned her towards a small sofa filling a recess of the room, while she herself took a seat opposite. Her lips were closed; no conventional grimace, usual upon the reception of a visitor, distorted the pure beauty of her grave countenance. She awaited in silence the stranger's communication; she was too unfamiliar with the forms of society to excuse herself for having kept her waiting in the antechamber. The countess at last understood that she must be the first to speak. She felt, too, in the presence of such a woman as Ernestine that her coming hither was a mistake, and it made her falter. For the first time in her life she was confused. The tables were turned. Ernestine was already the victor in this silent encounter. Hers was the victory of true self-respect over the frivolous conceit of a jealous coquette.

The Worronska had failed in her part even before she began to play it. She had heard Möllner's voice and his step as he left the room. The affair, then, had gone farther than she had thought. Anger had put her off her guard, and given her a hostile air when she had come to allure and perhaps lead astray. Her error must be rectified at all hazards. She held out her hand to Ernestine and said, in her melodious Russian-German, "I am the Countess Worronska."

Ernestine slightly inclined her head, and the expression of her face grew colder and more forbidding than before. "And what is your pleasure with me, Countess Worronska?"

"What? Oh, that is soon told. I seek from you amusement, instruction, excitement,--everything that so talented a companion as you are, and one so entirely of my way of thinking, can bestow."

Ernestine recoiled almost perceptibly. "Of your way of thinking?" she asked.

"Most certainly! We are both advocates of the emancipation of women, each in her own way, but our object is the same. We are both adherents of the great champion of women's rights, Louisa A---, who is my intimate friend. How charming it would be to enlist you also! We could then labour in concert,--I in action, Louisa through the daily press, you by your books."

Ernestine listened with the same unmoved countenance to what the countess said. When she had finished, Ernestine was silent for a moment, as if seeking some fitting form of speech for what she wished to say. The countess watched her eagerly. At last Ernestine replied, "Countess Worronska, I must decline your proposal,--I am resolved to pursue my path alone."

The Worronska bit her lips. "Indeed? You are afraid of sharing your laurels?"

"Not so," rejoined Ernestine calmly. "I am afraid of sharing the laurels of a Louisa A---."

"Oh! would you think that a disgrace?"

"Yes."

A pause ensued. The countess cast a fierce glance at Ernestine, who bore it coldly and unflinchingly. Again rage seethed in the bosom of the Worronska, but she controlled herself, for she was determined to compass her ends, and knew that she must be upon her guard with this girl.

"You are certainly frank," she began. "But I like that,--it is original."

"It is unfortunate that truth should be so rare among your associates, Countess Worronska, that you call it original!"

"You are severe, Fräulein Hartwich. You should know my friends, and then you would be more lenient to their weaknesses. Why is it unfortunate? Refinement of taste brings that in its train. We cushion the chairs on which we sit, we plane and polish the rough wood of our furniture, we clothe the bare walls of our rooms with tapestry, we do not devour our meat raw like the Cossacks, but delicately cooked to please our palates. Why then should we surround ourselves

morally with spikes and thorns, which rend and tear those around us? Why should we partake of our intellectual food so raw and undressed that it disgusts us? Thank Heaven, we have put off such barbarisms with our more advanced culture."

"You are perfectly right. Countess Worronska, looking upon the matter from a worldly point of view. I am only surprised to hear you defend the forms of society while you despise its proprieties."

A crimson flush rose to the brow of her visitor. But her rage only strengthened her determination to subdue her foe, superior as she could not but acknowledge her to be. "Yes, what you say is true: I love forms, because they are pleasant and useful. I hate propriety, because it would be our master, and by propriety you mean decorum--I understand you perfectly. Yes, then, yes: I love the forms of society, that give an æsthetic charm to existence, and make it smooth and easy, but I hate what people call decorum. When, in despair at the tyranny of my first husband, and utterly loathing his rude vulgarity, I left him by stealth, and fled, at peril of my life, across the half-frozen Neva to my father, to share his solitude and poverty, I acted honourably, but every one condemned me, the runaway wife was an object of scorn,--she had sinned against the laws of decorum. But when, after my divorce, I married the old Count Worronska, simply because I coveted rank and wealth, I acted dishonourably, but I had done nothing indecorous. Every one bowed low before me, and I found myself an object of respect to others when I was so deeply sunk in my own esteem. And can I do homage to decorum, the idol to which we are sacrificed, the empty scarecrow that the selfishness of men sets up to keep us within our prison-walls? In the folds of its garment lie hidden tyranny, hate and revenge, jealousy and envy, malice and uncharitableness, ready to crawl out like poisonous serpents and attack its victims. What free spirit will not curse it if it has ever been aware of even the shadow of its rod? I began by cursing it, but I have ended by despising it. I have sworn hostility to it, and, trust me, there is a rare delight in stripping it of its mask. Louisa A--- contends against it with far nobler weapons--than it deserves. It is not worth the going out to meet it with such solemn pathos. A hundred years hence, the world will laugh to think that it should have had power to annoy such a woman as Louisa."

She ceased, and looked into Ernestine's face to see the effect of her words. But there was no change of feature there.

"I cannot vie with you in your style of speaking, Countess Worronska. I am used to plain thoughts. I am not practised in metaphor, and cannot adorn what I say with such wealth of imagery. I can only reply plainly and frankly to what you say, that what you designate as our foe I consider our protection, and that it is a far different foe that I contend with. Therefore we should never agree, and it is a useless waste of time to attempt any closer intercourse."

The countess started, and the colour left her lips, so tightly were they compressed. Yet she would make one more attempt. She regarded Ernestine with a look of profound compassion, and possessed herself of her reluctant hand. "Poor child! does even your bold spirit languish in the fetters of prejudice? What a pity! How inconceivable! And will you tell me what foe it is that you wish to subdue?"

"The mean opinion that men entertain of our sex."

"And you would combat this with your pen?"

"I hope to do so."

"Do not mistake; we have mightier weapons for the contest than the pen!"

"There are none more effectual than the cultivation of our powers, for it will prove to them that we do not deserve their contempt,--that we can perform tasks that they consider emphatically their own."

"They will never acknowledge it. All intellectual power is relative,--there is nothing absolute but physical force. If we can knock a man down, he must believe that we are as strong as he. But he will never concede our intellectual equality, because there is no compelling him to be just. As long as there is no third authority in the world to act as umpire in the contest between the sexes, which can only be if God himself should descend from the skies, so long must we be victims to the egotism of men!"

Ernestine looked down thoughtfully. "You may be right, but we must comfort ourselves with the reflection that by the contest itself we have done good. To do good is the object of all, and the individual must be content with the peace of this consciousness as his reward."

"What cold comfort! Why, every flower in your path will perish in such an icy atmosphere! I pity you! Come, confide in me. In spite of your bluntness, I feel drawn towards you. I will introduce you to a new existence, where you may learn how to revenge yourself upon men. You bear the stamp upon your brow of one gifted by God to be their scourge. Learn to understand yourself, and you will see how perverted your views are! Your power lies not in the bulky volumes that you write. Our charms are the weapons by which we conquer! As long as men have eyes and we have beauty, they must be our slaves; and you would imprison yourself within four walls, and toil and strive, while you have only to face those who shrug their shoulders at your writings, to

have them prostrate at your feet? Would not this be an easier conquest?"

Ernestine was silent. The countess saw with delight that she was evidently agitated, and continued more confidently.

"You are beautiful,--how beautiful you yourself do not probably know, or you would not deprive the world of a sight that would enchant it, or yourself of the satisfaction of observing its admiration. Believe me,--there is no greater delight than the triumph of our charms. To know yourself an object of worship,--to be able to bless with a smile!--ah, what rapture! It is a divine privilege, that thousands would envy you. In comparison with it, what is the feeble pleasure that your studies can afford you? What can it matter to you if it is reported for a few miles around that you are a great scholar? Is such a report a flower, refreshing you by its fragrance?--a flame, that can warm you, or a ray of light, that can dazzle you? Can it give pleasure to any one besides yourself? It is invisible, incomprehensible,--a mere idea, a phantom, a nothing. Its only value for you is the value that it gives you in the eyes of others, for in ourselves we are nothing. We are only what we may become through our relation to others. Go to the hunters of Siberia, or to the Laplanders, and ascertain whether you find it any satisfaction that you rank among the scholars of Germany. You are striving for one end, that you may secure some value in the eyes of men and revenge yourself for the contempt heaped upon you as a woman. You seek the means to this end in your inkstand,--seek it in your dark lustrous eyes,--in your long silken hair. You will find it there, like the girl in the fairy-tale. You can comb pearls and diamonds out of those locks. Let me be the fairy to hand you the magic comb."

"Cease, I pray you, Countess Worronska!" cried Ernestine, blushing deeply. "I cannot listen to such words."

"If you fear my words, it proves the effect that they have upon you, and I have half conquered already," cried the temptress exultingly.

"If you think so," said Ernestine haughtily, "continue, I pray you. When you have finished, I will tell you what I would rather not have been compelled to say."

"You will think more kindly of me when you have heard me to the end," said the countess. "You think my views immoral; but what is immorality? What corresponds closely with the laws of nature? What morality do the brutes possess? None! and they are, therefore, irresponsible. They obey those laws which you, as a student of nature, esteem the first and highest. Ascetics say morality is necessary to preserve that order without which chaos would come again. But I ask you, Does chaos reign in the brute creation? Does not the strictest order in the preservation of species prevail there? Does not each possess and preserve its individual peculiarities? Does the lion mate with the hyena? Are there not inviolable laws prevailing there? And it would be just so with mankind. Noble natures would attract only noble natures, and the common and vile herd with the vile. Love would direct the whole, and the indecorum of conventionality, of force, of falsehood and hypocrisy, would vanish. Would not the world be fairer, and, believe me, better? Conscious that no legal claim could exist between husband and wife, each would endeavour to retain the heart of the other by redoubled tenderness and self-sacrifice. Mankind would grow more amiable, more self-denying, and the mind would be fed on the freedom of the body. As long as we have no freedom of choice, our spirits must be enslaved. Have not men arrogated to themselves the right of free choice? Are they bound by laws? Where is the man who does not transgress them in public or private? But for us there is no appeal,--we are property possessed,--we have no right of ownership. We must be far above the necessity for change, inherent in every human being,--far above the demands of taste, of passion,--above everything except man. We must achieve the victory over nature, so impossible for him, but be utterly subject to his will. Is this a just order of the world? No! Even those who have never felt the pressure of its injustice cannot defend it! Has not advancing culture abolished serfdom in Russia? And is the saddest of all serfdom--the serfdom of woman--to continue? No! If you do not choose to contend for its own sake for that right of free choice, of personal freedom for which such women as Louisa A--- are doing battle, do it for the thousands of poor weak creatures languishing beneath such a perversion of morality!"

Ernestine cast upon her an annihilating glance. After a short pause she said, "And if I were to do so, I should be striving for the ruin of humanity. I will not argue with you in justification of a morality which you do not understand, but I will attempt to remind you of its necessity, which has not, it seems, occurred to you. It can be done in a few words. Morality is moderation. Where it is wanting, all force exhausts itself in immensity; for moderation is the conservative force in nature, as in life. You look amazed. You do not understand me. I cannot lead you in a single hour along the dark, thorny path by which I have attained this conviction, and I know, besides, that I speak to deaf ears. But you have challenged my opinion. You shall have it, then." Ernestine's cheeks began to flush with noble indignation. "All partisans labour for their cause, which may excuse you for attempting to disturb the peace of a quiet mind, to instil poison into an innocent heart. May you never be more successful than with me! I will believe that you have been impelled by the fanaticism of your error, not by the demoniac desire to drag me, who have done nothing to harm you, down to your abyss. But, Countess Worronska, what wretched error is this upon which you are squandering your power, your glorious gifts? I know it. Do not think that what you say is new to me. It is the old threadbare philosophy of the voluptuary. It is the proclamation of all that mankind should conceal, if not for the sake of morality, then for the sake of immortal beauty, because it is monstrous if you will not call it immoral. It is what has branded the words

'emancipation of woman' with eternal disgrace. Enough! Spare me a nearer approach to so disgusting a theme. I know sufficient of it to condemn it; for it was my right and my duty, as a champion of our rights, to examine and prove all that had been done by any of my sex for the amelioration of its condition. And I have found with the deepest sorrow how widely different these women's paths are from mine, how little they understand their own dignity. What they call emancipation is degradation,--what should make them free makes them bold. Their frankness becomes shamelessness. What they call casting off ignoble fetters is licentiousness. What do they do? What do they achieve to show themselves worthy of the rights that they demand? Are such feats as smoking cigars and shooting pistols the evidences of our greatness? And what about these very rights that they demand? What does this Louisa A---- want? What do all these women want, who strut like stage-heroines about the world, filling it with shrill clamour about their misunderstood hearts? Fie upon them! They train themselves to be slaves by their struggles for emancipation,--slaves to their desires and to men; for all their bombastic phrases about freedom signify freedom of intercourse with the other sex."

The countess sprang up.

"Hear me to the end," said Ernestine, more and more animated by a noble ardour. "My words cannot do you the harm that yours might have done me. I deeply regret that my efforts could have been for one moment confounded with yours, and therefore I will clear myself to your better self, without an instant's delay, from the suspicion of abetting you in any way. Let me tell you that my purpose is solely to vindicate the intellectual honour of my sex,--to enlarge the bounds of our ability, not of our will. Emancipation of the spirit is the goal for which I strive. Or, to speak more plainly, you work for the emancipation of the flesh,--I for emancipation from the flesh. You see our efforts are as wide asunder as the poles; and, I tell you frankly, I fear the shadow that intercourse with you would cast upon my pure cause."

The countess drew around her her mantle of black lace, that had slipped from her shoulders, and shrouded herself in it as in a cloud, then stepped up to Ernestine, who had also risen from her seat, raised her hand, and said in a tone of menace, "You will repent this."

Ernestine calmly returned her gaze. "I scarcely think so, Countess Worronska. Thanks to my occupations, I stand entirely outside of the sphere where you could harm me."

"I could kill you!" hissed the countess, gasping for breath, while the blood rushed to her head and the room grew dark before her eyes.

"Oh, no, you neither could nor would," said Ernestine with cutting contempt. "You would not afford the world the spectacle of so bold a champion of our freedom ending her days in penal confinement."

"You are right,--it would be folly to commit a crime when easier means would gain the same end. I will deal you a death-blow, and your life shall bleed slowly away, and none of our excellent laws can touch me. I will wrest from you the man whom you love. I will,--and, trust me, what I will I can."

Ernestine said not a word. She was benumbed, as if by a blow. She did not see the countess leave the room,--she saw only, by the glare of the burning torch that the wretched woman had hurled into her breast, her own heart.

Was she, then, in love? And with whom?

## **CHAPTER VIII.**

### **"WHEN WOMEN HOLD THE REINS."**

Breathless with rage, the Worronska descended the stairs and left the house. A groom was driving a splendid carriage-and-four up and down before the house. She beckoned to him; he drove up and sprang down to assist his mistress, who, mounted upon the box, took the reins and whip, and, relieved by being able to vent her wrath upon some living thing, cut viciously at her impatient horses. The groom sprang nimbly into his place behind her, and away like the wind went the modern Victory in her triumphal chariot, as if rushing to breathe vengeance and hate into hosts fighting upon the battle-plain.

"Is it possible that that hectic, ill-tempered girl can rival me with such a man as Möllner?" she said to herself. "But shame on me!" she instantly added, "let me not, in my anger, prove a slanderer! She is beautiful, and a thousand times wiser than I,--but, curse her! I could strangle her with this hand!"

The passionate woman felt hot tears coursing down her cheeks. She struggled for composure; her chest heaved with the effort to breathe freely. She encouraged her horses to still greater speed, so that her carriage fairly rocked from side to side. She was glorious to behold in her wrath, as she both urged and restrained the spirited animals,—fit emblems of her own wild passions.

"But I will show her who she is and who I am," she murmured. "That I should be insulted by this German prude!" And she gave the near horse a cut with her whip, making him rear wildly and then drag on the others in his headlong career. In a few minutes the village was passed through, and the village curs desisted from barking at the horses' heels, and retired growling to their homes. The steep descent of the hill upon which the village was built was close at hand.

"Madame," said the groom to her in Russian, "look there!" He pointed to a sign-post by the wayside, warning travellers of the steep road. But it was too late; the countess needed both hands and all her strength to hold in her steeds, and could not reach the handle of the brake.

"We shall get down safely," she cried, holding the heads of the four noble animals well in rein. But as the road made a slight turn she recognized in the foot-path before her a well-known form. Her face flushed crimson,—it was Möllner. She no longer saw the steep descent,—she did not see that she must pass the church, where service was held at the time and all vehicles were required by law to pass at a walk; she only saw Johannes, whom she would overtake at all hazards. She gave the horses the rein, and they rushed on as if for their lives. Then Johannes turned his head towards her and made signs to her, but she did not understand them. He stood still. She thundered past the church, and two or three peasants, disturbed in their devotions, came running out and looked menacingly after her. Johannes made signs to her again, more earnestly than before, and now she saw that he meant she should look where she was going,—in the road just before her there was a group of children playing. She tried to turn aside—tried to hold in her horses, but in vain. Neither horses nor carriage could be guided or restrained in the impetus that they had gained from the steep descent, and they tore madly on directly towards the children. Johannes, in the greatest alarm, jumped over the hedge dividing the foot-path from the road. The children scattered in terror.

There was a shriek. The countess looked around,—no child was near. Whence came that cry? It came from under her wheels. At that moment Johannes reached the carriage, seized the leaders by their bridles and brought them to a stand-still. Then he stooped down and drew forth from beneath the carriage a lovely little girl, quite senseless. With a wrathful glance at the countess, he took the child in his arms, and murmured, "I thought so!"

"Is she dead?" asked the countess, pale with fright, and restraining with difficulty her excited steeds, while the groom put large stones in front of the wheels.

"Not dead," replied Möllner, "but no doubt severely injured."

"Oh, what an unfortunate accident!" cried the countess, quite beside herself.

"It was no accident!" Johannes rejoined severely, "but the inevitable consequence of your furious driving, Countess Worronska."

He leaned against the hedge, and began, without a word more, to look into the extent of the child's injuries. "This is what comes of it," he muttered with suppressed indignation, "when women hold the reins."

"Möllner, do not reproach me," the countess entreated. He paid her no attention,—he was engrossed with the poor little victim upon his knee.

"Whose child is it?" he asked of her playmates, who came flocking around him.

"It is Keller's Käthchen!" cried the children. "Ah, our dear little Käthchen!"

Some crowded about Johannes, others ran to the church to call the parents. Johannes tenderly bound up the child's bleeding forehead with his pocket-handkerchief, and carefully drew off its thick jacket to examine the shoulder-joint, that seemed to be broken.

The Worronska devoured the scene with envious eyes. She saw him only,—the grace of his motions, the tender care that he lavished upon the child,—and, like molten lava, the words burst from her lips, "Oh that I were that child!"

Johannes did not even hear her.

"The arm must go," he said sadly. "The best that you can do. Countess Worronska, is to drive to town as quickly as you can and send out Professor Kern or some other skilful surgeon."

"Möllner," she implored, "I cannot go until you have forgiven me!"

"I pray you make haste, madame. Your first duty is to do what you can for the child; and I am afraid you will suffer from any delay, for there come the enraged peasants."

Like bees disturbed in their hive, a menacing, murmuring throng came flocking out of the

church, and in a minute surrounded the strangers.

"What has happened?"

"Who is hurt?"

"A child run over!"

These words ran from mouth to mouth, and every one pressed forward to know whether it was his child. But alarm soon gave way to indignation,--for Käthchen, pretty little roguish Käthchen Keller, was the pet of the village. All loved her, and were shocked and grieved to see the blooming flower so ruthlessly cut down. The child had never harmed a living thing. Every one had been gladdened by her bright smile and taken delight in her chubby innocent face. And that this dear, artless little creature should be sacrificed to the mad humour of an arrogant stranger! What business had this crazy woman in their quiet village, disturbing the repose of their holiday and destroying the poor peasants' most precious possessions?

Maledictions were the answers to all these questions, that arose instantly in the minds of the villagers, already heated by wine, and their next thought was of revenge.

"Curses upon the vile woman," began one aloud, "to drive so madly!"

"Where were your eyes?" asked another. "Such a child is not a dog, to be driven over! Could you not turn aside?"

"She thought a peasant's child was of no consequence," said a third.

"Who ever saw four horses harnessed together!" exclaimed several.

"There is no end to the insolent pranks of these city folk."

"Thunder and lightning!" cried a sturdy, broad-shouldered peasant. "Stop talking, and let us have her before the magistrate."

"Yes, yes! to the burgomaster's!" shouted the crowd.

Johannes was in a most trying position. He still had the child in his arms, no one had taken her from him. He could not carry her away,--he dared not leave the defenceless woman to the insults of the mob. He tried to speak to the people, but in vain; they paid no attention to him. They had heard and seen the countess rattle past the church a few minutes before, and all their fury was concentrated upon her.

Johannes made a sign to the countess, who stood up in her carriage, regarding the people with contempt, to drive on instantly; but she cried, "*Croyez-vous que je craigne la canaille? Je ne quitterai pas cette place sans que vous veniez avec moi!*"

Then a voice shrieked, in the midst of the tumult, "Holy Mother! my child, my poor child!" and a woman rushed up, tore the little girl out of Johannes's arms, and covered her with tears and kisses.

A handsome young peasant followed her, and gazed, wringing his hands, and stupefied with horror, at his senseless child. "God in heaven! what have we done, that we should be visited so heavily?" he murmured, and would have fallen, had not two of his friends supported him.

"Her eyes should be torn out!" shrieked the mother, metamorphosed to a fury, while she pressed her child to her breast, as if to guard her darling from the danger to which she had fallen a victim. "To jail with her, abandoned, God-accursed wretch that she is!" And she kissed the child and bathed it in tears.

"Do not curse," said her husband gloomily,--"it's sinful on a holiday. God will one day," and he pointed to Käthchen, "demand this life at her hands. She will not escape punishment."

"May it soon overtake her!" sobbed the woman.

The priest now approached from the church, with all the consolation that the occasion required of him, and the schoolmaster humbly followed.

"See, see, reverend father, what they have done to my child," the mother cried, when she saw them. "And Herr Leonhardt too,--ah, she was his pet. What is to be done?"

"What a piteous sight!" said Herr Leonhardt, stooping over his little favourite, while the tears dropped from his poor eyes, and all the women wailed in chorus. But the priest felt called to utter a few solemn words of consolation in season.

"Give thanks, my dear Frau Keller," he said, raising his hands,--"give thanks for the abundant grace of our blessed mother Mary, in that she has so distinguished you above others as to call your dear child to be a holy angel in a better world, upon the very day of her own most blessed Assumption."



"Reverend father," said Johannes, "this gratitude is not necessary, thank God, as yet, for the child lives, and will live,--I will answer for it."

"Ah!" wailed the mother in despair, "you do not know what it is to bring such a child into the world, to love it and work for it night and day until it grows big, to go without many a bit yourself that it may have enough, and, when it has got to be a joy and pleasure to you, to pick it up here all crushed and broken! God punish her! God punish her!" With these words the woman hurried away, her husband supporting her trembling arms, that were scarcely able to sustain the child's weight, and yet would not resign it. The pastor and the schoolmaster went with her.

"Here," called the Worronska after the retreating parents, "take this for the present. You shall have more by-and-by." She held out a heavy, well-filled purse.

"Keep your money, we do not want it," said the husband with sullen rage, and went on without turning his eyes from his child.

The countess looked down, pale and agitated.

"He is right, we do not want money, but justice," shouted the mob, and pressed so close around the carriage that Johannes reached it with difficulty. He hastily kicked away the stones from beneath the wheels, and cried out to the Worronska,

"Drive on, in Heaven's name! Would you expose yourself to useless insults?"

"Don't let her go," was the cry. "Take out the horses! Go for the burgomaster!"

"If one of us drives over a cat, he is carried off to the lock-up,--let the great folks fare the same."

Some even began to unharness the horses,--but Johannes interposed with iron determination, snatched the whip from the countess, who never took her eyes from him, gave the noble animals the lash, and away they went through the living wall that was closing around them. A shout of rage arose, the carriage was pursued for a short distance, but it was out of sight in a few minutes, leaving behind only the unfortunate groom, cowering terrified in the middle of the road.

Then the universal indignation was turned upon Johannes, who stood quietly there with the whip in his hand. He had delivered the stranger from just punishment, and had assisted her to escape,--he was in league with her.

"You are one of her friends. You shall answer for her to us!"

"I certainly will, good people," said Johannes calmly and kindly. "First let me do all that I can for the poor child, and then I will go with you to the burgomaster's or wherever else you choose." This simple answer entirely disarmed the rage of the crowd.

"The gentleman is right, I know him," cried a newly-arrived peasant. It was the same man with whom Johannes had spoken upon his first visit to the castle.

"Why did you help that bad woman to escape?" asked some.

"Because she should be dealt with in an orderly manner. I promise you satisfaction, and much greater satisfaction than you would have in maltreating a woman."

"He is a just gentleman, a brave man!" said the people one to another.

"He takes it all upon himself,--that is honest!"

"Come, then, good people, and show me where the Kellers live,--afterwards we will have a word together."

The peasants assented, well content. "Yes, yes! that's all right!"

They had not far to go to the wretched straw-thatched hut of the day-labourer Keller.

A wooden flight of steps upon the outside of the hut led to the upper story,--the space beneath was used as a stable, and the one room above it, that served for sleeping room and dwelling-room, contained a large bed, an earthenware stove, two wooden chairs, and a table. Over the bed hung a carved crucifix, with a skull, and a vessel for holy water, and in the bed little Kätchen lay quiet and patient, almost smothered beneath the heavy coverlet, gazing at the by-standers with bewildered eyes. Her mother knelt by the bedside, weeping. Several women were trying to comfort her, telling her how quickly and well the broken limb would heal if she would only have a model of it in wax hung before the picture of the Holy Mother of God in the church. The waxen limbs of all kinds that already hung like a wreath around the sacred picture bore witness to the efficacy of this pious custom. Frau Keller must lose no time in presenting her offering,--for it was especially efficacious upon Assumption day.

Frau Keller shook her head. She was obstinate in her grief, and did not believe in this kind of cure.

"Kaspar," she said, "hung up a leg before the Holy Mother, and paid a gulden for it. And what good did it do? Did he not die of the trouble in his leg after he went to town?"

The priest stood at the foot of the bed, listening to the conversation and shaking his head. "Columbane, Columbane," he now began, "you blaspheme! Do you not remember the cause of Kaspar's death? Do not accuse the Blessed Virgin,--how could she help the man when he would not wait for her aid, but listened to the evil counsel of the Hartwich and had his leg cut off? He did not die of disease, but because he made friends with an enemy of the Holy Mother."

"Well, then," said one of the women, "perhaps the Holy Mother of God drew him to her again by that very leg."

"What? Then perhaps she might draw my little Käthchen to her in the same way," cried Frau Keller defiantly. "No, no! let me keep my child, crippled though she be, if she only lives. I am strong, and can work for her. No, Käthi dear, you do not want to go to heaven. You will stay with father and mother, even if they have only a crust for you."

"Yes, mother dear, I will stay with you," said the child in her sweet voice, leaning her head wearily upon her mother, who, sobbing, stroked the pale little cheeks. "Mother dear," she said, and there came the sweetest expression into her eyes, "do not cry so,--it does not hurt me much."

A dull cry of anguish broke from the mother's breast, and she hid her face among the bedclothes. "My child! my child! complain,--only be naughty and fret,--your patience breaks my heart,--you seem already on the way to be a blessed angel."

Upon the other side of the bed, that stood with its head to the wall, were two silent figures, the father and the schoolmaster. The latter gazed down upon the child with hands clasped as if in prayer, while the father leaned against the wall, his face hidden in his hands. He looked up now, and said with emotion but with resignation, "Be quiet, wife, and let us bear it as well as we can. If we must lose the child, she is too good for us,--I almost believe so now."

"Father dear," said Käthchen, "if you talk so, I must cry, and then you will cry more."

Herr Leonhardt plucked the man by the sleeve, and whispered, "The child ought to be kept perfectly quiet. Rouse yourself, and send these women away."

"So I say," said Johannes, who had stood for a few minutes unobserved upon the threshold of the door. "I pray you, good women, leave us to ourselves. So many people in this small room worry the child. Your friendly interest is very grateful; show it now by withdrawing."

The kindly neighbours willingly departed, he was such a handsome, pleasant gentleman who requested them to do so. The priest also took his leave; the schoolmaster only, at a sign from Johannes, remained.

Outside, there was no end to the questions and answers, as to how all was going on within, and how Käthchen, usually so nimble, could have got under the carriage-wheels. She was indeed a good little child, for it was at last ascertained that she had escaped herself and was perfectly safe, when she turned back to rescue a smaller child, a neighbour's little boy, who was standing still in the middle of the road. The boy escaped, but his poor little preserver was thrown down by the horses, and so severely injured.

"She is a dear pet--Käthchen," the men declared; and the women cried, "Oh, if you could see her now lying there in bed, you would believe that she was half in heaven already."

She was indeed in heaven, as is every true, pure child; for there is a heaven so close to the earth that only little children can walk beneath its canopy. We have grown up away from it; its glories are veiled from our eyes; it lies below us, like golden clouds around a mountain upon whose summit we are standing.

"Well, Käthchen, how are you now?" asked Johannes, stepping up to the bedside.

"Very well, thank you," said Käthchen dutifully, as she had been taught to reply.

There was something exquisitely touching in the half-unconscious self-control of the child. Johannes was moved by it. He stooped down and kissed the pretty lips.

"One more!" she entreated, putting her unhurt arm around his neck.

"Our Käthchen," said Herr Leonhardt, "is a good little girl. Do you know, Herr Professor, that the other day she was the only one in the whole school who would give Fräulein von Hartwich a kiss?"

At mention of that name a slight flush passed over Johannes's face. He sat down upon the edge of the bed and looked tenderly at the child. "Indeed! Did you do that, you angel?" he whispered, and again he kissed the lips, that seemed dearer to him after what the schoolmaster had told him. Profound silence reigned in the room. The parents looked on without a word. Herr Leonhardt alone saw Johannes's emotion. The little chest rose and fell more regularly. Johannes pillowed the head upon his warm, soft hand, and the child dropped asleep beneath the gentle gaze of her

protector. He looked at the clock. The surgeon, whom the countess was to send, could not arrive for a long while yet. Nevertheless, he determined to wait for him.

"Husband," whispered Frau Keller, "I have a strange thought. When the schoolmaster said just now that Käthi had kissed the Hartwich, I suddenly remembered how the child came home and told me all about it, and complained that the other children had jeered her, and told her that something would certainly happen to her,—that the Hartwich would bewitch her! 'Sh!--be still!--don't let the schoolmaster hear; he would be angry; but, for the life of me, I can't help thinking it very strange!"

The man looked thoughtfully at his wife, and scratched his head. After a little he whispered, "It is not worth while to say anything about it; but you are right,—it is very strange. Deuce take the Hartwich! What business had she to kiss our child? There's something wrong about her."

"Speak to the priest about it, and see what he thinks, but don't let the schoolmaster know that you do so. Go. Say you want some beer. The child is asleep now."

The man slipped out as softly as he could upon his hob-nailed shoes, to consult the priest upon so grave a matter.

## **CHAPTER IX.**

### **VOX POPULI, VOX DEI.**

When Keller, on his way to the priest, reached the village inn, he went in to refresh himself with a mug of beer, and found the priest whom he was seeking in the inn parlour, surrounded by a circle of auditors from the village and neighbouring farms. The Protestant pastor was also present, for the occurrence of the morning was a subject for universal discussion. The host was busy supplying the company with beer-mugs and bottles, secretly congratulating himself upon the accident that had brought him so much custom.

"Ah, here is the poor father! Well, what news? How is she now?" were the words that greeted Keller's entrance.

"Bad," he replied. "The child will be a cripple."

A murmur of compassion was heard.

Keller turned to the priest and asked to be permitted a word with him in private. His request was willingly granted.

"Your reverence," began the peasant, "Columbane thinks the Hartwich has been the cause of all this."

The priest clasped his hands. "What do I hear? Why does she think so?"

Keller told him what had happened.

The priest shook his head, and said in a loud voice to his Protestant brother, "Does it not seem, respected brother, as if we were forbidden by the visible finger of the Lord from holding any communication with this unholy woman, who has crept in among us like a poisonous serpent?" He then repeated, so that all could hear, what Keller had just told him.

The Protestant divine, who was always in harmony with his colleague when there was a common enemy to do battle with, also considered the matter a very serious one. "It would of course be superstition to believe that the Hartwich had bewitched the child, but it stands written, 'Cursed are the ungodly,' and the curse must cleave to all who come in contact with any such."

There was instantly a great commotion among the peasants drinking in the room.

"This much is certain," cried the pastor with great emphasis, "that every misfortune comes, directly or indirectly, from the Hartwich!"

"Yes, yes," resounded from all parts of the room. "Whom has she benefited in any way?"

"No one, no one!"

"Has she not tried to sow among you the seeds of her sinful doctrines? has she not, like the serpent of Eden, hissed into the ear of the sufferers to whose bedside she was admitted dreadful

doubts, instead of pouring into them the balm of divine consolation?"

"Yes, yes,--she always spoke disrespectfully of our pastors and their office."

The clerical gentlemen looked mournfully at each other.

"She has tried to stir up rebellion against the Church!" cried the priest. "She even turned me ignominiously from the doors when I went, in all the dignity of my office, to administer extreme unction to her servant Kunigunda, and she pretended in excuse that the maid was not going to die, and the ceremony would excite her and make her worse. She could not bear the sight of the Crucified beneath her roof. She is an outcast from God and His Church. Centuries ago, such as she were burnt alive; there was good reason for it. But we all suffer, and must continue to suffer, from their presence among us. The devil has put on the cloak of philanthropy, beneath which he hides all such sinners, so that we cannot touch them."

"She is a poisonous sore in our flesh," added the Protestant pastor, "and it stands written, 'If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out;' but we dare not cut out this sore that offends us."

"Why not?--what is to hinder us?" shouted the excited peasants.

"Then you really believe that she has done this mischief to our poor child?" said Keller with horror.

"Well, if we cannot exactly believe that," replied the Protestant pastor, "we must confess that we see in the accident a sign from Providence that we should avoid her. This much is certain, that the stranger who drove over the child had been visiting the Hartwich, so that, if she had not dwelt among us, the accident would most assuredly never have occurred, for that furious woman would never have come here."

"The Hartwich is to blame for it all!" growled the drunken throng.

"She is, in one way or another," continued the expositor of Christian love. "I repeat, with my respected brother, every misfortune among us is her work."

"Yes, every misfortune is the work of the Hartwich!" yelled the chorus.

"Gracious heavens! See! look there!" cried one, pointing to the windows.

All looked out.

"'Tis the Hartwich herself!"

"Does she dare to come down here?"

"She wants to see the misery she has caused!"

"Holy Mother!" cried Keller, "she is going to my house!" And he rushed out.

Like fermenting wine from a cask when the stopper is removed, the whole drunken throng rushed after him into the street.

Priest and pastor remained behind, looking at one another. "What shall we do?" asked one. "Ought we not to follow them, to prevent mischief?"

"Let the people rage, my worthy friend," replied the other. "It is not for us to interfere in such matters. She is not worthy of our protection, and the just indignation of the people will find vent in words, that will not harm her, but that it will be well for her to hear. *Vox populi, vox Dei!*"

"True, true," assented the other. "We should not interfere with the public sense of right in such a case. She would not listen to us. Let her hear the truth from the mouths of the peasants; perhaps it will have more effect upon her coming from them than from men of culture like ourselves!"

"Let us hope so," said the Catholic father devoutly, as he seated himself by his Protestant colleague at an empty table, and filled his glass from the bottle of old wine that the host placed before him.

"What is that?" asked Johannes softly, as a distant hum of approaching voices was heard. He sat with his hand still patiently supporting Käthchen's head, and would not draw it away, lest he should awaken the child.

The schoolmaster went on tiptoe to the window and looked out. "I cannot tell what is the matter," he said. "An excited crowd is rushing to and fro in the street, but I cannot see who they are or what it is all about."

"The people have not recovered from the event of this morning," said Johannes.

Meanwhile the noise drew near. Various abusive words were heard, and it seemed as if stones were thrown and fell upon the pavement. Shrill female voices cried quite distinctly, "Not in here!" "Go away!" "Put her out!" Boys shouted and whistled through it all.

"Good heavens!" cried the schoolmaster, "they are persecuting a lady! Oh, yes! Herr Professor, look! she is trying to escape into the houses! The women thrust her out and shut their doors upon her----"

"Brutes!" exclaimed Johannes, beside himself with rage, for one glance from the window had shown him how matters stood.

"Holy Maria! they are throwing stones and apples at her!" cried Frau Keller.

Johannes had rushed from the room as the schoolmaster turned towards him with the words, "It is Fräulein von Hartwich!"

But, just as Johannes reached the stairs, Keller burst in, pale and agitated, and locked the door after him.

"What do you mean?" cried Johannes. "Do you wish to shut me in here?"

"Ah, sir!" implored Keller, blocking up the passage, "do not open it,--the Hartwich wants to come in----"

"Well, then, let her in instantly! why do you delay?"

"For God's sake, keep her out!" said Keller.

"Are you mad," cried Johannes, "that you would close your doors upon a fellow-being imploring protection? Open the door, or I will force the lock."

"Sir, sir, my house is my own, if I am only a poor peasant!" cried Keller still blocking the entrance. "This is the abode of honest labour, and no accursed foot shall cross its threshold."

The uproar without seemed stationary before the house. A shower of stones against the door showed that the persecuted woman had fled hither. Johannes was no longer master of himself. His blood boiled in his veins, his heart throbbed to bursting. With the strength of a giant he seized the burly peasant by his broad shoulders and hurled him aside--almost into the arms of the schoolmaster, who was coming to the rescue also. Then he tore open the door, and Ernestine fell half fainting at his feet. He caught her in his arms, and, as he stood thus shielding her, cried, in a tone that left no doubt in the minds of his hearers as to the truth of his words, "I'll knock down the first man who dares to come near this lady."

A dull murmur arose. "Let him try to stop us," cried several, and clenched fists were shaken at him.

"Yes, I will try it,--but the man who dares me to try it will repent the trial!" threatened Johannes. And so commanding were his words and bearing that no one ventured further than to throw a stone or two, accompanying them with abusive epithets. Johannes drew Ernestine more closely to his side. "Shame on you, cowards that you are!" He turned to Keller. "Will you still refuse a shelter to this lady?--you see that she can scarcely stand."

Keller looked at his wife, who had run out to them. "Do not let her in!" she cried. "For God's sake, keep her out! has she not done us harm enough?"

Keller looked at Johannes and shrugged his shoulders. "You see my wife will not allow it."

Johannes stamped his foot in despair.

"Are you human?"

"We hope so, sir," said Keller, insolently thrusting his hands in his pockets.

"And far better than the friends of that woman there," shouted the mob, and a small stone flew close past Johannes.

"If I were as crazy as you are," cried he, "I should throw down upon you the stones that you have thrown at me here, and my aim would be better than yours. But I will not contend with drunken men or do battle with people who are not responsible for their actions; all I ask of you is to give way and allow me to take this lady to her home."

The crowd maintained its place in a compact mass, and only replied by unintelligible words, from which, however, Johannes gathered that Ernestine's punishment was not yet considered sufficient, and that she was not to be allowed to escape so easily.

"I will pay you whatever you ask, if you will only afford Fräulein von Hartwich shelter until I have quieted this tumult," said Johannes to Keller.

"You'll get nothing out of me, sir! Neither money nor fine words will get her across my threshold."

"Mother, let her come in," suddenly cried a voice that had a wonderful effect upon the mob. Käthchen had slipped from her bed unperceived, and in her distress had run out to her mother. She threw her uninjured arm around Ernestine's knees, and looked up at her weeping. "They shall not hurt you; I love you so dearly!"

"Jesus Maria!" shrieked Frau Keller. "My child! my child!" She tore the little girl away from Ernestine, and, followed by her husband, carried her into the house.

"Do you want to kill yourself?" cried the father in despair.

"No! I want the lady, I want the lady," the child was still heard wailing from the room.

A commotion now began, which threatened to be serious indeed. "There, now, you see it with your own eyes,--the sick child even crawls out of bed to her. Don't you see now that she is bewitched? The Hartwich must leave the place this very day, or we'll hunt her out of the village."

"Men! men! for God's sake, what are you doing?" said a gentle voice behind Johannes.

"Oho, the schoolmaster!" was now the cry. "Let him come down,--we've had our eyes upon him for a long time. Come down, schoolmaster, you shall be ducked for your friendship for the witch." And again the human flood overflowed the lower step of the stairs at the head of which Johannes was standing.

"Back!" commanded Johannes, resigning Ernestine to the schoolmaster, "back! now you see my arms are free."

Involuntarily the foremost recoiled at sight of his menacing attitude.

"Deluded people," cried Johannes, beside himself with indignation, "is there nothing sacred from your frantic rage,--neither a defenceless girl nor the gray head of your teacher? What has he done, except spend his life in the thankless endeavour to make reasonable human beings of you?"

"He is friends with the Hartwich,--it is his fault that she kissed the child. His house ought to be burned over his head!"

"Yes, yes!" roared the mob, "their holes should be burned out and destroyed--his and hers. Blasphemers! Unbelievers! They shall yet learn to believe in God."

"This is too much!" thundered Johannes. "Would you prove your religion by becoming incendiaries? Woe upon you if you lay a finger upon what belongs to either of these people! Do you know the penalty for arson? And, depend upon it, I will see to it that you do not escape."

A shout of rage arose at these words.

"Herr Professor," said Leonhardt imploringly, "do not aggravate these people further,--we cannot convince them. Children," he called down to them, and his voice trembled with pain, not with fear,--"children, I have grown old among you; I know you better than you know yourselves. You are too wise to do anything that would subject you to the penalty of the law, and too kind to commit an outrage upon people who have never harmed you. You do not believe that I am an unbeliever. Have I not educated your children to be useful, God-fearing men and women? Have I not stood your friend in every time of trouble? The little house, that you in your blind fury would destroy, has afforded many of you a peaceful shelter,--it is a sacred spot to your children, and could you lay a finger upon it? Go to the church-yard and see if there is a single grave there of your loved ones that has not been adorned by flowers from my garden, and would you bury it beneath the ruins of my dwelling? No, do not try to seem worse than you are." He placed Ernestine gently down upon the landing and stood in front of her. "You know that your old master loves all God's creatures, and would you condemn him for taking compassion upon the unhappy maiden whom no one pities, whom all hate? Do you call me godless because I hoped to lead this erring but noble nature to find her God again? Yes, take up your stones,--look! I will take off my cap and expose my white head to your aim. Where is the hand that will lift itself against it?"

The old man stood with uncovered head, holding his cap in his clasped hands. The evening breeze played amid his silver locks, and the stones that had been picked up were gently dropped again.

Then his arm was drawn down by his side and a kiss was imprinted upon his withered hand. It was Ernestine. Johannes saw the act, and his eyes were moist. She could be grateful. He exchanged a happy glance with the old man to whom she had just paid such a tribute.

"He is only a weak old man," muttered the people,--"let him alone. He means well."

"I will go and bring their pastors," said Leonhardt softly to Johannes, and he descended the steps. He walked quietly through the midst of the crowd, that opened before him, but closed up again when he had passed through.

"Come," said Johannes, raising Ernestine from the ground, "let us try to put an end to this wretched scene." He carried rather than led her down the steps. "Make way there!" he called in a commanding tone.

The foremost in the mob gave way. Just then Frau Keller appeared at the door. She held the cup of holy water, which usually hung above the bed, and she sprinkled with its contents the spot where Ernestine had been standing. Her pious act was greeted with a shout of applause. Ernestine saw her, and trembled and turned pale, while large tears gathered in her eyes; she grew dizzy, and would have fallen had not Johannes supported her.

"Courage, courage," he whispered,--"do not let such folly distress you."

"Look, look! she cannot bear the holy water. She didn't mind the stones,--but a few drops of water are too much for her." Thus shouted the mob, and the uproar began again.

"Is this possible?" cried Johannes, casting prudence to the winds. "Is it possible that in the nineteenth century, and in a civilized country, such utter barbarian stupidity should exist? Do you really believe, if Fräulein Hartwich were in league with the devil, that she would have borne your abuse, that she would not have thrown her spells over you long ago, and escaped your brutality? Do you think that she listens to you from choice, and likes to have stones thrown at her? Why, the very patience and resignation with which she has endured your outrageous insults might prove to you that she has no supernatural power at her command,--that she has not even the protection of a bold nature, like the other lady, with whom you were justly indignant. But let me tell you that I am neither feeble nor weak, and that my patience is exhausted, and my power, although not supernatural is quite sufficient to punish such excesses as this, and to conjure up among you a host of evil spirits in the shape of a detachment of gens-d'armes. Therefore be quiet, and let us pass on our way. Every moment of delay increases the weight of the charges that I shall bring against you before the magistrate."

So saying, he put one arm about Ernestine, and with the other cleared a path for himself through the throng, who were somewhat quelled by his last words, and gave place grumbling.

And now the clergymen, followed by the schoolmaster, appeared, with every sign of hurry and amazement.

"You come too late, gentlemen, to prevent what must cover those under your charge with shame," said Johannes with severity. "I supposed such scenes impossible in our day. You, gentlemen, have taken care that I should be better informed, and have prepared a rich page in the history of our civilization. I am well aware from what source the insults heaped by these misguided people upon Fräulein Hartwich draw their inspiration, and I consider you, gentlemen, responsible for the restoration of order and the safety of this lady." He drew Ernestine's arm more firmly within his own, and walked on without waiting for a reply from the reverend gentlemen, who stood there speechless with alarm and embarrassment, looking after him with a degree of respect that they could not control.

In silence the pair reached the castle and entered the garden. Ernestine passively allowed herself to be led through the shady walks. Involuntarily Johannes turned towards the little eminence where he had seen her for the first time. He had resolved not to leave Ernestine here, but to place her that very evening beneath his mother's protection. How should he persuade her to such a step? This was the question that he propounded to himself, breathlessly searching for the answer.

Ernestine was for the time incapable of speech. She could not raise her eyes to her protector. Mortification, profound mortification, overpowered her. How thoroughly she had recognized his position as a man, and her own as a woman! She admired him,--she was ashamed of herself. What a feeling it was!--yes, it was the same self-humiliation that she had felt once before, beneath the oak tree where, when flying as to-day from insults and sneers, she had met the handsome lad who had given her the prophetic book. But when would the prophecy in the fairy-tale be fulfilled? When should she cease to be laughed at, despised, and insulted? When should the lonely, persecuted, weary swan unfold its plumage upon calm waters in sunshine and peace? And in an access of pain she covered her face with her hands and burst into tears. She sank down upon the mound and sobbed like a child. Johannes stood silent before her. His mind was filled with the same thoughts, the same memories, and, like an answer to her mute soliloquy, there came from his lips, in tones of melting tenderness, the words, "Poor swan!" Ernestine's hands dropped from her face, she stared at him with wide-open eyes,--then sprang up, and, while her pale cheeks flushed, and her whole frame trembled, gazed at him still, as if she would look him through, her agitation increasing every moment. "There--there is only one person on earth who knows that," she faltered.

"What?" asked Johannes with a beating heart.

"What I was thinking of--about the swan!" she articulated with difficulty, for her voice failed her.

Johannes, who stood somewhat below Ernestine, looked up at her expectantly. "And who is that person?" he asked gently.

Ernestine could not reply,--a strange thrill passed through her, and she awaited the issue of the miracle of the moment.

"Ernestine, do you remember the lad who once rescued a wild, timid girl from mortal peril?"

She bowed her head in assent. "Ernestine, did you ever then for one moment in your childish heart think of him with love?"

She raised her eyes to the twilight skies, and was silent for a moment; then she breathed a scarcely audible "Yes."

A light, feathery cloud hovered above her head. Was it the little mermaid, dead for her beloved's sake, and, dissolved in foam, borne away by the daughters of the air to eternal bliss? Could it return again,--that fair, half-forgotten love-dream of her childhood,--the only one she had ever dreamed?

And she looked after the floating cloud as it grew thinner and thinner, until it was gradually dissolved in air, and the gentle radiance of the evening star appeared where it faded.

"Ernestine, do you know me now?" said Johannes. "See, this is the second time that God has placed me by your side to rescue you from a self-sought peril, and, as when I then brought you down from the broken bough, so now I open wide my arms to you, and pray you, 'Seek refuge and safety here!' Oh, little dryad, you are the same as then, for all that you have grown so tall and beautiful! There are the same mysterious dark eyes, the same strange, lonely spirit imprisoned in the delicate frame, bewailing its Titan descent. I knew then that there was only one such creature in the world,--and I should have recognized you among thousands as I recognized you when you stood alone upon this hill. Wondrous and fairy-like creature that you are, if you do not dissolve in air at the touch of a mortal, come to this heart; if an earth-born being may approach you with earthly love, take mine and learn to love a mortal. Yes, pure, aspiring spirit, for whom this earth has never been a home, I am only a man,--and yet a faithful, true, and loving man. Can you love me again?"

Ernestine stood immovable. She had raised her hands to her forehead, as one is apt to do at hearing the mysterious, the incomprehensible.

"You do not speak; have you no words for me? Look, Ernestine, do you not remember the boy about whose neck you once clasped your trembling arms so willingly?"

At last she stretched out both hands to the earnest speaker, with a look of unrestrained delight. "Johannes," she cried, as tear after tear coursed down her cheek, "Johannes Möllner,--my childhood's friend,--I know you now."

He hastened to her side, and opened his arms to clasp her to his heart, but she recoiled with such a burning blush, with such childlike alarm painted upon her face, that Johannes controlled himself, and only pressed her delicate hands to his lips. Her maidenly reserve was sacred to him.

## **CHAPTER X.**

### **NOWHERE AT HOME.**

On this very evening there was a social meeting of the Professors at the Staatsrätthin's. Johannes had entirely forgotten it. As the afternoon passed and evening approached without bringing him, the Staatsrätthin grew really anxious about him, apart from the embarrassment which his absence caused with regard to her guests, to whom she knew not what excuse to make. She was walking to and fro in her garden behind the house, where her guests were to assemble and enjoy the lovely twilight in the open air.

Suddenly Angelika joined her in breathless haste. "Mother, mother, I have found out where Johannes has been all day long!" she cried, taking her hat off to cool her forehead, and throwing herself into a garden-chair. "Moritz has just got back from Hochstetten, whither he was called this afternoon, and he tells a wonderful tale. The whole village is in commotion,--the behaviour of the Hartwich has actually excited a tumult. There was an outbreak, and Johannes,--our Johannes,--publicly declared himself her champion!"

The Staatsrätthin clasped her hands and gazed incredulously at Angelika. "Is this true?"

"Oh, this is not all!" Angelika went on to say. "Moritz did not even see Johannes, for he was all the time--now, be composed, mother--in the castle with the Hartwich!"



"Good heavens!" cried her mother, seating herself upon a bench. "Has it gone so far already?" A long pause ensued. At last the anxious mother folded her hands in her lap and said softly to herself, "My son, my son, what are you doing?"

Angelika said nothing, but turned away. The same evening star that had beamed so gently upon Ernestine and Johannes glittered in the tears which filled the sister's eyes as she looked up at it.

"Angelika," said her mother mournfully, "you should not have told me this without some preparation. You forget that I am grown old, and my many trials of late years have robbed me of the power of endurance that I once possessed. How much I have gone through since your uncle Neuenstein's bankruptcy! All our misfortunes have come from Unkenheim,--your uncle's unlucky scheme in the purchase of the Hartwich factory, the loss of three-fourths of our property in the affair, and the consequent necessity of our leaving our home that Johannes might practise his profession for his livelihood here. And nothing of all this would have happened if we had never seen Unkenheim! And this wretched Hartwich girl comes too from that place! You will see that she is going to bring us additional misfortune! Shall we never draw a free breath again? Why should this creature disturb our dearly-purchased peace of mind?"

"Mother dear," Angelika entreated, kneeling down beside the Staatsrätin, "mother dear, do not cry now when we expect guests. Be comforted,--things will not go as wrong as you fear. Come, be again the calm, prudent mother who never seemed so great to me as in misfortune. I trust in God, and our Johannes----"

She did not finish her sentence, but arose hastily, for several of their friends appeared at the garden-gate. The Staatsrätin, accustomed to control herself, had regained her self-possession, and received her guests with her usual graceful cordiality.

"Where is your son?"

"Is your son not at home?"

To this question, asked at least twenty times, she replied always with unwearied patience, "He was suddenly called away, but I hope he will soon be here."

When old Heim appeared, he listened with a queer smile to the terrible tale that Angelika whispered into his ear.

"What a fellow he is,--this Johannes!" he said with kindly humour. "With her! with her at the castle! That's going rather too fast,--eh?"

"Oh, uncle!" cried Angelika, "is that all the sympathy you have for us in so grave a matter?"

"Why, you see, my child, the matter does not seem so grave to me as to you. Johannes is a man, and knows what he is about. You act as if he were a beardless boy, whose nurse ought to follow him about. If this clever girl pleases him, it is a proof of his taste. Whatever you do, I will not league with you for all the beseeching glances of those forget-me-not eyes of yours." And the old gentleman seated himself deliberately upon Angelika's straw hat, that she had forgotten to take from the chair where she had thrown it. "God bless me! what kind of a cushion have you put in my chair?" he cried, producing, amid universal laughter, a flattened mass of straw and violets that bore not the faintest resemblance to a hat.

"That comes of leaving one's things about. Who would have supposed that I should go about in my old age sitting upon straw hats? Well, well, child, to-day is a day of misfortunes!"

The company quickly assembled. The ladies seated themselves at the large round tea-table, the gentlemen stood about in groups, and, as smoking was allowed, puffed forth blue clouds of smoke into the clear evening air.

The moon began to cast a pale light through the crimson evening glow. Night-moths fluttered hither and thither, and now and then a big booming beetle would fly around the heads of the startled ladies. The tired birds flew in among the bushes to seek their nests, arousing the alarm of the younger girls who were in great terror of bats.

Suddenly a wiry voice without was heard chirping Rückert's song:

"Yes, a household dear and blest  
Mine shall always be.  
I'll invite there as my guest  
Him who pleases me."

And Elsa, leaning on her brother's arm, appeared at the door. The Staatsrätin arose.

"Ah, my dearest, motherly friend," cried Elsa from afar, gliding towards her, "I am late, am I not? Could my thoughts have borne me hither, I should have been with you long ago; but imagine--our droschky lost a wheel--and we had to walk all the way."

"I am very sorry," said the Staatsrätthin kindly. "You must have had quite a fright."

"Yes, it was a most unfortunate intermezzo, disturbing our anticipations of the pleasant evening," said Herbert politely.

"Oh, it did not spoil my enjoyment," laughed Elsa with pretty assurance, and she piped out the last couplet of her song:

"Thrown from the carriage should I be,  
A flowery grave awaiteth me."

"The only thing to lament was our tardiness in reaching you, and I ran myself quite out of breath."

"Not quite!" replied the Staatsrätthin with a smile. "You were trilling very gaily as you came along the Bergstrasse."

"Really, did you hear me?" asked Elsa in charming confusion. "My voice, then, was more fortunate than I,--it reached you sooner!"

"How is your wife?" the Staatsrätthin inquired of Herbert.

"Thank you,--she is always the same. The constant spectacle of her sufferings, without the power to alleviate them, is almost too much for me."

The Staatsrätthin looked compassionately at Herbert's sunken cheeks. "Poor Frau Herbert! and you too are greatly to be pitied!"

"I thank you for your sympathy,--it helps to lighten the burden of my anxiety on her account."

Elsa had not listened to this grave conversation; she had already joined the company, and the Staatsrätthin followed with Herbert.

"A bat! a bat!" cried one of the younger gentlemen as Elsa approached, and he pointed to a bird just whirring past.

"You are severe," one of his brethren said to him in a low voice.

"Only look," whispered a third, "Herbert is as fine as usual in a dress coat. It is not fair to appear in full dress when he knows that by the rules of these meetings we are all to come in morning costume."

"It is his way,--no one could expect anything else of Herbert!" said Taun.

"He's a fool," said Meibert,--"the charm of ease in an undress coat is one of the chief attractions of these meetings. At least I find it so."

"So do I, so do I," cried one and another of the party. Meanwhile Elsa was nodding and bowing in every direction. She exulted in the consciousness of giving so much pleasure by her presence. She loved every one, and every one loved her. Earth was a paradise, full of faith, hope, and charity,--through it she fluttered like a kindly fairy at her own sweet will. She was a little alarmed at not seeing Möllner, and her gaiety received a severer check than when she had nearly found her "flowery grave." But she comforted herself,--he would come,--he could not stay away from the place where Elsa was. And she determined not to visit his absence upon the company,--they were not to blame for it,--she would join in the conversation. There was something touching in her good-humoured vanity. She would use the advantages which she was conscious of possessing over others only for their benefit. She took pleasure in her imaginary gift of conversation only because she could thereby amuse her dear friends by means of it. How should she know that she was ridiculed and laughed at? She saw that mirth abounded wherever she was. How could it be caused by anything but delight in her presence? Her confidence in the esteem and love of her fellows was impregnable, for it was rooted in her unbounded confidence in her own excellence. Who would not love a creature so good, so talented, and withal so modest that she was kind and gentle to all? Why, no one could help it. This conviction inspired her in society with a self-possession that carried her untouched through all the contempt and sneers that she everywhere provoked, and kept her quiet self-sufficiency unruffled. Most happily for her, she felt all the blessing without an idea of the curse of mediocrity that attached to her in the presence of others.

She was quite idyllic to-day, for Elsa in the midst of nature was a very different person, although scarcely less lovely, from Elsa in her study. She had encircled with leaves her large straw hat,--the wide brim of which kept flapping up and down as she tripped about,--and a nosegay of wild flowers was stuck in her bosom. She loved wild flowers far more than garden flowers. Everybody admired garden flowers,--she pitied the wild flowers, and would atone by her love to the poor neglected blossoms of the field. Her delicate sense perceived beauty in the humblest thing that grew. She did not need grace of form and vividness of colour to impress her with the wisdom of the Creator. Every dandelion, every blade of grass, was lovely in her eyes. How wondrous was its structure! How its modest withdrawal from superficial eyes accorded with

her own retiring nature! And then it was the prerogative of a poetic temperament to see what was hidden to all the world beside. It was a severe blow, therefore, to her tender heart when the professor of botany asked, "But, Fräulein Elsa, why have you brought a bunch of hay to a house noted for its capital suppers?"

"Oh, you naughty man," she pouted, "you cannot tease me out of my love for these darlings."

"Do you take all these weeds under your protection?" asked the implacable professor. "Then you must have enough to do when the cattle are driven out to pasture."

All laughed, and Elsa laughed too. She could take a jest.

"But," she replied, "to fall a sacrifice to the stronger is a fate from which even Flora herself cannot shield her children. Thank God, they all grow again! I do not wish to save them from the animals whom they serve for food. It is an enviable lot to sustain life in others by one's own death. I wish to shield them from the contempt of men. Is it not a sacred duty to espouse the cause of the despised? And those who do not discharge it conscientiously in small matters will neglect it in more important things. So let me put my poor thirsty flowers in water, that they may lift up their little heads again."

They handed her a glass of water, into which the botanist recommended that a lump of sugar should be thrown, because, as he said, sugar-and-water was so much more nutritious.

"Go, go, naughty man," said Elsa, arranging her bouquet. "Look! is not that lovely?"

"My good Fräulein Elsa," cried the professor, "do not ask me to be enthusiastic over the beauty of a flower. I have long lost the sense of delight that people feel at sight of a flower. The most beautiful flowers for me are those that furnish most matter for scientific investigation."

"What a prosaic point of view!" cried Elsa. "Tell me, ladies, can there be anything more monstrous than a botanist who does not love flowers? It is as unnatural as for a musician to take no pleasure in music. It is treason to the *scientia amabilis*."

"You say so," replied the professor with some asperity, "only because you do not know what is at the present day called 'the lovely science.' I assure you, modern botany has, as De Bury remarks, no more right to this title than any other science. It is only the knowledge of a couple of thousands of names of flowers and the manifold conditions of their existence,—the examination into their manner of life,—in other words, the physiology of plants. The flower is not the end, but the means to an end, the end of physics, physiology, and every other science: the discovery of the whole by a knowledge of a part. Let this part be plant, man, or beast, we are all searching for the same laws, and it is just as unnecessary that a botanist should be fond of flowers as that a physiologist should be a philanthropist."

Elsa blushed rosy red at these words. "Möllner loves mankind,—I know he does," she whispered.

"So much the better for him if he does," said the professor smiling. "That is a private satisfaction of his own, and we will not disturb it. But, seen in the light of his profession, men are no more to him than plants,—to me plants are no less than men. Both are to us only subjects for untiring investigation."

"I cannot think that of Möllner," said Elsa softly to herself.

The botanist shrugged his shoulders compassionately and left her. When he rejoined his brethren, they accosted him with, "It is easy to see that you have not been here long, or you would not try to preach reason into Elsa Herbert. Who could make a woman understand such things?" And there was a burst of laughter, in which Hilsborn was the only one who did not join. He was never disposed to sneer. Although he himself could not overcome his dislike for Elsa, he was too amiable to put it into words.

"But, really, for one's own sake it is best to make an attempt at least to enlighten the ignorant," the botanist replied, when thus attacked. "It is impossible to listen in silence to such nonsense."

"Then, Fräulein Elsa, you consider it a blessed lot to be devoured by cows," said a young private tutor, who had but just thrown off his student's gown.

Elsa was quite happy. She had not received so much attention for a long time. It was the consequence of her originality. How excellent, too, her spirits were to-day! What a pity that Möllner was not present to witness her triumph!

"Yes," she said gaily, "whatever is as perishable as a flower cannot die a more charming death than----"

"In a cow's mouth," laughed the skeptic. "It is unfortunate that Fechner had not conceived this poetic idea before he wrote his 'Nanna.'"

"Oh, you may ridicule anything in that way, if you choose to do so," said Elsa.

"Do not vex our kind Elsa," Angelika here interrupted the discussion, throwing her fair round arm around the other's thin shoulders. "Elsa dear, give me your nosegay."

"There, put it on your brother's writing-table," Elsa whispered in her ear.

Angelika looked at her with compassion. "I will do what you ask, Elsa, but you know he does not care much for plucked flowers."

"But perhaps he will value them when he knows that they were plucked by the faithful hand of such a friend as I."

Angelika took the bouquet, and said hesitatingly, "I hope he will not be vexed,--he does not like to have anything placed upon his writing-table,--but I will try."

Hastily, as usual, Moritz came running through the garden just as Angelika was bending over Elsa. She turned, and found her husband's sparkling black eyes resting upon her.

"Moritz," she cried in delight, "have you come at last?"

"Yes, my darling. I had another patient to see; but now I am free to stay with you until tomorrow at eight,--twelve whole hours. Is not that fine?"

"Fine indeed!" repeated Angelika, and poor Elsa listened to these loving speeches, longing for the time when such happiness should be hers.

"Come," said old Heim, plucking Moritz by the sleeve, "we cannot live upon your pretty speeches to your wife, and they may spoil our appetites. Your mamma begs you to play the part of host at supper."

"Come, Angelika," said Moritz, drawing Angelika's arm through his own. He never took any other woman than his wife to supper.

This was a trying moment for Elsa, for it was her usual fate to be left sitting still when supper was ready or a dance was in prospect. She must either join herself to some other unfortunate, similarly neglected, or perhaps be offered a left arm by some good-natured man already provided with a lady upon his right. Ah, her knight, her Lohengrün, was not there, he who would one day rescue her forever from this solitude. Where was he? Why did he not come? And in her distress she turned to one of the gentlemen who had just finished smoking and was approaching the circle of ladies. "Do you not know where Professor Möllner is?"

The gentleman was a young assistant surgeon, whom Moritz had taken to the village with him that afternoon. The latter, as he passed, whispered in his ear, "Do not tell."

The young man looked confused, and just then Herbert approached and said maliciously, "You were in Hochstetten this afternoon, where Professor Möllner played his usual part of good Samaritan? I heard you telling Hilsborn about it,--pray favour us too with the interesting story."

He laid his hand, as if unconsciously, upon his sister's shoulder, but its heavy pressure, told her that it was not done either unconsciously or kindly.

"We all know very well that Möllner never allows an insult to pass unpunished," said Hilsborn, "and you should know it, Herr Herbert, better than any of us."

"True, I have had occasion to be convinced of the interest that Möllner takes in Fräulein von Hartwich, although it is by no means so dangerous to correct an erring professor as an enraged mob."

"What? what is it?" ran from mouth to mouth, and the company drew together in a large group.

"Permit me," said Moritz in a loud voice to Herbert, "to be the interpreter of my brother-in-law's conduct, as I certainly understand it better than a stranger. The truth is, the Hartwich was insulted by a Hochstetten mob, and my brother-in-law interfered to prevent her from receiving personal injury."

"Ah," said Herbert, as if he were comprehending it all for the first time, "this, then, was the generous motive that took your brother two miles from town to that retired village?"

"I myself have never yet presumed to cross-examine my brother-in-law as to his motives,--I leave the bold undertaking to you," replied Moritz, challenging Herbert with his keen glance.

"What can have happened there?"

"What did the Hartwich do? A whole village certainly does not rise against a private individual without some cause."

"This Hartwich must be a dreadful person!" Such were the remarks made by one and another.

"Gentlemen, let me pray you to come to supper," said the Staatsrätthin, who was evidently embarrassed.

But her invitation was unheeded. All the ladies and several gentlemen had, like hungry wolves, had a taste of the interesting subject, and they were not to be tempted by the promise of other food. There was no end to their amazement and conjectures. To be sure, it was impossible to express before Möllner's relatives all that was thought, but they could gain some information by their questions.

They could not understand how Professor Möllner could befriend such a person. It was no wonder that public opinion was so opposed to her.

"Yes," said Elsa, "Christian love should be shown to every sinner, but this woman puts our sex in such a light that really one blushes at being a woman. I can say, with Gretchen, that humanity is dear to me, but this Hartwich displays such shamelessness, such vulgarity of mind, that it becomes the duty of those possessed of any sensibility to suppress all compassion and to regard her with abhorrence."

"Tell me, then, Fräulein Elsa," Hilsborn here interrupted her, "what becomes of your former assertion that the cause of the despised and neglected should always be espoused by the true Christian, as in the case of your field-flowers?"

Elsa blushed, and stroked back her curls.

"But, my dear friend," remarked the botanist, "the Hartwich is not a field-flower."

"Certainly not one that cows can eat, for she is poisonous," said Herbert.

"Oh, there are reptiles that feed on hemlock," said old Heim with irritation. "But, whether she be hemlock or belladonna, we all know that both are medicinal, and she might perhaps be useful as an antidote to the affectation and hypocrisy that infect the feminine world of to-day, producing bigotry, malice, and all sorts of moral diseases."

"That was going almost too far," Moritz whispered to the old man, who passed him grumbling thus, with his hands clasped behind him. "I cannot abuse her any more, for Johannes's sake, but I do wish the devil had her rather than Johannes should have her!"

Heim looked at him and contracted his white, bushy eyebrows. "To that nonsense all I say is, we will talk about it at some future time."

The Staatsrätthin approached. "Uncle Heim, you are blinded by your partiality. Convince us that this person is anything else than a brazen-faced claimant for notoriety, and God knows what besides,--convince us of this, And we will beg her pardon,--but, until then, we must be allowed to consider any intercourse with her, on my son's part, as a misfortune. Now give me your arm; we must go to supper."

"Yes, let us go. I am tired, and shall be glad of something to eat," said the old gentleman, conducting the Staatsrätthin into the house, where the table was laid.

The others followed, and Elsa fluttered after them like the last swallow of autumn. They all entered the house by the large door opening upon the garden. Directly opposite was the door leading into the street. They began, laughing and talking, to ascend the stairs to the dining-room, when a carriage drove up. The Staatsrätthin, who led the way, stopped and listened intently. It might be Johannes.

The door was at that instant thrown open, and he appeared,--but not alone. There was a lady leaning on his arm.

A murmur of surprise was heard.

Johannes was quite as much astonished at unexpectedly encountering such an assemblage as the guests were at his entrance with a veiled lady, who was evidently embarrassed and desirous to withdraw when she saw so many people. But Johannes detained her. "I pray you, remain," he said to her, "you have no cause for alarm."

The Staatsrätthin leaned heavily upon Heim's arm, her knees trembled under her.

"Compose yourself," the old man whispered in her ear. "Submit to the inevitable,--remember that your son is master of the house."

"I shall not forget it," she replied softly, yet with bitterness.

In the mean time, Johannes had reached the staircase with the evidently reluctant Ernestine. "My dear mother," he said, looking up at her with a face radiant with pleasure, "I bring you another guest."

The Staatsrätthin descended a couple of stairs with the air of one compelled to receive a guest whose visit she regards as anything but welcome.

"Fräulein von Hartwich," said Johannes, presenting her at once to his mother and his assembled friends, "has been persuaded by me to seek an asylum for this night beneath our roof, as her uncle is absent from home, leaving her alone and defenceless, the object of a low, and brutal conspiracy."

"You are welcome, Fräulein von Hartwich," said the Staatsrätthin with cold courtesy, without offering Ernestine her hand, or relieving her embarrassment in any way. "Let me entreat you to share our simple meal. Unfortunately, we can postpone it no longer, as we have already been obliged to wait some time for my son."

And, without another word to Ernestine, she led the way with Heim to the dining-room.

Ernestine's heart throbbed. What a reception was this! To what a humiliation had she exposed herself! Was not running the gauntlet here a thousand times worse than being stoned in the village by rude peasants? "Let me go," she said, taking her hand from Johannes's arm. "I feel that I am unwelcome to your mother."

"Ernestine," said Johannes, "you are my guest, and I will not let you go. Forgive my mother's cold reception. It is not meant for you, but for the distorted character of you that she has heard. Remain, and convince her that you are not what she thinks, and you will be treated by her like a daughter."

"Oh, my only friend, I obey you, but I do it with a heavy heart. It would have been better for you to let me go to old Leonhardt for a couple of days."

"How could you have gone to old Leonhardt?" Johannes interrupted her impatiently. "It would have been visited upon him if he had received you. And it was equally impossible for you to pass this night alone in the castle without your uncle. You must be content to remain under my protection. Is that so hard?"

"Oh, no," said Ernestine, with a grateful look,--"but the others!"

"I am sorry that we arrived just in the midst of this crowd. Everything would have gone well if we had not encountered them just upon the stairs. I would have taken you to my study, where no one goes,--you could have rested there until these people were gone and my mother had prepared your room for you. But, since they have seen you, you must not hide yourself like a criminal. There are some here who already wish you well, and many others whose regard you will soon win."

"I am far more afraid of these people than of the angry peasants," said Ernestine sorrowfully. "I am so tired."

"Poor child!" said Johannes kindly. "I know you are, but do it for my sake. Will you not? I shall be so glad to have you by my side, and so proud to show them all that you accept me as your friend."

"Well, then, I will do as you say," said Ernestine submissively, and she ascended the stairs with Johannes.

At the door of the supper-room she laid aside her hat and shawl, and he looked admiringly at her lovely pale face, with the noble intellectual brow and the large melancholy eyes, and at her tall slender figure. Who that saw her could withstand her? He was so proud of her!

As they entered, the guests stood around the table, awaiting him. The impression that she produced was an extraordinary one. It was as if one of those pale ethereal female figures in Kaulbach's "Battle of the Huns" had stepped out of the frame. No one had ever seen before such ideal and melancholy beauty in real life. In an instant all were silent, and gazed earnestly at the rare spectacle.

"By Jove! she's a dangerous woman," whispered Moritz to the Staatsrätthin.

"Indeed she is!" she replied, scarcely able to take her eyes away from her. "My poor Johannes!"

"You don't see such a woman every day!" growled old Heim with pride. "Didn't I always say she would turn out a beauty?"

"The fact is, she is divine, and I shall love her dearly! Now say what you please," whispered Angelika. And, without waiting for a reply from either husband or mother, she flew across the room to Ernestine, who was standing overwhelmed with confusion, and cried, "Fräulein Ernestine, do you not remember me?"

Ernestine looked at her for a few seconds. "This must be little Angelika."

"Rightly guessed," said the young wife, and, standing on tiptoe, she pressed her rosy lips to Ernestine's delicate mouth.

Then Moritz approached, and said in his blunt, half-jesting way, "And I am the husband of this

wife. My name is Kern, and I am besides, one of the monsters who had the courage to close the doors of our lecture-rooms in the face of a most beautiful woman."

Ernestine opened her eyes wide at this address, but, appreciating his humour, smiled gently.

"And indeed," he continued, "I do not repent in the least that I did so, now that I see you,--for not a student would ever have learned anything with such a comrade beside him."

Ernestine cast down her eyes, and, confused and ashamed, said not a word.

Moritz turned from her, and, with a paternal tap upon Johannes's shoulder, said to him, "Upon my word, you're not to blame for admiring her."

"Men are all alike," said the Staatsrätthin in a whisper to Frau Professor Meibert. "My son-in-law, who never has a word to say to any woman but his wife, is already bewitched by her pretty face."

"Yes, and there is my husband making his way towards her," was the reply. "It must be admitted that she is quiet and modest."

"Still waters run deep!" said the Staatsrätthin.

"Yes, that's true!" said the other with a nod.

"What do you think, Herr Professor," said Taun's wife to Herbert with an admiring glance at Ernestine, "of our having *tableaux vivants* next winter? Would it not be beautiful to have her with Angelika for the two Leonoras?"

"Better try Hercules and Omphale. Let the Hartwich be Omphale, and set Professor Möllner at the spinning-wheel. That would make a charming picture!" remarked Herbert.

"I hear you do not like her," said Frau Taun, "but now that I see her I cannot believe all the terrible things that are told of her. And Möllner, too, is not the man to seat himself at the spinning-wheel, even though she were Omphale,--your characters do not fit."

Herbert shrugged his shoulders.

"Now, my dear friend," Möllner's clear voice was heard saying, "allow me to make you more intimately acquainted with your friends and foes. Here is an old friend of yours, Professor Hilsborn. Do you not remember him?"

"We met once at a children's party," Hilsborn explained, "and you, with the rest of us, threw stones at a glass ball tossed up by a fountain. You came off from the contest victorious, and were the object of envy and hostility in consequence."

Ernestine blushed. "Oh, yes, now I know. You were that gentle, amiable boy,--the adopted son of Dr. Heim; but--where--where is Dr. Heim?"

"Here he is," said the old gentleman, fixing his penetrating eyes upon her. Ernestine held out her hand, but she could not endure his glance, and her own sought the ground.

"Oh, Father Heim,--may I still call you so?"

"That's right," cried the old man. "Then you have not forgotten?" And he laid his hand kindly upon her head.

"How could I forget you, when you saved my life?"

"Aha," said Heim to her so softly that no one else could hear what he was saying, "don't be afraid child,--I shall stand up for you before all these people, but to you yourself I must say that my heart bleeds for you, and that if I did not hope that all the stupid stuff with which your little head is crammed would one day give place to something infinitely better, I should almost repent patching it up in days gone by. Don't be vexed, my child, you don't like to hear this from me,--perhaps you may be better pleased to hear it from some one else. And now God bless your coming to this house!"

Ernestine made no reply, but his words produced a deep impression upon her. A tear trembled upon her eyelashes as she stood silently before him. Möllner then gave her his arm, and they all took their seats at table. Heim sat upon her right hand, and Taun and Hilsborn were opposite her. Then came Moritz with Angelika, and Herbert with Frau Taun, while the Staatsrätthin sat upon Heim's right.

"Permit me to present my friend Professor Taun," said Möllner after they were seated.

"A friend!" added the latter to Möllner's words.

"He is one of those who voted in your favour," Möllner explained.

"I thank you," said Ernestine, "in the name of my sex."

"I cannot appropriate all your thanks to myself. They are due first to my dear friends Heim and Hilsborn, for they fought for you more bravely than I, to whom you were personally a stranger."

"Really, Father Heim, did you vote for me?" asked Ernestine in surprise.

"Well, yes," grumbled Heim, vexed that Taun had told of it. "The thing that you sent in was not bad, and I would have liked to open a wider field for your restless spirit, where you might find something better to do,"--here he sunk his bass voice to a whisper,--"than abuse God Almighty as a dog bays the moon, and make all honest folk your enemies with your atheistical stuff."

Ernestine started with a sudden shock. Was this, then, urged against her? She was amazed. Were there really people in these enlightened circles who could be shocked at her skepticism? Had Leuthold spoken falsely when he assured her that true culture was synonymous with emancipation from all religious prejudices? And who were the cultivated class, if these professors and their wives were not?

"Are you wounded by our friend's rough manner?" asked Taun, sorry for Ernestine's confusion. "You must know of old what a noble kernel is concealed within that rough shell."

"Who is talking about me?" Moritz cried out to them. "I am sure I heard 'noble Kern,' and that must be meant for me."

"Let those three alone, you vain fellow!" laughed Johannes, signing to him not to disturb their grave discourse.

Ernestine looked sadly at Helm. "Father Helm used to be kinder to me. He was never so harsh to me before."

"Of course not," said Helm in a low voice. "Then you were a thing made of blotting-paper, that a breath might have destroyed. We were content only to keep you alive, and, as is apt to be the case with delicate children, we forgot, in our anxiety about your physical health, to take due care of your mind."

"Well, well, never mind that now," said Taun. "I am not at all afraid that you will long fail of finding the right. Your writings give evidence of such uncommon talent that I should not wonder if you became the most learned woman of the age."

Ernestine's eyes flashed. She raised her head like a thirsty flower in a summer rain. "The most learned woman of the age!" The words touched her weak point, and penetrated the inner sanctuary of her ambition. Heim's harshness was forgotten. "How can you say this to me, in a century that has produced a Caroline Herschel and a Dorothea Rodde?"

Herbert, who from a distance had been hastening to the conversation, turned to Moritz and asked him in a low voice, "Who is Dorothea Rodde? Of course I have heard of Herschel's sister,--just because she was Herchel's sister,--but I know nothing of the other."

"Don't ask me," laughed Moritz. "I have too much to do to busy myself about the wonders worked by all the blue-stockings immortalized in the pages of trashy annuals."

Ernestine shot an angry glance at him. She had heard what was said, and she was indignant.

It was the drop too much when Angelika asked across the table, "Johannes, pray tell us--the gentlemen want to know--who Dorothea Rodde is."

Johannes shrugged his shoulders. "I do not know."

"What, you! Do you not know?" said Ernestine. "Is it possible! Does no one know that woman--the famous daughter of that great man Schläger? She only died in eighteen hundred and twenty-four, and is she forgotten already?"

"She cannot have materially advanced the cause of science," said Johannes, "or she would not have been forgotten."

"Such a rarely-endowed individual as this woman must, I should suppose, always be an object of scientific interest, even if she did not directly advance the cause of science itself. It must surely be interesting to physiologists, as well as to psychologists, that a woman has lived capable of learning all that Dorothea Rodde learned, even although she taught nothing. All cannot create. Many men have been held in high esteem for diligence alone. Besides, Dorothea would have achieved greatness if she had not committed the folly of marrying, thus arresting her scientific development in the bud and retiring entirely from public view. She buried herself alive, and the world is always ready to strew ashes upon a woman's coffin. Had she been a man, every one would have known that, when a boy of seventeen, he could speak all the dead and living languages, was thoroughly versed in chemistry, medicine, anatomy, and mineralogy, and in his eighteenth year, after a brilliant examination, received the degree of doctor of philosophy from the University of Göttingen! But it was only a girl who achieved all this thus early; and if the less envious time in which she studied acknowledged her superiority, the more prudent present ignores it all the more utterly."



A painful silence ensued. Every one was busied with his or her own thoughts. Every one felt confused. This beautiful, placid Ernestine had suddenly showed her claws!

The Staatsrätthin silently laid down her knife and fork,--she had lost all desire to eat.

Johannes looked sadly at Ernestine, and gently shook his head. Herbert alone grew more cheerful as the rest seemed disturbed, and looked down the table at Elsa, who sat at the other end, lost in melancholy reverie as she drew several flowers and grasses out of the large vase on the table, intending, like Ophelia, to deck herself with them; but, alas, Hamlet had no eyes for her sweet madness!

"May I request you to present me to the lady?" Herbert asked Johannes.

"Herr Professor Herbert," said the latter, and added with emphasis, "your bitterest opponent!"

Ernestine bowed slightly and looked coldly at Herbert.

"Permit me," he began sneeringly, "to beg you to inform me, Fräulein von Hartwich,--I ask solely for instruction in the matter,--what possible scientific interest the fact that a woman spoke several languages--she could hardly have spoken *all*, as you declared--could possess."

"Yes, I too am curious upon that point!" cried Moritz.

Ernestine looked gravely from one to the other. "I am quite ready to explain it to you. I should not, indeed, have ventured to do so if you had not asked me, for it would have seemed to me insulting to suppose that you could need any such explanation."

"That shot told," Moritz remarked comically.

"We are foes, gentlemen, and I am bent upon victory," said Ernestine. "I think the facility of acquisition shown by Dorothea Rodde is certainly as significant a fact in natural history as any example of extraordinary instinct in animals, for which zoologists search so untiringly. Or is the natural history of women less interesting than that of the ape?"

"We are not used to compare or to speak of women thus," Möllner interposed.

"Then, if you really accord us an equality with men in the scale of creation, Dorothea's eminent talent must certainly be of scientific interest, because it must assist in the investigation of the relative weight of the masculine and feminine brain,--a point not yet solved, the social importance of which is not recognized, or it would not be treated with such frivolous indifference. I, gentlemen, am convinced that the great contest for the emancipation of woman can be settled only through physiology, since that alone can prove whether the material conditions of the thinking mechanism are equal in men and women; and, if they are, who would deny a woman the right to assert her independence of man, even in the world of the intellect?"

"But we have not yet reached this point," said Johannes. "This equality has not yet been proved."

"Nor has the contrary," said Ernestine. "Therefore it seems to me that it would be well worth while for physiology to come to the aid of history, and test the material brain of famous women."

"And what end would that serve?"

"Can you ask that question seriously? Would not the result of such investigations, if it were favourable to women, strike a blow at our present social arrangements in the relations of the sexes? And would not the rendering such an aid to true social harmony be a triumph for physiology, of which it might well be proud?"

"It would be all very well," said Moritz, "if the whole question were worth the trouble."

"Of course it is not worth it for you, but it is for us. What do men care about the position of woman,--her capacity or her incapacity? If your wives fill their position,--that is, if they are your obedient servants, have sufficient capacity for cooking, and can bring up your children,--all is as it should be, as far as you are concerned, and the most important problem of mankind, in the social system, is solved to your satisfaction."

A unanimous murmur arose at this accusation, but Ernestine was now greatly excited, and she continued, "It was the pain I felt at this narrow-minded indifference that led me to devote myself to natural science. I will do what I can to induce scientific men to turn their attention in this direction. Do not smile: even if I can do nothing for this cause myself, I would cheerfully dedicate my existence to arousing the interest of others in the subject. If I can prevail upon some less scrupulous university to afford me an opportunity for pursuing the requisite anatomical and physiological studies, these physical and psychical investigations shall be the sole occupation of my life."

"But, Fräulein von Hartwich," said Johannes seriously, "what would you discover that could further your desires? We have proved conclusively that the feminine brain absolutely weighs less than the masculine, and---"

"Have you proved that superiority depends only upon weight?"

"Not precisely, but it certainly does in most instances."

"In most instances? but if it is not proved to do so in all, the question is far from settled. It is true that Byron, Cuvier, and others had remarkably weighty brains, but, on the other hand, the brains of certain philosophers, as, for example, Hermann and Hausmann, weighed less than the ordinary feminine brain. We are then led to suspect that superiority depends upon the relation of the brain to the rest of the body,--perhaps upon the relation of different portions of the brain to each other, or the quantity of the gray matter. The only sure acquisition that physiology may be able to boast in this matter is that the relative weight of the feminine is not lighter than that of the masculine brain." Her eyes glowed with enthusiasm. "Oh, how gladly would I die if I could only succeed in casting a ray of light upon this chaos!"

"But, Fräulein von Hartwich," Herbert began with an *ex cathedrâ* air, "as woman is in all respects weaker and more delicate than man, is it not natural that her brain also should be smaller and lighter, rendering her incapable of as great intellectual exertion?"

"But, Herr Professor," replied Ernestine with a slight smile, "I have just said that superiority depended upon the relative, not the absolute, weight. Were it otherwise, the largest and strongest man would be the wisest, and you, sir, would have less ability than any one present, for you are the smallest man here."

Again there was an embarrassed silence. Many could scarcely suppress their laughter as they saw the angry look of the little man. Others found the scene painful to witness. Such conduct on the part of a lady was unprecedented in the annals of professorial gatherings, and, although those who were acquainted with Ernestine found her behaviour perfectly natural from her standpoint, strangers to her were inexpressibly shocked,--none more so than the Staatsrâthin, to whom the girl's every word was like acid to an open wound.

It was the old story over again. She was unlike the others, and, without meaning it, frightened them all away. Wherever she went, the curse of eccentricity attached to her. No one shared her interests,--she had nothing in common with any one,--she was, and must continue to be, alone! Even Johannes grew thoughtful and silent. She timidly sought his eye, but he did not look at her.

Elsa, although she had no public, was still playing Ophelia, and was pondering upon the sweetness of the service she could render if it were only asked of her. Ah, no one wanted to see how charmingly she could obey. And she softly hummed to herself, in English, Ophelia's words,

"Larded all with sweet flowers,  
Which bewept to the grave did go  
With true-love showers."

Frau Taun looked gravely across at Ernestine. She ceased to anticipate *tableaux vivants*,--nothing could be done with such material. And then the conversation at table! She really could not expose her young guests to listen to anatomical treatises.

Herbert noticed the breach that had been made in Frau Taun's good opinion, and hastened to throw a bombshell into it. "She has not the slightest sense of refinement."

The ladies in the vicinity nodded assent.

Heaven be thanked! this combination of beauty and learning was wanting in what they possessed in fullest measure, and she had already succeeded in making herself disagreeable to the gentlemen who had been so impressed by her appearance.

One lady plucked the sleeve of her neighbour. "See her sit with her elbows upon the table!"

"How coarse!"

"There now, see how quickly you have made enemies of all these people," whispered old Heim. "You are not wrong from your point of view,--but where is the use of battering so at the door of a house where you have been received as a guest? If you wish to associate with mankind, you must not go about treading upon their toes."

"I do not wish to associate with these people," said Ernestine.

"Oh, yes, you do! You must wish it. Do you suppose that you need no help, no support,--that you can get along entirely alone in the world? How unpractical! how terribly exaggerated!"

"I do not understand you, Father Heim."

"I don't suppose you do----"

Angelika here interrupted the conversation, saying, as she handed Ernestine a plate of apricot crême, which was greatly lauded, "You must eat some of this, Fräulein Ernestine. I made it

myself, and I am very proud of it."

"You have just heard how Fräulein von Hartwich despises the noble art of cookery. Don't pride yourself upon it before her," sneered Moritz.

Angelika compassionated Ernestine's mortification at these words, and, while the other ladies were deep in a discussion regarding the preparation of the delicious crême, she said kindly, "You are quite right in lamenting that we women attach so much importance to such things, but they are part of our daily life, and we cannot entirely ignore them. Why did God give us organs of taste, if we are not to enjoy the flavour of our food? It is so natural to try to make the life of those whom we love pleasant, even by the most trivial means, amongst which are justly ranked eating and drinking."

"Forgive me for asking the question," said Ernestine, "but could not their enjoyment be equally well secured by the hands of a cook while you were employing your time with something better?"

"Yes," cried Angelika, amid general amusement, "if we had the money to pay eighty gulden for an excellent cook. But, as we have not, one must either superintend matters one's self, or put up with bad cooking. And you would not have a poor man, coming hungry and tired from his day's work, do that. No, I assure you, when I see Moritz enjoying something that I have prepared for him myself, it gives me almost as much pleasure as it does to feed a child."

Ernestine looked at her blankly. This was entirely beyond her horizon.

Angelika continued: "But indeed it does not make us servants. A service rendered for love cannot degrade,--voluntary obedience is not slavery. We must be guided by some one in life,--why not by a husband who protects and labours for us?" And she held out her hand to Moritz.

"But," said Ernestine, "if we learn to labour for ourselves we need be beholden to no one,--dependent upon no one."

"Oh," said Angelika, with a charming smile and a roguish glance at Moritz out of her large innocent eyes, "we cannot do without them, these stern lords of creation,--at least I could not live without Moritz, if I were ever so rich and wise."

Loud applause greeted this frank declaration; it seemed as if a sudden breath of fresh air were admitted into a sultry, closed apartment,--all breathed more freely. Angelika's genuine sunny nature was a relief to every one, after the distorted, gloomy views that Ernestine had broached.

"And you expect to bring that fool to reason?" whispered Moritz to Johannes.

"Yes," replied the latter curtly.

"Well, I wish you all success. I would not win a wife at such a price."

Supper was ended. The Staatsrätthin rose from table, and the company adjourned to the adjoining room, where punch was served.

Johannes silently conducted Ernestine thither. His duties as host then compelled him to leave her. She stood alone in the middle of the room, looking around for some one to whom she might turn. No one came near her. The ladies whispered together, casting occasional glances in her direction, and the gentlemen stood about in groups, either turning their backs upon Ernestine or eyeing her through their glasses. She stood alone, as upon the stage before an audience. She did not know what to do. It seemed cowardly and undignified to flee for refuge to a corner, and yet this cross-fire of keen eyes was as hard to endure as it had been years before at the Staatsrätthin's. What did her intellect or learning avail her now? She was as much shunned, despised, and misunderstood among people of refinement and culture as by the peasants. What fatality was it that thus attended her? Who would solve the riddle for her?

An unexpected end was put to her torment. Elsa glided up to her upon Möllner's arm.

"Fräulein Herbert wishes to be presented to you," he said.

Ernestine gazed in amazement at the strange flower-crowned elderly child, and took with some hesitation the damp, withered little hand held out to her.

"I begged my--our friend--" she looked round, but Möllner had again joined the other guests--"to make us acquainted with each other, because I feel myself so strangely drawn towards you. Your observations upon the brain impressed me greatly,--for I too am wild about natural science, and am myself half scientific. I dote on phrenology. I am a disciple of Schewe's, whose striking diagnosis of my characteristics converted me to Gall's theory. Heavens! what a delight it would be to discuss this subject with you, who have studied the brain so thoroughly! I am sure we should understand one another. You must let me examine your head--so remarkable a head for a woman. What a treat it will be for me! Come,--pray sit down."

Ernestine made an impatient gesture of refusal.

"What! you do not wish it? Oh, don't be afraid that I shall prove an *enfant terrible* and tell

what I discover. I never tell tales."

"I am not afraid of that," replied Ernestine bluntly. "If you could discover my character from the shape of my skull, there would be no need of your silence. I have nothing to conceal. But I take no interest in such nonsense."

"Nonsense do you call it?" cried Elsa, clasping her withered hands. "Then you do not believe in Gall's doctrine?"

"What do you mean by believe?" said Ernestine. "I do not believe in anything that has not been proved, and when anything has been proved I do not believe it,--I know it. Gall's theory is like Lavater's physiognomy, an hypothesis based upon coincidences, fit only to amuse idlers, but not worthy the attention of an earnest labourer in the cause of science."

"Oh, you cut me to the heart," sighed Elsa, who saw the scientific nimbus with which she had crowned her brows thus falling off like a theatrical halo of gold-paper. She was greatly offended. She had meant so well,--for Möllner's sake she had conquered herself and attempted to make a friend of Ernestine. He should see how her wounded but self-renouncing heart would open to her rival. She had been so glad not to come quite empty-handed to this learned woman; for, as far as she had understood the anatomical conversation at table, it coincided wonderfully with Gall's theory, which she had lately mastered that she might have the pleasure of subjecting Möllner's head to an examination. And now, just as she had hoped to recommend herself to him whom she loved by her one little bit of scientific acquirement, even this unselfish pleasure was denied her, and the attempt had failed entirely. Oh, Ernestine was a hard--a terrible woman!

While Elsa had been talking to Ernestine, the gentlemen had cast significant glances towards them, and said among themselves, "There is a wonderful combination,--the Hartwich and Fräulein Elsa! It must be worth studying."

And so they gradually drew near the two women. At last, Moritz, who, like a child with its doll, always had his wife hanging on his arm, could not refrain from joining in the conversation, for he pursued a jest like a boy after a butterfly. "Tell me, then, Fräulein Elsa, what did Schewe say to your head?" he asked.

"What?" and Elsa smiled diffidently. What an attraction she possessed for the other sex! Here were all the gentlemen gathered around her again. "What? oh, modesty forbids me to tell you."

"Then he was very complimentary?"

"He was indeed."

"That was the reason, then, you found his diagnosis so striking," laughed Moritz.

Elsa became embarrassed.

"That is just what makes that man so successful," said Moritz. "He flatters every one, and therefore every one believes him."

"Oh, you do him great injustice!" Elsa remonstrated. "He is so in earnest about his science. He can be quite rude. He would certainly be rude to you, Professor Kern."

The gentlemen all laughed. "Fräulein Elsa is severe."

"Dove-feather'd raven! wolfish-ravener lamb!"

quoted the youthful tutor.

"Oh, I admire the man so much," said the offended lady, "he is an adept in the sense of touch,--really he not only feels, he thinks and sees, with the tips of his fingers. After he had examined my head, and was standing aside with closed eyes, as if to recapitulate mentally what he had discovered, it seemed to me that he was actually holding my soul in his closed hand, like a bird just taken from the nest."

"It is to be hoped he did not keep it."

"Oh, no! he gave it back to me; he presented me with it anew in teaching me to understand it."

"Well, if he has initiated you into the mystery of his art, Fräulein Elsa, oblige us with some of it now. There ought to be all sorts of fledgelings to take out of these nests, and we really would like to have a glimpse of our souls."

"I asked Fräulein von Hartwich just now to let me examine her head, but she would not allow it."

"But we are all ready for it," cried Moritz, bowing his head, as did several of the other gentlemen.

"Pray don't," Angelika entreated her husband.

"Dear Angelika," said Elsa, determined to be interesting to-day at all risks, "I am not at all afraid of the trial, for I am confident of success. But it must be seriously undertaken. The gentlemen must be disguised so that I cannot recognize them."

"Yes, yes, that's right! It will be delightful!" cried the gentlemen, to whose gaiety the punch perhaps had lent some assistance.

"Fräulein Elsa must leave the room while we disguise ourselves."

"I will wait for a while in the garden, where it is far more charming to see the elves sipping the dew than you, gentlemen, drinking your punch. Call me when you are ready, and I will come, and, like a bee among the flower-cups, dip into your heads and find out whether they contain honey or gall."

With this arch threat she was hurrying away, when Ernestine took her hand compassionately and whispered in her ear, "Do not do it, you will only be laughed at."

Greatly offended, Elsa withdrew her hand. "By you, perhaps, but only by you. My friends here understand me and love me!" The tears rushed to her little eyes, and she hastened out, without hearing Herbert call after her, "You will disgrace yourself."

She hurried down into the garden, to confide her griefs to the elves and fairies. She would endure smilingly, no one should know what she had dared to dream,--to hope. But could her faithful heart at once resign all hope? Patient waiting had before now been crowned with success. She went to the spot where Angelika had left the flowers that she had given her for Johannes. The glass was overturned, the water spilled and the flowers were scattered about withered. How sorry she was! It was a bad omen. She picked up her favourites and pressed them to her heart. "Thus will it perhaps be one day with me. I shall fade away," she thought, "forgotten and neglected like you, and the only proof of affection that can then be mine will be that some tender soul may lay upon my coffin a wreath of you, sweet flowers of the field!"

She seated herself upon the grass and sung softly, while her tears dropped upon the flowers,

"Ah, tears will not bring back your beauty like rain.  
Or love that is dead, to bloom over again."

"Fräulein Elsa, are you weeping?"

She started and sprang up, Möllner was approaching her across the lawn.

"Oh, no, these are not tears, only the dews of evening," she lisped, drying her eyes.

Möllner looked at her with pity. "Poor creature," he thought, "it is not your fault that nature has proved such a step-mother to you, and that your brother's distorted views of education have made you ridiculous, and even deprived you of the sympathy that you deserve."

He offered her his arm. "Come, my dear Fräulein Elsa!" he said kindly, "I am sent to bring you in. Thanks to Fräulein von Hartwich, you are spared the mystification that was contemplated for you."

"How so?" asked Elsa, who, upon Möllner's arm, felt like a vine nailed against the wall.

"Fräulein Ernestine was requested to exchange dresses with Frau Taun, whose hair is also black, and both were to wear masks, in order to deceive you. The younger portion of the company so insisted upon it that I could not prevent it. But Fräulein von Hartwich, convinced that you were not so secure in your art as to be impregnable to deceit, refused so obstinately to do what was asked of her that the assemblage fairly broke up in disappointment."

Elsa was silent from shame. She knew that she could not have come off victorious from such a trial. She had depended upon easily distinguishing individuals by their hair, and it had not occurred to her that Frau Taun's hair was of the same colour as Ernestine's. And yet, glad as she was to be thus relieved, she was humiliated at having afforded her enemy an opportunity for such a display of magnanimity in her behalf.

"You will make a trial of your skill some time when we are more alone, will you not?" asked Möllner in the tone one uses to comfort a child.

"Yes, if you desire it, and if you would allow me to subject your own magnificent head----"

Her voice trembled with emotion as she preferred this bold request.

"Why not?" interposed Möllner, "if you think my hard head would prove a profitable subject."

"Your hard head! oh, how can you speak so? I should tremble to touch that head, lest Minerva should spring from it to punish me for my temerity."

Johannes smiled compassionately. "I cannot persuade you not to embarrass me with your exaggerated compliments. You know I am a blunt man, and cannot repay you in kind."

"How should you repay me? I only ask you to permit me to reverence you. What can the brook require from the mighty tree whose roots drink of its waters? Let my admiration flow on at your feet, and let your vigorous nature draw thence as much as it needs. There will always be enough for you,--the brook is inexhaustible."

Johannes was most disagreeably affected by this outburst. What could he reply, without either inspiring the unfortunate creature with false hopes or deeply offending her?

Her brother's voice relieved his embarrassment. They reached the house.

"Here they come!" Herbert cried to the others, who seemed to be waiting for them and were just taking their departure. They ascended the stairs, and Elsa put on her hat and shawl.

"Where have you been so long?" Herbert asked in a tone intentionally loud.

"Heavens! we fairly flew through the garden!" cried Elsa.

"Have you wings, then, Fräulein Elsa?" asked the young tutor.

"Yes," she replied, with an enraptured glance at Johannes. "They have lately budded anew."

"Pray, then," urged her indefatigable tormentor, "soar aloft, that we may see you,--it would be a charming sight!" And he lighted a cigar at the lamp in the hall.

"All human beings are born with wings," said Elsa with pathos,--"only we forget how to use them."

"Come, Elsa dear, there is no use in our arguing with these men," Angelika said kindly. "Take leave of my mother, and we will walk along together, as we are going in the same direction."

Elsa did as she was told. In the doorway, behind the Staatsrätthin, stood Ernestine, utterly dejected. Elsa went up to her and whispered, "May you rest well, if indeed shy Morpheus dare approach your armed spirit."

Herbert dragged Elsa away, whispering fiercely, "No pretty speeches to her! I will crush her! The 'little' man will prove great enough to terrify her!"

"Good-night, sweet mother. Good-night, poor Ernestine!" said Angelika, and then had hardly time to kiss them both before her impatient husband fairly picked her up and carried her downstairs.

"Good-night, Professor Möllner," whispered Elsa. "The brook ripples onward to the ocean of oblivion."

"Good-night, good-night," resounded, in all variations of tone, from all sides, and Father Heim hummed in his strong bass voice an old student song, in which the other gentlemen gaily joined, for, with the exception of the disturbance caused by "that crazy Hartwich," the evening had been a pleasant one, and Möllner's Havanas were delicious on the way home. If only the Hartwich had not spoiled their fun with Fräulein Elsa, it would have been too good. Elsa was by far the better of the two. If she was a fool, they could at least laugh at her, which was impossible with the Hartwich, she was so deuced clever at repartee. Thus talking, laughing, and singing, the throng sought their several homes through the silent, starry night.

The Staatsrätthin had entered the room with Ernestine, Johannes, having locked the street-door after his guests, came and took a chair by Ernestine's side. "Come, mother dear, sit down by us, and learn to know our guest a little before we separate for the night."

But the Staatsrätthin took up her basket of keys. "I am very sorry, but I must see to the arrangement of Fräulein von Hartwich's bedroom. The servants are all very busy just now."

"Mother, let Regina attend to all that, and do you stay with us," Johannes entreated, with something of reproach in his tone. "Other things can be left until to-morrow."

"The silver at least must be attended to. And Fräulein von Hartwich is in great need of repose."

"I am so sorry to give you so much trouble," said Ernestine, really grieved.

"Oh, I assure you it is a pleasure!" With these brief words the Staatsrätthin left the room.

Ernestine sat there pale and exhausted. Johannes took her hand. "Patience, patience, Ernestine. She will soon--you will soon learn to know each other."

Ernestine silently shook her head. Her brow was clouded. "There is no home for me here!"

"Not yet, but it will become one!"

"No, never!"

Johannes compressed his lips. "Ernestine, you do not dream how you pain me!"

"Pain you, my friend? The only one who is kind to me! Oh, no, I will not,--I cannot!" And she leaned towards him with strong, almost childlike, emotion, and laid her hand upon his.

"When I see you thus," said Johannes, with a look of ardent love, "I ask myself whether you can be the same Ernestine who seeks to sacrifice the unfathomed treasure of her rich, overflowing heart to a phantom,--to a struggle that can never yield a thousandth part of the pleasure that she might create for herself and others. Oh God!" and he pressed his lips to Ernestine's hand, "every word that you said to-day stabbed me like a dagger. How was it possible for you to think and talk so, after that hour that we passed together? Oh, lovely white rose that you are, you incline yourself towards me, but, when I would pluck and wear you, your thorns wound my hand!"

Ernestine laid her other hand upon his bowed head. "Dear--unspeakably dear--friend, have patience with me. If you could only put yourself in my place! In early childhood, when others are borne in the arms of love and petted and caressed, I was abused, scorned, neglected,--because--I was--a girl. Every cry of my soul, every thought of my mind, every feeling of my young heart, asked, 'Why am I so bitterly punished for not being a boy?' And in every wound that I received were planted the seeds of revenge,--revenge for myself and for my sex,--and of burning ambition to rival those placed so far above me in the scale of creation. These feelings matured quickly in the glow of the indignation which I felt when I saw my sex oppressed and repulsed whenever it strove to rise above its misery. They grew with my growth, strengthened with my physical and mental strength, and they filled my whole being, just as my veins and nerves run through my body. How can I live if you tear them thence?"

Johannes held her hand clasped in his, and listened attentively.

"It is," continued Ernestine, "as if my heart had frozen to ice just at the moment when the agonized cry, 'Why am I worth less than a boy?' burst from me, and as if that question were congealed within it,--so that I can think and struggle only for the answer to that 'why?' Why are we subject to man? Why do we depend solely upon his magnanimity, and succumb miserably when he withholds it? The times when physical force ruled are past. Everything now depends upon whether the progress of woman is to be retarded by world-old prejudices, or by positive mental inferiority on her part; and I shall never rest until science satisfies me upon this point."

"And do you not believe, Ernestine, that there is a third power subjecting the more delicate sex to the stronger--a higher power than the right of the strongest--more effective than the power of the intellect,--the power of love?"

Ernestine looked at him with calm surprise. "I do not believe love can accomplish what reason fails to prove."

"Is that really so?" Johannes was silent for a moment, then walked to and fro with folded arms, and finally stopped before her. "You speak of a sentiment that you have no knowledge of. But of all my hopes that you have destroyed to-day in the bud, one there is that you cannot take from me. You will learn to know it!"

The Staatsrätthin entered. "Fräulein von Hartwich, your room is ready for you. Will you allow me to conduct you thither?"

"Mother," cried Johannes, "do not be so cold and formal to Ernestine. You cannot keep at such a distance one so near to me."

"I really cannot see wherein I have failed of my duty towards Fräulein von Hartwich,--we are as yet entire strangers to each other."

"You are right, Frau Staatsrätthin," said Ernestine. "I am not so presuming as to expect more from you than you would accord to the merest stranger. I am very sorry to be obliged to accept even so much from you. I will go to my room, that I may not any longer keep you from your rest; but be assured I shall trespass upon your hospitality for a single night only."

She turned to Johannes, and, with a grateful look, offered him her hand.

"Good-night, kind sir."

"God guard your first slumbers beneath this roof!" said Johannes fervently, and it seemed as if the wish took the airy shape of her lost guardian angel, and hovered before her up the stairs to the cosy little room whither the Staatsrätthin conducted her, and then, placing itself by the side of her snowy couch, fanned her burning brow with cooling wings.

"Mother," said Johannes gravely, when the Staatsrätthin rejoined him, "to-day, for the first time in my life, you have been no mother to me!"

## **CHAPTER XI.**

### **INHARMONIOUS CONTRASTS.**

The morning sun streamed brightly through the white muslin curtains of Ernestine's windows, yet she still slept in peaceful and childlike slumber. For the first time for many years, she was not cheated of her repose by haste to go to her work. The guardian angel, that Johannes had invoked to her side, forbade even her uncle's ghost to knock at her door, and still kept faithful watch beside her bed. It seemed as if the whole house were aware of its sacred presence, for a quiet as of a church reigned among its inmates. They were all up, but, at the command of their head, every door was softly opened and shut, every footfall noiseless. Johannes knew how much need Ernestine had of repose, and he would not have her disturbed. He even controlled the throbbing of his own heart, that longed to bid her good-morning.

The sleeper drew calmly in with every breath the repose that surrounded her,—and what a blessing it was for the poor, wearied child!

The Staatsrätthin had superintended the arrangement of the breakfast-table, and was seated with her work at the window. But her hands were dropped idly in her lap, and her eyes, red with weeping, were fixed sadly upon the flame of the spirit-lamp that had been burning for an hour beneath the coffee-urn.

"Do you not think I had better have fresh coffee prepared? this has been waiting so long," she said to her son as he entered the room.

"Just as you please, mother dear," said Johannes. "You know I understand nothing of such things."

The Staatsrätthin rang for the servant. "Regina, take this coffee away and bring back the urn. I will boil some more."

The maid did as she was directed, with a sullen face. "'Tis a shame to waste such good coffee!" she muttered as she went out.

"It is very disagreeable, mother," observed Johannes, "to have Regina criticising all our arrangements. I do not like to have servants of that sort about me. If you cannot break her of it, pray send her away."

"She does her work well, and is thoroughly honest," replied the Staatsrätthin.

"That may be, but there certainly are servants to be had who would do their duty more respectfully and good-humouredly. I do not like to have my comfort destroyed by sullen faces around me. I like to have people who render their service cheerfully."

"It is not very easy to find them."

"They must be sought until they are found," said Johannes, cutting short the conversation by opening and beginning to read his newspaper.

The Staatsrätthin sighed, but said not a word.

Regina re-entered with the urn, and asked crossly, "Is the Fräulein not to be wakened yet?"

"No!" was Johannes's curt reply.

"Then the urn might as well be washed, if the coffee is not to be made until noon," she grumbled again, and left the room, closing the door with something of a slam.

"Now, mother, this really is too much. I cannot undertake the direction of the servant-maids, but I will not tolerate them when they are so insolent. Regina must conduct herself differently, or she goes!"

"You have suddenly grown very impatient with the girl," said his mother bitterly. "I hope you may always be as implicitly obeyed as you desire."

"I understand what you mean, mother, but it does not touch me. I desire only what is right,—obedience from the servants whom I hire, love from a wife who is my equal."

"Love alone will not answer."

"Yes, true, faithful love will."



"There must be submission and self-sacrifice."

"True love embraces all these,--submission, self-sacrifice, the entire self."

"It is not every one who can love truly; so be upon your guard that you are not intentionally or unintentionally deceived."

"Reassure yourself, mother, and spare me your misgivings," said Johannes with unusual sternness, again turning to his newspaper, while he listened to every rustle outside the door of the room.

The Staatsrätthin brought from a cupboard a delicate little coffee-mill and began to grind some fresh coffee. The clock struck half-past eight.

"It is easy to see that the young lady has not been used to a regular household," the Staatsrätthin could not forbear observing.

"I only see that she is worn out after the fatigue of yesterday."

"No one who is accustomed to early rising ever sleeps so late in the morning."

"It is impossible to rise early when one works all night long."

"It is a bad custom for the head of a household!"

"Mother," said Johannes, starting up, "I should be downright unhappy if I did not know how kind-hearted you really are."

"Indeed?" The Staatsrätthin shook up the coffee, but her hands trembled visibly. "This girl changes everything. Since she came into the house, all things are wrong: to-day, I make you unhappy,--yesterday, I was no mother to you! And yet, my son, since the painful day when I gave you birth, I have never been more a mother to you than now in my anxiety for your true happiness!" She could say no more; her emotion choked her utterance.

"Mother dearest," cried Johannes, embracing her tenderly, "you must not shed a tear because of a hasty word of mine. Come forgive me,--I am really so happy to-day. My dear, good mother, scold your boy well, I beg."

The Staatsrätthin smiled again, and stroked her darling's shining curls.

"God bless you, my dear son. It is because I love you so that I cannot give you to any but the noblest and best of women. I tremble lest you, who are without an equal in my eyes, should throw yourself away upon a wife who is unworthy of you."

"Trust me, mother, I understand and thank you, but, if you want me to be happy, love me a little less and Ernestine more! This is all I ask of you,--will you not do it?"

"The first I cannot do, but I will try to do the last, because you desire it, my son!"

"That's my own dear mother!" cried Johannes, kissing her still beautiful hands. "And now you may go and waken our guest, for I must see her before I go to the University."

"Here she is!" said the Staatsrätthin, going forward to greet Ernestine. "Good-morning, my dear. How did you sleep?" And she kissed her brow.

Ernestine looked at her, surprised and grateful. "Oh, I slept as if rocked by angels,--I have not felt so rested and refreshed for a long time!" Then, holding out a bunch of lovely white roses to Johannes, she asked, "Did you have these beautiful roses laid outside my door?"

Johannes blushed slightly, and gazed enraptured at the beautiful creature. "Yes, I put them there myself."

"I thank you!" said Ernestine. "You are kinder to me than any one ever was before. I have many flowers in my garden, but none, I think, so lovely as these. They are the first flowers I ever had given to me. I know now how pleasant it is."

"Did your uncle never give you a bouquet upon your birthday?" asked the Staatsrätthin.

"Oh, no! And I do not think it would have delighted me so from him!" said Ernestine, with artless ease.

Johannes's face beamed at these words. "When is your birthday, Ernestine?" he asked, while the Staatsrätthin led her to the breakfast-table.

Ernestine set down the cup that she was just about putting to her lips, and looked at him in amazement "I do not know!"

"You do not know!" cried Johannes.

"I will ask my uncle,--he told me once, but I have forgotten."

The Staatsrätthin clasped her hands. "Forgotten your own birthday? Is it possible? Was it never celebrated?"

"Celebrated?" repeated Ernestine in surprise. "No, why should it have been celebrated?"

"What! do you know nothing of this affectionate custom?"

Ernestine shook her head almost mournfully. "I know of no loving customs."

The Staatsrätthin looked at her with compassion. "Then you hardly know how old you are?"

"Not exactly; but my father died when I was twelve years old,--shortly before his death he reproached me for being so little and weak for twelve years old,--and since then ten summers have passed away."

"Poor child!" said the Staatsrätthin. "I begin to understand!"

"I thought you would, mother," said Johannes from the other side of the table.

"Your uncle has deprived you of many of the pleasures of life," continued the Staatsrätthin.

"Such pleasures, perhaps. But I must not be ungrateful,--he has given me others no less fair and great!"

"And what were they?"

"He has taught me to think and to study. There can be no greater or purer pleasures than these."

Again the Staatsrätthin's brow was overcast.

Johannes saw it, and broke off the conversation. "Ernestine, it is not good for you to drink your coffee black. It excites your nerves."

"On the contrary, my uncle bids me always take it so, to stimulate me,--without it, I often could not begin my day's work."

"That accords entirely with your uncle's system of education. First he utterly prostrates you by wakefulness and study at night, and then stimulates you by artificial means. Why, you yourself can understand that such a life of alternate prostration and over-excitement must wear you out. I really do not know what to think of your uncle in this respect."

Ernestine looked down, evidently impressed by the truth of Johannes's words.

"But tell me, Johannes," said the Staatsrätthin, "why do you address Fräulein Ernestine by her first name, when she does not authorize you to do so by returning the familiarity?"

"She asks me to do so."

"Oh, yes, I begged your son to call me Ernestine,--it makes me feel like a child again, and as if I could begin my life anew!"

"But you should address him by his first name, and not have the intimacy all upon one side."

Ernestine blushed. "I cannot do so now,--by-and-by, perhaps."

"Leave it to time and Ernestine's own feelings, mother dear. I shall not ask for it until it comes naturally. Some time when she wishes to give me a special pleasure she will do it. And now good-by, Ernestine. I must go. I lecture at nine, but as soon as I get through I will return."

Ernestine looked up at him with glistening eyes, and breathed, scarcely audibly, "Farewell, my friend."

Johannes pressed her hand, and then, turning to his mother, said, "Dear mother, I leave Ernestine to you for an hour, and hope with all my heart that you will understand each other. But, at all events, remember what you promised me."

"Most certainly I will, my son." He went as far as the door, then lingered, and, calling his mother to him, whispered imploringly, "Be kind to her,--all that you do for her you do for me."

And, with one more look of longing love at Ernestine, he was gone. It was very hard to go. It seemed to him that he must stay,--that Ernestine would escape him if he did not guard her well. He would have turned back again if his duty had not been so imperative. "If I only find her here when I return!" he said to himself one moment, and the next he blamed himself for his childish weakness. He loved her too well. The one hour of lecture seemed to him an eternity. He longed to see her again almost before he had crossed the threshold that separated him from her.

How beautiful she was to-day after her refreshing sleep,—how maidenly! If, when he returned, she looked at him with those glistening eyes, he could not control himself,—he would throw himself at her feet and implore her to be his. The decisive word must be spoken,—he must have certainty. The state of doubt into which he was plunged by the strange contrast between Ernestine's cold, stubbornly expressed opinions and her tender personal behaviour towards himself was not to be borne any longer. Only one hour separated him from the goal for which he longed with every pulse of his strong, manly nature. Oh, were it only over!

"Do you like beans?" the Staatsrätthin asked Ernestine.

"Why do you ask me?"

"Only because you are to have them at dinner to-day."

"Thank you, but I cannot dine with you."

"Why not?"

"My uncle might return unexpectedly from his journey, and be angry if he did not find me at home."

"Strange! How comes it that you, who contend so earnestly for freedom, are under such strict control? Is it not somewhat of a contradiction?"

Ernestine started.

The Staatsrätthin continued: "You are battling for the independence of woman, you brand as slavery a wife's obedience to her protector, and yet a man who, as I understand the case, is far more dependent upon you than you are upon him, has such complete dominion over you that you do not dare to stay from home a day without his permission."

Ernestine was again startled and surprised. "You are right. But I have grown up under his control. It has become a habit with me, so that I am hardly conscious of it, and it has never yet been so opposed to my wishes as to induce me to shake it off."

"Now, let me ask you, my dear, whether you regard this dull, half-unconscious habit of submission as nobler and loftier than the loving, voluntary obedience that a wife yields to a husband?"

Ernestine was silent for a moment, and then said with her own generous frankness, "No, it is not. But I have brought it upon myself, and cannot escape from it as long as my uncle possesses the legal right of my guardian."

"But this legal right does not in any way affect your personal freedom as long as you do not desire to do anything contrary to law."

"He always told me that the guardian was the master of the ward. And if this tyrannical regulation had not applied equally to the male and female sex, I should long ago have attacked it in my publications."

"That would not have done much good, I fear," said the Staatsrätthin dryly.

Ernestine shrugged her shoulders. "None of my writings effect much good. But they are not meant to be anything more than a few of the many drops of water that must one day wear away the stone that dams the course of the pure waters of reason."

"We will not discuss such abstract subjects," said the Staatsrätthin evasively. "I would rather persuade you to stay with us to-day."

"If I only thought that I should not be a burden to you!"

"You certainly will not be to me, and you will give my son a pleasure far greater than the annoyance to which your absence may subject your guardian. But you are the best judge of what you ought to do."

Ernestine laid her hand upon the Staatsrätthin's. "I will stay!"

"There,—that's right! Johannes would never have forgiven me if I had failed to persuade you to stay." She rang the bell. Regina appeared, and carried away the coffee-tray.

"You may bring me the beans, I will prepare them," said the Staatsrätthin. Regina brought in the beans in a dish, with a bowl for the stalks.

"I'm sure you will excuse me," said the Staatsrätthin to Ernestine, and she seated herself by the window, knife in hand, ready to begin her task.

Ernestine looked on in astonishment. "Do you do that yourself?"

"Why not? The cook has a great deal to do to-day, and I am glad to assist her."

"I would help you if I knew how," said Ernestine.

"Try it,--perhaps it will amuse you. It does not require much skill." The old lady, quite delighted at Ernestine's interest in domestic affairs, handed her another knife and a bean, saying, "Look! you first strip off the stem and those tough fibres,--so. The people in this part of the country are apt to pay no attention to the fibres, but if you do not strip them off they are very tough. And now cut the bean lengthwise. Stop!--not so thick,--a little finer. Now, don't put the stems back in the dish, but here in this bowl! See! everything in the world can be learned, and, if you should not be compelled to do it, it is at least well to know how."

A gentle sigh escaped her as she remembered that her own circumstances had once, before she had lost her property by her brother's failure, been such as to make these homely offices entirely unnecessary.

Ernestine contemplated with smiling surprise the Staatsrätthin's enthusiasm in encouraging her to undertake this new rôle. She asked herself seriously if it were possible that this was really an intellectual woman. But one glance at the broad, thoughtful brow and the clear, expressive eyes of the speaker convinced her of the truth.

Lost in these reflections, Ernestine continued her novel taskwork, but the Staatsrätthin suddenly discovered, to her horror, that she was throwing the stems in with the beans, and the beans into the bowl of stems and strings.

"My dear," she cried, "see what you are doing! now I shall have to pick over the whole dishful!"

Ernestine threw down the knife and leaned back in her chair. "I never was made for such work! Forgive me, but I cannot think it worth while to learn it. I shall never be so situated as to need such knowledge."

"As you please," said the Staatsrätthin coldly.

"Are you displeased with me? Is it possible that you are displeased with me because I cannot cut beans?" She seized the old lady's busy hand. "Frau Staatsrätthin, make some allowance for me. You must not ask one to do what she is not fit for. Would you ask the fish to fly, or the bird to swim? Of course not. Do not, then, expect a person who is at home only in a different world to take an interest in the every-day concerns of this."

"This strife about the beans you make,  
When really crowns are now at stake,

we might say," remarked the Staatsrätthin. "And certainly in our case these matters are not so widely different. What is most important cannot be entirely divided here from what is unimportant. Such little household occupations, slight, even insignificant, as they may appear, belong to the responsibilities of a woman's position. They are stitches in the web of her life. If a single one is dropped, the whole is gradually frayed!"

Ernestine shrugged her shoulders. "You are perfectly right from your point of view, Frau Staatsrätthin, but your point of view is not mine. To me a woman's mission is something higher. A noble mind cannot condescend to occupy itself with such cares, which are--forgive me the expression--always more or less sordid."

The Staatsrätthin frowned slightly, but she did not interrupt Ernestine, who continued: "It is hard enough that so much of the brute cleaves to us that we must eat and drink to keep our physical mechanism in order; thus, in the process of development, we never attain any higher degree of perfection. We ought to take pride in developing ourselves as fully as possible, in contending against every animal appetite instead of making a formal study how best to pamper it. We ought to blush for our frail, indigent physical nature, instead of making an idol of it and regarding her who sacrifices to it most freely as the loftiest illustration of feminine virtue."

"That all sounds very fine," said the Staatsrätthin, "but it is, nevertheless, a deplorable mistake. With the capacity for pleasure the Creator has bestowed upon us the right to enjoy. We ought only to see to it that our pleasures are true and noble. It is false shame that would repudiate what we cannot live without, and it sounds strangely contradictory from the lips of a natural philosopher like yourself. Before whom would you blush? Before your fellow-beings? Certainly not, for they all share your mortal infirmities. And, since you do not believe in a God, where does there exist for you any supernatural ideal, any bodiless spirit, subject to do change nor desire of change, before whom you can be ashamed of being a mortal?"

"In myself,--in my own imagination."

"Yes, yes, this is the usual jargon. Because you deny your God, and still feel the need of Him, you exalt yourself into a divinity, and are humiliated at the idea of your imprisonment within a

mortal frame!"

"Oh, no, I am not so vain and arrogant. There is, if I may thus express it, a refinement of mind that is shocked by the coarse demands of material nature. And I should be afraid of degrading myself in my own eyes if, in satisfying these demands, I used the time and ability that might be employed for higher purposes."

"You speak as if by the responsibilities of a woman I meant devotion solely to creature comforts. I understand by these something more than eating and drinking. Order and cleanliness, for example, are among the necessities of our life, especially for fine natures, for they belong to the domain of the beautiful, and must be the special concern of the female head of a household, whatever may be the number of her servants. To be sure, there are women who are so busy with brooms and dusters that we might almost think them neat from their love of dirt. But I am not speaking of such extreme cases. The superintendence of servants, if you have them, the distribution of labour, the purchase of clothing, with its hundred various branches, and, finally, the direction and care of children, are all necessities of existence, duties to which no woman, even the wealthiest, can refuse to attend. Least of all should they be left to the husband. I consider it one of our most sacred duties to relieve him from all material cares, that he may be free to work for the benefit of mankind. Thus we assist him, modestly though it be, in the great work, by enabling him to keep himself free and fit for his labours."

"I frankly acknowledge that I am incapable of such modesty. I cannot be satisfied with an excellence that I must share with every housekeeper. I am conscious of the ability to assist directly in the cause of human progress. Why should I waste it in labour wholly possible to mediocrity?"

"You depreciate this labour because you do not know it. Rightly conceived and executed, it may prove of the greatest significance. For the more cultivated and intellectual a woman is, the more capable is she of appreciating the importance of the task assigned to man, and the necessity of lightening it as much as she can by due care of his physical and mental welfare. And with this thought ever in her mind, the meanest employment, the most menial occupation, becomes a labour of love. And even the most careful housewife can find time, if she is so disposed, to educate herself still further, and so to form and exercise her talents as to make them the delight of her husband's hours of leisure. That is what I understand, my dear, to be a wife in the truest sense." She suddenly took Ernestine's hand and drew her towards her. "And thus,--why should I not speak frankly?--thus I would have the woman to whom I am to be a mother."

Ernestine looked at her in amazement. "Will you--are you to be a mother to me, then?"

The Staatsrätthin hesitated for a moment, and then said, "I should like to be. You are an orphan, and I pity you. If you would only be what a woman should be,--if you would only conform to our social and Christian views, I could give you all a mother's love."

Ernestine withdrew her hand. "I thank you for your kind intentions, but, if these are the only conditions upon which you can bestow your affection upon me, I fear I shall never deserve it."

The Staatsrätthin shook her head in rising displeasure. "You do not understand me."

"I understand you far better than I am understood by you."

"You probably think my homely wisdom very easy of comprehension--while yours is too deep for my powers of mind." The Staatsrätthin laid down her knife, and pushed away the dish of beans. "But the time may come when you will think of what I have been saying, and will be sorry that you have repulsed me."

"Frau Staatsrätthin, I have not repulsed you. I am only too honest to accept a regard bestowed upon me on conditions that I cannot fulfil. To gain your approval I should be obliged to equivocate,--and I have always been true. It is robbery to accept an affection springing from a false idea of one's character. What would it profit me to throw myself on your breast and silently return your tenderness, when I know that you would love me not for what I am, but for what I might pretend to be? Sooner or later you would discover your error, and despise me for deceiving you. No, I am not unworthy of the love of good people just as I am, but if I cannot win it by frankness and conscientiousness, I will never try to steal it."

"You speak proudly. Such self-assertion does not become a young girl towards an old woman, least of all towards the mother of her best friend and benefactor."

"Frau Staatsrätthin," cried Ernestine, "I shall always be grateful to your son for his kindness to me, but surely I ought not to testify my gratitude by hypocrisy and slavish servility."

"My dear," said the Staatsrätthin, controlling herself, "you agitate yourself causelessly. I am a simple, practical woman, who does not speak your language, and cannot follow you in your flights. I have no desire to drag you down to us. I simply wish to show you the world in its actual shape, that you may know what awaits you when you come to make your home in it; and I would gladly receive you in my motherly arms, lest you should receive too severe a shock from your first contact with reality."

"Oh, Frau Staatsrätin, if the world is what you describe it to me, I would rather remain above it, in a colder but purer sphere."

"I should have thought the sphere in which you were not safe from the assaults of angry peasants hardly a desirable one. I, at least, should prefer the modest discharge of domestic duties in the circle of home. But tastes differ."

Ernestine shrank from these words. "Truth is born in heaven, but stoned upon the earth. Those who wish to bring it into the world must have the courage of martyrs. These are such old commonplaces that one can hardly give utterance to them without their seeming trite. Those who recognize truth must speak it, and the happiness of possessing it outweighs with me the misery that I may incur in speaking it."

"Forgive me, but these are phrases that utterly fail to cast any halo around such a disgraceful occurrence as that of yesterday."

"Frau Staatsrätin!" cried Ernestine, flushing up.

"Be calm, my dear child, I am speaking like a mother to you. What can you gain by casting discredit by your conduct, beforehand, upon the truths that you wish to assert? Who will place any confidence in the understanding and learning of a woman who does not understand how to guard herself from ridicule? Pray listen to me calmly, for I speak as he would who would give his life for you every hour of the day. I would empty my heart to you, that no shadow may exist between us. The world is thus pitiless towards everything in the conduct of a woman that provokes remark, because our ideas of propriety have assigned her a modest retirement in the home circle, and it sees, in the bold attempt to emancipate herself from such universally received ideas, a want of womanly modesty and sense of honour, which, it thinks, cannot be too severely punished. Publicity is a thorny path. At every step aside from her vocation, although never so carefully taken, a woman meets with briars and nettles that wound her unprotected feet but are carelessly trodden down by a man. And even although she succeeds in weaving for herself a crown in this unlovely domain, it is, as one of our poets justly says, 'a crown of thorns.'"

Ernestine was looking fixedly upon the ground. The Staatsrätin could not guess her thoughts. Suddenly she raised her head proudly. "And if it be a crown of thorns, I will press it upon my brow. It is dearer to me than the fleeting roses of commonplace happiness, or the pinched head-gear of a German housewife!"

The Staatsrätin looked up to heaven, as though praying for patience. Then she replied with an evident effort at self-control, "I grant you that the lot of woman might be, and should be, better than it is. But we cannot improve it by struggling against it, but by enduring it with the dignity which will win us esteem, while our struggles can only expose us to the ridicule that always attends unsuccessful effort."

"Frau Staatsrätin, I hope to turn ridicule into fear."

"And if you should succeed, what will it avail you? Which is the happier, to have people shun you in fear, or to be surrounded by a loving circle for whom you have suffered?"

"I do not live for myself,--I live for the cause of millions of women for whom it is my mission to struggle and contend. Even if I could be ever so happy, I should despise myself were I able in my own good fortune to forget the misery of others. But I confess frankly that I could not be happy with such a lot as you prescribe for woman. Whoever has once floated upon the ocean of thought that embraces the world, would die of homesickness if confined within the narrow limits of the domestic circle."

The Staatsrätin dropped her hands in her lap,--her patience was exhausted. "It is of no use,--you cannot comprehend the words of reason!"

"Do you call that reason? I assure you, my ideas of reason are very different."

"Of course, of course. You are thinking of the definitions of Kant and Hegel. You are talking of what is called 'pure reason,' that repudiates everything hitherto dear and sacred in men's eyes, and would have created a far better world if God Almighty had not so bungled the work beforehand. But scatter abroad your doctrines far and wide,--they cannot do much harm, for they only serve to show upon how flimsy an argument the enemies of God base their denial of Him. But such a person can never be cordially received into a family circle. She can never inspire confidence, and that grieves me for my Johannes's sake!"

Ernestine was silent for awhile, and then looked sadly at the Staatsrätin. "I have not asked you to receive me into your family, Frau Staatsrätin. I know that my opinions make me an object of dislike wherever I go. Any one who sees through the defects and abuses of society will never be a welcome guest, but will be shunned as an embodied reproach. Strong-minded women, as they are called, think me narrow-minded,--the narrow-minded call me strong-minded. I belong to no party, I am opposed to all. It is a terrible fate, and nothing can help me to endure it, save a good conscience."

"Or excessive self-conceit," the Staatsrätin interposed half aloud.

Ernestine blushed deeply. Scarcely restraining her anger, she replied, "Frau Staatsrätthin, people, accustomed all their lives long to the modesty of stupidity that characterizes the women of your circle, will find it very easy to stigmatize as self-conceit the courage of a woman daring to have an opinion of her own."

"It is not necessarily stupidity that prevents one from trumpeting forth one's opinions as indisputable truth."

"Frau Staatsrätthin," said Ernestine, trembling from head to foot, "if you possessed for me one drop of the motherly kindness of which you spoke a little while ago, you would judge me less harshly. A mother makes allowance for her child. How could you wish to be my mother, when you are not disposed to make any allowance for me?"

"I really cannot tell how I fell into such an error,--and yet I was sincere, perfectly sincere. God knows I meant kindly by you. If you knew the part that you are playing in the eyes of the world, you would be more humble and grateful for the sacrifice,--yes, listen to the truth, you who pride yourself upon your frankness,--for the sacrifice, I say, that a mother makes when she opens her house and heart to such a person for her son's sake."

Ernestine sat pale and mute, her hands folded in her lap; she could not stir. The Staatsrätthin continued, greatly irritated: "But I did it; I conquered myself, and tried to forget your skepticism, your unwomanliness, your reputation. I hoped--hoped for my son's sake--that you would change, and I would gladly have been a help to you. But you repulse my first approach in a manner that makes me tremble at the thought that my Johannes has given his loving heart to such a hardened nature,--that he should have by his fireside a woman who despises a wife's duties, and who will be the ruin of himself and his home."

Ernestine sprang up. She gasped for breath, and her words broke forth from her with painful effort. "Frau Staatsrätthin, I can assure you there has never been a word or hint at any nearer relation between your son and myself. I never would have crossed your threshold had I known how I was slandered. I promise you, you shall have no cause for alarm. I shall never disgrace you by forcing you to receive me as your son's wife. If he should ever offer me his hand, I should refuse it. As I do not pretend to believe in a God, I cannot offer to appeal to him, but I swear to you by my honour, which is dearer to me than life----"

"Stop, stop!" the Staatsrätthin interrupted her in mortal terror. "Oh, my Johannes, what am I doing! Ernestine, do not make matters worse than they are. Do not drive them to extremities. I want you to reject, not my son, but your own faults and errors. Promise me to give up these, and you shall be the beloved daughter of my heart!"

"I cannot promise you that. I do not wish to do so. Do you think I would beg and fawn for the doubtful happiness of reigning at a fireside where every occasion would be improved to remind me of the sacrifice that was made in enduring me?--where the only commendation that I could earn would be for the skilful management of sauce-pans and dish-cloths, and where a badly-cooked dinner would brand me as a useless member of society? No, you know less of me than I thought, if you imagine that the chasm that you have opened between us can ever be bridged over. Spare me the humiliation of further explanations. I thank you for your hospitality. I leave you, as I did years ago, when I stood trembling and wet through before you, and you had nothing for me but cold words of reproof, that made me feel myself a little culprit, although I was as unconscious of wrong as I am to-day. Then I would sooner have died than have returned to you, although your son, blessings upon him! would have treated me like a sister. Ten years afterwards he has brought me again to you and overcome my old childish timidity; but the first moment that I stepped across your threshold and encountered your cold greeting, I knew that there was no home for me here!" She covered her face with her hands, and leaned exhausted against the door through which she was about to leave the room.

The Staatsrätthin, like all impulsive but really fine-tempered people, was easily appeased and touched. She hastened to her and threw her arms around her. "My dear child! Can you not forgive the hasty words of an anxious mother? Indeed I was unjust. You are more sinned against than sinning. I thought only of my son, and--"

"There was no need to stab me to the heart for his sake. I never dreamed of becoming the wife of your son,--he is far too hostile to my views, much as I esteem him. I wished for nothing but the happiness of calling one human being in the world friend. But I can go without that too. I will prove it to you. Farewell!"

And she hurried out, followed by the Staatsrätthin, who could not prevent her from gathering together the few things she had brought with her and leaving the house.

The mother looked after her with anxious forebodings. "What will Johannes say? How he will blame his mother!" she lamented,--but she soon collected herself, and said calmly and firmly, "In God's name, then, I will bear it. It is better thus!"

## PART III.

### CHAPTER I.

#### **THE STRENGTH OF WEAKNESS.**

On the morning of the day that drove Ernestine from her peaceful but brief refuge, Herr Leonhardt slept unusually late. His wife, who did not wish to waken him, looked anxiously at the old cuckoo clock, that pointed to half past six. It was very natural that the old man should be tired, after the trying occurrences of the previous day. Frau Brigitta had never seen him so agitated. He had shed bitter tears upon his return home,--tears from those poor eyes! Every drop had fallen scalding hot upon his faithful wife's heart. Those amongst whom he had lived for half a century as a steadfast, self-sacrificing friend and teacher, had taken up stones to stone him,--had forgotten all that they owed him,--it broke the heart of the weary old man.

Frau Leonhardt sat upon the bench by the stove. She folded her kind, fat hands, and wondered how any one could grieve the man who was to her the very ideal of honour and worth! The door in the clock opened, and out hopped the cuckoo, flapped his wings, called "cuckoo" seven times, and then disappeared, slamming the door behind him as if he were greatly irritated at finding nothing astir as yet. Frau Leonhardt arose,--the old man must be called now, for the children came to school at eight.

She ascended the ladder-like staircase to their upper story, which was under the roof of the cottage, and softly entered the bedroom. Herr Leonhardt lay with his face turned to the wall.

"Are you asleep?" asked Frau Leonhardt.

"What is it? what is the matter?" cried her husband alarmed. "Is it really on fire?"

"Why, you are dreaming,--it is time to get up,--the children will be here!"

"But, my dear wife, it is still night. What are you doing up so early?"

"Night?" and Frau Leonhardt smiled. "Why, how sleepy you are!--it is broad daylight--seven o'clock."

"Broad daylight!" cried the old man in a strange tone of voice. He sat up in bed, rubbed his eyes, then rubbed them again and stared at the bright sunbeams, but not an eyelash quivered. He was very pale.

"How are you, dear husband?" asked his wife anxiously.

"Well, well, mother dear, only a little tired still," he said in an uncertain voice. "Go down now and get the coffee ready. I will come soon!"

"Can I not help you? you are trembling so; you must have fever!" cried Frau Brigitta.

"Oh, no, I am quite well,--go down now, I pray you."

She obeyed, hard as it was for her, and below-stairs she could not help weeping, she knew not why. She prepared the coffee, and listened with a beating heart for Bernhard's step upon the stairs. Then, after twenty minutes, that seemed to her an eternity, she heard him coming with a slow, uncertain tread. Some great misfortune seemed upon its way to her. How strange!--he felt for the door before opening it. He must be very sick. She ran towards him, but his look reassured her. He was pale indeed, but his expression was as calm and gentle as ever. He laid his hand upon her arm. "Well, dear wife, now let us breakfast. I have kept you waiting for me!"

"Oh, yes, I waited," said Frau Brigitta, leading him to the table. "Have you any appetite? Do you feel any better?"

"Oh, yes, but pour out the coffee for me, my dear. I am still somewhat fatigued."



"That I will." And the old woman poured the coffee into his cup. "Here is the milk." And she placed the pitcher near his hand.

Herr Leonhardt took it carefully, and touched the edge of his cup with his hand, that he might not pour in too much; but, in spite of his care, he spilt the hot milk upon his fingers. He said nothing, but secretly wiped it off and slowly put his cup to his lips. His wife laid a piece of bread upon his plate, and this also he ate slowly.

"Is it not good?" asked Brigitta.

"Certainly it is," he replied, "but pray eat your own breakfast." And he listened to be sure that she did so. Then, when he had drunk his coffee, he felt for the table before he put down his cup.

His wife looked at him with anxiety. "Bernhard, I think your eyes are worse again to-day."

"I think they are," he replied quietly. "Have you breakfasted?"

"Yes, I have finished."

"Well, come then and sit here beside me. I want to tell you something. Give me your hand, my dear wife, and listen quietly to what I have to say."

Frau Brigitta looked at him wonderingly, and her heart beat so quickly--she knew not why--that it almost took away her breath.

Herr Leonhardt stroked her hand, and spoke with the tenderness with which one speaks to a child. "During all these eighteen years that I have been such a care to you, and in all the thirty years of our marriage, you have never caused me an hour of suffering, and I have done what I could to aid and support you. You have borne bravely all our common misfortunes, followed our first children to the grave with me, and comforted me when I was overcome by despair. Do not let your courage fail you now, for I must give you pain. I cannot help it. Try, as you always have done, to spare me the pang of seeing you sink under it. Promise me this!"

"For Heaven's sake, my husband, speak! I will promise you everything!"

"What we have so long feared, dear wife, has at last come upon us!" He drew her nearer to him. "This morning when I awoke there was no daylight for me!"

A dull, half-suppressed moan was heard at these words; then silence ensued. The old woman's hands slipped from her husband's,--he put his own out towards her, but she was not at his side. She had sunk down from her seat and buried her face in her arms, that he might not hear her sob.

"Mother, where are you?" he asked after a little while.

She embraced his knees and hid her streaming eyes in his lap. "Oh, my poor, kind husband,--blind! Oh God! Those dear, dear eyes!" And then her grief would not be controlled, and she lay at his feet, sobbing loudly.

Herr Leonhardt gently raised her until her head rested upon his shoulder, and then waited until the first outbreak should be past. He too had had moments this morning that none but his God might witness. He could not ask his wife to do what had been impossible for himself. At last he said softly and tenderly, "Brigitta, you have been everything to me that a wife can be to her husband. I have always thought there was nothing left for you to do, and yet in your old age our loving Father has filled up the measure of your self-sacrifice and laid upon you a heavier burden than any you have yet had to bear. He has taken from me the power to support you, and calls upon you, a weary, aged pilgrim, to be your husband's staff upon his path to the grave. It seems very hard,--but, dear Brigitta, when God calls, what should we answer?"

"Lord, here am I!" said his wife, and the resignation and cheerful submission in her voice were truly wonderful. She embraced her aged husband, and her tears flowed more gently as she said, "I will guide and support you, and never be weary."

"Thanks, dear heart. And now be calm, for my sake! Think how much worse it would have been if you had found me this morning dead in my bed!"

"Oh, a thousand times worse!"

"Then do not let us rebel because God has taken from me one of the five senses, with which He endows us that we may enjoy the glory of His universe, he has still left me four. If I can no longer see your dear face, I can still hear your gentle voice of comfort and feel you by my side; and although I cannot see the sun, I can still warm myself in its beams,--I can inhale the fragrance of the flowers that it calls into life,--enjoy the fruits that it ripens. I can hear the songs of the birds, and with them praise my Creator from the depths of my soul. How much he has left me! We will not be like thankless beggars, showing our gratitude for benefits by complaining that they are not great enough. I have seen the sunlight for sixty-eight years. Shall I complain because, just before my entrance into eternal light, God darkens my eyes, as we do a child's when we lead it up to a brilliant Christmas-tree? I will bear the bandage patiently, and try to prepare

my soul for the glories awaiting it. Let us but remember all this, dear wife, and we shall not be sad any longer."

The old man ceased. His darkened eyes were radiant with light from within, the reflection of those heavenly beams of which in spirit he had a foresight.

His wife had listened to him with folded hands, and her simple nature was elevated and refined by thus witnessing his lofty resignation. The peaceful silence that reigned in the room was too sacred to be broken by any sounds of earthly sorrow. Her eyes were tearless as she gazed upon the noble face of the man who was all in all to her, and she waited humbly for further words from him. At last the only words escaped her lips that she could utter in her present frame of mind. "And our son?" she asked softly.

An expression of pain flitted across his features. "That is the hardest to bear,--our poor son! God give him strength, as He once gave me strength when I was forced to leave the University and become a schoolmaster. I told him a short time ago what the physicians said. I did not tell you, for I wanted to spare you as long as I could. He sent me a reply by return of mail, which you shall hear, now that I have nothing to conceal from you. You shall read it, and be glad that you have such a son."

"My good boy!"

"He will give up his studies and take my place here, so that we need never come to want."

"But will that be allowed?"

"Yes,--I have already obtained permission from the proper authorities."

"Oh, how thoughtful you have been!" cried his wife with emotion. "With all that burden to bear so silently, and now you console me instead of my comforting you! How did such a poor creature as I ever come to have such a husband?"

She pressed a kiss upon his withered hand. The footsteps of the school-children were heard in the hall. Herr Leonhardt arose and went to the door.

"Wait I let me lead you," said Brigitta.

"Oh, you need not," he said smiling. "I have been preparing myself for blindness for a long time, and I have practised walking about with closed eyes, that I might not be so helpless when the time came. And so now I can find my way very well." He had reached the door, and went out. "Good-morning, children!" he cried, and felt his way along the wall to the school-room, followed by his anxious wife. He stumbled a little upon the threshold. "Never mind," he said to Brigitta, who would have supported him. "I need more practice, but it will be better soon." He found his desk, seated himself there, and waited until the children had all taken their places.

"Are you all here?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"Well, then, sit down,--we cannot have any school to-day. My dear children, I must take leave of you. I cannot teach you any more. God has taken from me my eyesight. I cannot see you nor your lessons, and therefore I can no longer be your schoolmaster. Your parents will consider my blindness a punishment from God for my conduct, but I tell you, if the trials God sends us are rightly borne they are not punishments, but benefits. Remember this all your lives long. There will come dark hours in every one of your lives, if you live to grow up, when you will understand what your old master meant. And now come and give me your hands, one after the other. So,--I thank you for your childlike tenderness and affection, and I forgive from the bottom of my heart those few who have ever given me any trouble. My son will soon be here in my place; promise me to obey him, and to make his duty easier for him by diligence and obedience. Farewell, my dear children. God bless and prosper you!"

He held out his hands, and the children, sobbing and crying, thronged around him to clasp and kiss them.

"Who is this?" the old man asked of each one, and then, as the names were told him, he shook the little hands.

"Do not cry, dear children, we are not bidding farewell for life. You will often pass by the school-house on Sunday and shake hands with your old master as he sits on his bench before the door. And then I can guess by the voice who it is, and can feel how much you have grown, and you can tell me what you have been learning during the week. And those who have studied the best shall have some nuts, or one of my loveliest flowers, or some other little gift. Won't that be delightful?"

The children were consoled by this prospect, and hastened home to tell the important news to their parents.

The old man stood alone with his wife in the deserted school-room. "Come, dear wife, we will

send a message to Walter." He laid his hands once more upon his desk, and tears fell from his eyes. "It is strange," he said, "how much it costs us to leave a spot where we have laboured so long, even although our work has been hard and ill rewarded. Our home is wherever we have been used to the consciousness of duties fulfilled, and when we must leave it, it is as if we were going among strangers!"

He put his arm in Brigitta's, and, with head bent, crossed the threshold which separated him from the humble scene of the daily labour of his life. For the first time, he looked, to his wife's anxious eyes, like a broken-down old man.

"I must leave you alone for an hour," she said, when she had seated him in the dwelling-room on the bench by the stove. "I must prepare the dinner."

"Do so, mother; man must eat, whether he be merry or sorrowful, eh? And we are not really sorrowful, are we?" And he forced a smile and patted her shoulder.

"No, dear Bernhard, we are not!" said his wife, struggling to repress a fresh burst of tears.

"Send a messenger to town to Walter as soon as possible," said Herr Leonhardt.

"Indeed I will. I cannot rest until my boy is with us. And I will send for the doctor, too!"

"Do not send for the doctor; he can do nothing more for me."

"But it will be a comfort to me to see him,--do let me send," said Brigitta. And she left the room.

The old man sat there, calm and still. "And now I must begin my new daily task,--the laborious task of idleness!" he thought, as he folded his hands and gazed into the night that had closed around him for this life.

He sat thus for some time, when the cuckoo began to announce the hour of nine, but the last "cuckoo" stuck in the bird's throat, and he stood still at his open door. The clock had run down. For the first time in many years, Herr Leonhardt had neglected to wind it up. He arose, groped his way towards it, felt for the weights, and carefully drew them up. The cuckoo took breath again, finished his song, and slammed to his door. "I will not forget you again, little comrade," said he, "you, who have chirped on through such merry and sorry times. How often now shall I long for you to tell me when the long, weary hours end!"

Thus said the old man to himself, and again slipped back to his place. "There is something done," he said as he sat down. Then minute after minute passed by, his head sank upon his breast, the darkness made him sleepy, and for awhile even his thoughts faded and were at rest.

His wife looked in upon him several times, but withdrew softly, that his sleep might not be disturbed.

It was almost twelve o'clock.

Then something rustled into the room; the old man felt the air stirred by an approaching form, and he raised his head. The figure threw itself at his feet. He put out his hand and touched waves of silky hair.

"Father Leonhardt!"

"Oh, this is Fräulein Ernestine."

Ernestine looked at him, and observed with dismay that the pupils of his eyes did not contract with the light.

"Herr Leonhardt, what is the matter with your eyes?"

He smiled. "Their work is done."

"Good heavens! already? I thought they would last months at least."

"What matters a few months more or less?" said the old man quietly.

Ernestine looked amazed. Involuntarily she clasped her hands. "Is this possible? I tremble from head to foot at the mere sight of such a calamity, and you--you upon whom it has fallen--are so perfectly calm and composed. Tell me, oh, tell me, what gives you such superhuman strength?"

The old man turned to her his darkened eyes. "My faith, Fräulein Ernestine."

Ernestine's gaze fell. "It is well for you."

"Yes, it is well for me," repeated Herr Leonhardt.

A long pause ensued. At last the old man asked kindly, "How are you after that terrible yesterday?"

"Oh, Father Leonhardt, do not ask me how I am! Until this moment I thought myself very miserable, but your calamity teaches me to despise my own pain. In comparison with that, what is all the imaginary unhappiness that comes from being misunderstood? What matters it if people despise me for differing from them? What can their esteem give me or their contempt deprive me of? They cannot bestow upon me or take from me one ray of sunlight, one glimmer of the stars. The golden day shines upon my path, and I am young and able to labour. I see the beauty of the world, the universe is painted upon my organs of sight, my soul is bathed in light, and how can I give room to mortified pride or offended vanity, when I see a great enlightened soul peacefully resigned to endless night? No, Father Leonhardt, holy martyr that you are, I discard all my petty personal trials, and am grieved only for you." She bowed her head upon his hands, and sobbed passionately.

"My daughter," said the old man, much moved, "you are not telling me the truth. The pain that you have suffered must be great indeed, for only a heart that knows what suffering is can feel so for others' woes. Your heart must have been filled before to overflowing with these tears that you are now shedding for me."

"Oh, Father Leonhardt, blind though you are, you see clearly. I came to seek advice and comfort from your paternal heart, and you have comforted me even before I could tell you of my grief. Yes, there was a moment when I forgot myself, but it is past. Your noble example has made me strong again. Let it go. I can think and talk now only of yourself. I pray you take me for your daughter. You have treated me with a father's tenderness,—let me repay you as a child should. Yesterday you perilled that venerable head to save me from the angry mob,—now let me shield you from the menacing phantoms of night and loneliness. Come, live in my house with your wife. I will be with you as much as I can. I will talk to you and read to you. I am so lonely, and,—I cannot tell why,—I begin to thirst so for love."

Herr Leonhardt clasped his hands. "Oh, what comfort and delight Heaven still sends me! Yes, although my eyes are blind, I can see the hidden beauty of the heart that you reveal to me. God bless you, my dear daughter, and grant you the light of His countenance, that you may one day recognize Him as your best friend and benefactor!" He paused, and then added almost timidly, "Forgive me,—I am falling into a tone that you do not accord with. Remember that in my youth I studied theology,—a little of the pulpit still sticks to me. Do not think that I arrogate the right or ability to instruct you. I, old and broken down as I am, am not the one to train that proud spirit. I will accept the crumbs of love that fall for me from your large heart, and gratefully pray for your happiness."

"Father Leonhardt, do not undervalue yourself. You must know how far above me you are. When I saw you in your simple greatness confront those rude men yesterday, I was filled, for the first time since my childhood, with a sentiment of adoration. You understand me, you make allowance for me, while every one else misunderstands and condemns me. You stood by me in the hour of danger, and yet you never boast of your kindness. Oh, you are noble and true! Come to me,—let me find peace upon your paternal heart, let me give you a home and provide for your son's future."

"Thanks, thanks for all your offers, my dear child, but I cannot take advantage of your generosity, and, thank God, I do not stand in need of it. My son has already determined to give up the study of medicine and take my place here as schoolmaster. Thus, our future is provided for, we shall not have to leave the dear old school-house, and I can die where my whole life has been passed."

"Does that thought comfort you?" asked Ernestine, shaking her head.

"Oh, yes, it is all that I desire. Those who, like yourself, my child, pass through life with all sails set, have no idea of the restraint which those in our class must gradually learn to put upon themselves in order not to despair. Yet in this very restraint, in this perpetual narrow round of duties that life assigns us, there is happiness, a content that routine always brings. You may say that routine blunts the faculties,—but, for the most part, it only seems to do so. A nature strong from within will thrust its roots deep into the soil of its abiding-place with the same force that enables it to grasp the universe, and if you should attempt to tear it thence in its old age, you would almost tear its life away also. I love the little spot of ground and the little house that have been the world to me. I believe I should die if I had to leave them."

Ernestine listened thoughtfully. "Well, then, if I may not offer you a support, I can at least offer your son the means of pursuing his studies. My library, my apparatus, are at his disposal. I hope he will not refuse to make use of them in his leisure hours."

"That indeed is a favor that I accept most gladly, although I can never hope to repay it! I thank you in my son's name. You will know the happiness of having restored to a human being what he most prizes,—his hopes for the future."

"You amaze me more and more," cried Ernestine with warmth, "as you afford me an insight into the depth and cultivation of your mind. What self mastery it must have cost you to live here among these savages!"

The old man smiled. "Living among them, one gradually grows like them in some things, and is

no longer shocked. At first, to be sure, I thought myself too good for them. But my faith soon taught me that no one is too good for the post God has assigned him. When I was a student I delighted in the theatres, and visited them frequently. Once, as I was leaving the manager's room, I heard him lamenting the obstinacy of one of his corps. 'He utterly refuses to take a subordinate part. Good heavens! they cannot all play principal parts!' The man never dreamed of the serious lesson he had taught me. 'All cannot play principal parts,' I said to myself whenever the demon of arrogance assailed me, and I gave myself, heart and soul, to the subordinate role that had fallen to me on the stage of life. I soon desired no better lot than to hear some day my Master's 'Well done, good and faithful servant!'"

"All cannot play first parts," murmured Ernestine. "I too, Father Leonhardt, will ponder these words." She sat silent for awhile, then passed her hand across her brow. "No! to be nothing but a subordinate, a figure that appears only to vanish again, occupying attention for one moment, but just as well away,--no, that I could not endure!" She sprang up, and walked to and fro.

"My dear Fräulein----"

"Father, call me Ernestine,--it is so pleasant to hear one's first name from those whom one values."

"Certainly, if you desire it. Then, my dear Ernestine, I was going to answer you by saying that no one who fulfils the duties of life conscientiously is 'as well away.' As far as the world is concerned, it may be so; but we must not seek to have the world for our public, or to find the sole delight of life in its applause. It is not modest to imagine one's self an extraordinary person, destined to enchain the attention of nations upon the stage of the world."

Ernestine blushed deeply.

Leonhardt continued: "Every one finds associates amongst whom to play a principal part, and in whose applause satisfaction is to be found. For these few he is no subordinate, for them he does not 'appear only to vanish again.' Is not a wife, or a husband, to whom one may be everything, worth living for?"

"Only for persons, Father Leonhardt, who have never so soared above their surroundings as to find the centre of their being in the life of the mind and what pertains to it. Those who have so far forgotten themselves as to make the interests of the world their own, can only live with and for the world, and it is as impossible for them to be content in a narrow round of private satisfactions as for the plant to retreat into the seed whence it sprung."

"Indeed, Ernestine?" cried a familiar voice behind her.

She turned, startled. Johannes had been listening on the threshold to the conversation. He was evidently in a state of feverish agitation. His chest heaved passionately as he approached. "Would you escape me thus--thus?" He took her hand, and his eyes sought hers, as if to dive into the depths of her soul in search of the pearl of love deeply hidden there. There was a fervent appeal in his glance,--he clasped her hand, and every breath was an entreaty, every throb of his heart a remonstrance. Pain, anxiety, and the haste of pursuit so shook him that he trembled. Ernestine saw, heard, felt it all, but she stood mute and motionless,--she could not open her lips or utter a sound,--she was as if stunned. "Ernestine!" Johannes cried again, "Ernestine!" The tone went to her very soul,--a low moan escaped her lips,--she inclined her head towards his breast, and would have fallen into his arms,--but a shadow, the shadow of his mother, stepped in between them and darkened Ernestine's eyes so that she no longer saw the noble figure before her, or the tears of tenderness in his eyes. All around her was cold and dim, as when clouds veil the sun,--his mother's shadow scared her from his heart.

She raised her head, and slowly withdrew her hand from his.

His arms dropped hopelessly. A moment of utter exhaustion followed his previous emotion. He put his handkerchief to his forehead, that seemed moist with blood. His veins throbbed,--there was a loud singing in his ears,--he could hardly stand. He exerted all his self-control, and went towards Leonhardt.

"God strengthen you, Herr Leonhardt!" he said in broken sentences. "I know it all from your messenger to your son, whom I met on the road. I need not offer to console you,--you are a man, and will endure like a man."

"I am a Christian, my dear Herr Professor, and that stands to feeble age in the stead of manhood!"

"True, true!" said Johannes with a troubled glance at Ernestine. She approached, and said in a trembling voice,

"Father Leonhardt, I must say farewell to you now and go home. When your son comes, send him to me." She offered Möllner her hand. "Forgive me, I could not help it!"

Johannes mastered his emotion, and said, with apparent composure, "I shall write to you."

Ernestine silently assented, and went. The old man listened. He heard her retreating footsteps and Johannes' labouring breath, and again he saw for all his blind eyes.

"Oh, Herr Professor, do not let her go. Follow her quickly, and let all be explained. Believe me, she is an angel. Grudge her no words. There is no use in writing,--her uncle can intercept all her letters. Spoken words are safest and best. Quick, quick, or you may both be wretched!"

"Thanks, old friend, you are right!" cried Johannes, all aglow again; and, before the words were well uttered, he was gone.

Frau Brigitta entered with the soup, and looked after him in surprise. "The gentleman seems in a hurry!" said she.

"Let him go, mother dear. These young people are struggling, amid a thousand fears and anxious hopes, for a goal that we old people have long gazed back upon contentedly. God guide them!"

Johannes called to his coachman to await his return before the school-house, and followed Ernestine, who was slowly pursuing the foot-path directly before him. All was quiet and lonely around, for it was noon, and the peasants were at dinner.

She looked round upon hearing Johannes' step behind her, and stood still. He soon overtook her.

"Ernestine," he said resolutely, "I must have a final, decisive word with you, and Leonhardt is right,--it should go from heart to heart. Will you listen to me?"

He drew her arm through his, and as they talked they slowly approached the eminence upon which stood the castle.

"Ernestine, dear Ernestine, I would give all that I have that the scene between you and my mother, this morning, had never been. You have been mortally offended, and that, too, while you were my guest in a house whither you had fled for refuge, and that should have been a home to you. But it happened in my absence,--it was not my fault. Will you make me suffer for it?"

"No, my friend, certainly not."

"Well, then, be magnanimous and forgive my mother, although she never can forgive herself!"

"I have nothing to forgive."

"You are implacable in your righteous anger. Let me hope that the time may come when my mother may atone for what she said to you to-day. Dearest Ernestine, she startled back your young heart, just awakening to its truest instincts; it was a poor preparation for what I wished to say to you to-day, and yet,--and yet I must speak,--I can be silent no longer. Yes, Ernestine, I wished to-day to ask you to be my wife. I wished to entreat of you the sacrifice that marriage demands of every woman, and of you more especially; and I firmly believe that if you could have listened first to my views of the duties and the lot of a wife, they would not have seemed to you as terrible as from the lips of my practical mother. I hope to be able to shield you from the hard materialism of life that so alarms you, and to which my mother attaches too much importance. My white rose shall not be planted in a kitchen-garden. You shall be the pride and ornament of my life. I ask nothing from you but love for my heart, sympathy in my scientific pursuits, and allowance for my faults." He took her hand in his, and stood still. "Ernestine, will you not give me these?"

With bated breath he waited for her reply. In vain his glance sought her eyes beneath their drooping lids.

Ernestine stood motionless in marble-like repose, and no human being could divine what was passing in the depths of her soul. At last her pale lips breathed scarcely audibly: "I cannot,--your mother,--I cannot----"

"Oh, if you cannot love me, do not make her bear the blame, do not overwhelm her with the curse of having robbed her son of the joy of his life,--that were too severe a punishment! And, if you do love me, conquer your pride nobly by showing her how she has mistaken you. Show her all the woman in you, and prove to her that you are capable of self-sacrifice, and revenge could not desire for her more profound humiliation."

"I cannot make the sacrifice that she demands; and if I could I would not, because she *demand*s it and makes it a condition. A soul that is free will not barter away its convictions and its aims, even though the happiness of a lifetime is at stake. When your mother asks me to resign my plan of achieving an academic career, and to bury the immature fruits of all my labours, she is excusable, for she does not dream what she asks; but when you propose such conditions, you can, not only never be my husband,--you can no longer be my friend, for you do not understand me."

"Good God, Ernestine! what do I ask of you more than what every man asks of the woman whom he wishes to marry,--that she shall live for him alone? And how can you do this if you do

not relinquish your ambition and be content with a private life? You need not relinquish science, you shall be my confidante, my aid in all my labours, my friend, sharing all my plans and hopes. Only do not any longer seek publicity, do not try to obtain a degree or deliver lectures. No opprobrium or contempt must dare attach itself to the pure name of my wife."

Ernestine started as if struck by an arrow. "Those are your mother's very words. What? Do you, who assume such superiority to woman, condescend to repeat phrases taught you by your mother?"

"Ernestine, you are unjust. You have long known my views concerning the position of woman, and you cannot expect that I should be false to my most sacred convictions at what is the most important moment of my life."

"And yet you require this of me?"

"A woman's convictions, Ernestine, are always dependent upon her feelings in such matters. And where feeling is concerned, the stronger must always conquer the weaker. Hitherto you have been moved only by the wrongs of your sex,--they are all that you have known anything of. When you love, you will learn to know its joys, and be all the more ready to resign your vain championship for your husband's sake."

"Do you think so?" asked Ernestine with unaccustomed irony.

"I hope so. It is our only chance for happiness. I am true to you, and tell you beforehand what I look for from you. I will not influence your decision by flattery or false acquiescence. It must be formed in full view of the duties it imposes upon you, or it will be worthless. You may think this a rude fashion to be wooed in, and perhaps you are right. But I will not win my wife by those arts which woman's vanity has made such powerful aids to the lover. I will not owe my wife to a weakness,--and vanity certainly is a weakness. Your love for me must be all strength. I would have you great indeed when you give yourself to me,--and when is a woman greater than when she conquers her pride and herself for love's sake? In her self-conquest she accomplishes what heroes, who have subdued nations, have found too hard a task, for it requires the greatest human effort. It is true, the world will not shout applause,--deeds truly great often shun the eyes of the multitude: in the renunciation of all acknowledgment there is a joy known only to a few. Within quiet convent walls, past which the stream of human life flows heedlessly, many a victory over self has been attained that was never rewarded by a single earthly laurel. What awaits the end of the painful contest? The grave! But I ask of you, Ernestine, far less of sacrifice, and surely there is a reward to reap in bestowing perfect happiness upon one who loves you. Do you hesitate? Is the struggle not ended? Can your royal soul not cast aside the self-imposed chains of false ambition? Oh, Ernestine, do not let me implore you further; say only one word,--to whom will you belong,--to your uncle, or to me?"

"To myself, for no human being can belong to any other!" And her look at Johannes was almost one of aversion. "Yes, now I see that you are your mother's son. I see her stern features, I hear her voice of remonstrance, and I see myself between you,--a creature without will,--no longer capable of independent thought or feeling, still less of rendering any service to the world. Am I to cast aside like a garment what has been the guiding hope of my life,--my dream by night and day,--and go to your mother begging for forgiveness and indulgence, excusing myself like a child, and promising future improvement, that I may humbly receive from her cold lips the kiss of condescending pardon? Again and again, No! What right has your mother to regard me as a criminal, and to attempt to improve me? Whom have I injured? What law of propriety have I infringed, that she should treat me like some noxious thing in the world? I have lived in calm retirement, asking for no happiness but that of labour. Why should she insist upon thrusting another kind of happiness upon me, and blame me for not considering it as such? Did I seek her out? Was it not against my will, and only in accordance with your earnest entreaties, that I accompanied you to her house? Why should she drive me from it like an intruder, and impose upon me conditions of a return that I did not desire? Oh, if you, noble and true as I once thought you, had loved me, not as you thought I ought to be, but as I am, with all my faults and eccentricities, I would have striven for your sake to become the most perfect woman in the world. And if you had said to me, 'Be my companion,--I will help you to vindicate the honour of your sex, whatever is sacred to you shall be so to me also,'--if you had thus acknowledged my individuality, and had intrusted your happiness, your honour, to my keeping, without other warranty than the dictates of your own heart, I would have bowed in reverence to a love so powerful,--I would gladly have sacrificed my freedom to you,--to please you, I would have performed the hardest task of all--humiliated myself before your haughty mother! But when you come to me thus,--only her echo,--when you make it the foundation of our happiness that I should be what she chooses, and try to assure yourself at the outset that I will submit to all your requirements, that you may run no risk from such a self-willed creature,--all this shows me that she has separated us utterly. I have lost you, and all that you have given me is the knowledge that I have no place in this world, and that I am miserable!"

Johannes stood pale and mute before her, but his pure conscience shone in his steady eyes. Ernestine did not venture to look at him. With trembling hands she plucked to pieces a twig that she had just broken from a bush at her side.

"After this we can be nothing more to each other," he began; and it seemed as if every word

fell from his lips into her heart like molten lead. He took breath, as if after some violent physical exertion, and then continued: "I do not answer the accusations with which you have overwhelmed my mother and myself. They grieve me for your sake. They are unworthy of your nobler self. I have treated you as I was compelled to do by my sense of honour. I have told you what was, according to my profoundest convictions, indispensable to the happiness of marriage. That you refuse,--that you can refuse me the sacrifice I ask of you,--proves to me that you do not love me. This is what separates us. And I pray you to remember that, as I sacredly believe, it is the duty of a man to convince himself that the woman whom he seeks to marry is fitted to be the mother of his children; and your heart is not yet open to the wide, self-forgetting affection that can alone suffice to enable a woman to undertake the hard duties of a wife and mother. Will it ever be thus open? Who can tell? Another may one day reap in joy what I have sown in pain. I do not reproach you,--how could I?" He laid his hand upon her head, his eyes were for one moment suffused. As he looked at her, grief had the mastery, and he was silent. She was crushed beneath his gaze, her artificial composure forsook her, a cry escaped her lips. She now first began to perceive what she had done, and her heart shrunk from the burden that she had laid upon it, although she did not as yet dream of its weight.

Johannes gently smoothed her hair from her brow. Her agitation restored his self-control.

"You are kind, Ernestine,--you see how you have hurt me, and you are sorry for me. It is the way with women. This little weakness does you honour in my eyes. I pray you be composed. I am quite calm again." He would have withdrawn his hand, but she held it fast and looked up at him with those eyes of sad entreaty that had worked such magic upon him when she was a child.

"Do not utterly forsake me!" she whispered in half-stifled accents.

"No, as truly as I trust my God will not forsake me, I will not forsake you. I will not shun you like a coward, who, to make renunciation easy and to learn forgetfulness, turns his back upon the good he cannot attain. You need a friend who can protect you, placed as you are with regard to your uncle and the world. This friend I will be to you, until you find a worthier. Do not fear that you will hear another word of love, or of regret. I will conquer my grief alone. My one care shall be for your happiness. Farewell, and when you have need of me send for me." He pressed her hands once more, and turned away without another word.

Ernestine looked after him as he receded from her gaze. She looked and looked until he turned a corner and vanished. Then she sank on her knees and cried in an outburst of anguish, "Have I really had the strength to do this?"

She must have remained thus some time beneath the shade of the trees, when the sound of carriage-wheels approaching startled her to consciousness. It was her uncle. He stopped the vehicle and descended from it.

"You can take out the horses," he said to the coachman. "I shall not drive to town." The man turned and drove home again.

Leuthold stood mute before Ernestine, piercing her soul with his penetrating glance. He had learned from Frau Willmers everything that had occurred the day before, but nothing of the intercourse that had previously taken place between Ernestine and Johannes. Scarcely a week had passed, and had his ward already escaped him--fled with an utter stranger? The thing was impossible. Ernestine was no coward,--a crowd of drunken peasants could never have driven the shy girl into the arms of the first stranger whom she met. She must have previously known her magnanimous champion. He interrogated the other servants, but they one and all hated him and were devoted to Frau Willmers. They all declared their entire ignorance,--"the Fräulein must have met the gentleman at the school-house,--he was often there."

This was enough to prove to Leuthold that the ground was unsteady beneath his feet, and for a moment he succumbed under the weight of this new anxiety. Was it possible to guard a woman more strictly, to seclude her more utterly, than he had guarded and secluded Ernestine? And yet--yet in this heart, that he thought long since dead, impulses were strong that would seek and find expression in spite of every precaution that he might take. And all this at a moment when he was battling for life and death with a peril which required younger and more unbroken energies than his own!

It was too much; a presentiment seized him that fate had decreed his ruin. But he collected himself once more, and took counsel with himself, as was his custom in all emergencies. As we turn to Heaven when all around us seems dark, so he turned in his direst need to his own understanding and will, that had hitherto sufficed him.

Allowing himself but brief refreshment after all his anxiety and alarm, he ordered the carriage and set out for town to bring home his ward. But, to his great surprise and delight, he found her thus near home, evidently weary and disconsolate.

"Aha, like the mermaid in your beloved fable, you have been trying your fortunes among mankind, away from your cool, clear, native element," he said to himself with a smile. "They liked you well, I doubt not, at first sight, but you have not gained much, for they soon discovered that you were half fish and not fit to live with them!"



As he approached her, he put on an expression of distress, and when the coachman had gone he began in a tone of great anxiety, "Merciful heavens, do I find you thus? Weeping by the roadside like a homeless beggar!"

"True, true indeed,--like a homeless beggar," Ernestine repeated.

"But, my dear child, is this becoming,--such a scene in this open spot,--writhing on the ground here like a worm?"

She looked at him. He had on a broad-brimmed, light-gray felt hat. As ever, his costume was faultless. Standing before her with a lowering glance, his tall, supple figure now bending down to her, his eyes riveted upon her, he it was that seemed to her like a worm, and a most poisonous one, and with unmistakable aversion she sprang up and recoiled from him.

He stepped back and looked at her with amazement. "What! is this Ernestine von Hartwich, whom I have educated--whose philosophical composure nothing could disturb? or is this wayward child a changeling, brought hither by some evil sprite?"

"Spare me your sneers, uncle," said Ernestine imperiously. "They disgust me!"

Leuthold's amazement increased still further. "What--what words are these? Is this what is taught at Frau Staatsrätthin Möllner's? Upon my word, Ernestine, I believe you are ill."

"Yes, yes, I am, and I pray you to leave me. You cannot restore me to health."

"What an amount of mischief has been done in these few days when you were without my advice and protection! It is true, I cannot tell what has happened, but something serious must have occurred. I forbear to reproach you for making acquaintances without my knowledge, and for leaving the house without my permission, and thus causing me great anxiety, for I see you are sufficiently punished already, but, I beg of you, do not do so again. You see now what comes of it."

"And I beg of you, uncle, not to treat me thus, like a child, who must say, after she has been chastised, 'I will not do so again!' If I wished to return to the world, of which I had my first experience yesterday, you could not forbid me to do so, for"--involuntarily she repeated what the Staatsrätthin had said--"you cannot forbid my doing what does not infringe the law. But I do not, and never shall, wish to return,--never! I am out of place among other people. I do not understand their ways, nor they mine." She looked at Leuthold with suspicion. "I do not know whether you have been right in bringing me up as a perfect recluse,--in making me so unfit for life in the world. Who can tell that it would not have been better to leave me my simplicity of heart, and not to have led me into paths whence there is no return? I will struggle on in my lonely way as never woman struggled before, until the day comes when I can convince and shame the most incredulous. But let me tell you, uncle, that if the day never comes when my fame atones to me for all the happiness I have resigned,--then, uncle, I shall curse you!"

She spoke the last words with an expression that alarmed even the cold-blooded Leuthold. In an instant he grasped the whole situation. He saw that she had made some sacrifice to her ambition that was almost too great for her strength. His ready wit soon divined what had occurred. It was a blow, of the significance of which he was perfectly aware. He felt that he had reached a crisis that demanded all his caution and forethought, and he did not venture to speak until he had pondered well what course to adopt. Thus they arrived at the gate of the castle-garden in silence. He opened it for Ernestine to pass in. As they walked past the spot where she had stood with Johannes on the previous evening, Ernestine burst into tears. Leuthold looked at her in surprise, and she controlled herself and walked hastily on. As always, he had the effect of cold water upon her. Her wound did not bleed in his presence.

"I was greatly irritated when I learned, upon my arrival this morning, what had happened," he began at last "Our very lives are not secure in the midst of this mob of ignorant peasants. We must seriously think of removing elsewhere,--we cannot possibly remain here."

Ernestine made a gesture of dissent.

"What, you do not wish to go? What can induce you to stay here, where all are so hostile to you?"

Ernestine did not reply. After a pause she said curtly, "Very well. You have proposed our departure,--that is enough for the present I will think of it."

They entered the house.

"Ernestine, I have brought you the sphygmometer I promised you,--would you like to see it?"

"No, I will go to my room and rest."

Leuthold knew not what to do. He did not wish to leave her to herself, but would have made use of her agitation to extort her secret from her. She had reached the door when he cried after her, "Apropos, Ernestine! I congratulate you!"

"Upon what?"

"I committed an indiscretion this morning, and found upon your table the essay that you have withheld from me for so long. I assure you, Ernestine, I was actually astounded! It is far beyond anything you have ever done before,--it will be a perfect bomb-shell in the scientific world!"

Ernestine dropped the handle of the door and looked sadly at him. "Do you think so?" She shook her head. "They will not pay it any attention."

"Oh, you are mistaken. It must make its mark. Be easy upon that point. How did such a magnificent thought occur to you?"

"As such thoughts always occur,--if it can only be verified!"

"Oh, most certainly it can be verified. I'll warrant its correctness. Girl, there is a great future in store for you. I thought I knew you, but you continually surprise me by your genius."

"Oh, uncle, I scarcely dare to hope. I know now how men despise the attainments of learned women. There is no use in talking or writing unless I can adduce proofs, irrefragable proofs, that are accessible to all. The science of to-day demands facts, and, if I cannot procure them, I can never convince these prejudiced minds."

"Be assured that every one who reads that paper of yours will be spurred on to make experiments in the matter. Leave it to those practised in technicalities to work out the demonstration. The merit of the idea will always be yours."

"And even if they find it worth the trouble to investigate the matter, and then do it so carelessly that they do not arrive at the desired result, it will always be thought a mere hypothesis, and I a learned fool. Madame du Châtelet was laughed at for publishing her novel idea that the different colours of the spectrum gave out different degrees of heat. What did it profit her that Rochon, forty years afterwards, hit on the experiments that yielded the proof of her hypothesis?<sup>[1]</sup> She had long been mouldering in the grave, and not a laurel had ever been laid upon it. Oh, this is a miserable existence! How long must we toil on thus, step by step?"

Involuntarily she left the door of her room, and approached her uncle.

He took her clasped hands, and felt that she was again within his power. "Until there is a woman with sufficient force to withstand a man. They are all Brunhildas,--these mighty heroines. They fall victims to the Siegfrieds who master them. You, Ernestine, are perhaps the only woman capable of accomplishing the task calmly and with a clear mind. You succumb to no inferior passion, but keep your eyes fixed steadily on the mark. You will shatter the prejudices of the world, and no human being will dream who aided you in your work, I have long forgotten how to think and act for my own advantage. You are my pride, something more than my child,--the child of my mind. Your education is my work, your honour is my honour. Come then, I have been thinking of it, and believe I have hit upon an experiment that will demonstrate your idea."

"Uncle, what is it?" cried Ernestine, flushing up.

"Come into the laboratory now. We will see, upon the spot, what can be done."

"Uncle," said Ernestine, overflowing with gratitude, "you give me new life! Forgive me for doubting you and doing you injustice for a moment!"

"Never mind, my dear child, it is all forgotten. I can easily imagine how others have assailed me to you, and that you gave heed to them. Have we not all our hours of weakness?"

"Yes, oh, yes, uncle, it was an hour of weakness!" And in deep humiliation she covered her face with her hands.

"I can guess," said Leuthold calmly, with his melodious insinuating voice. "They burdened your heart,--you have been spoken to of love,--you have been sought for a wife. Is it not so?"

Ernestine made no reply.

"They knew you for the feminine Samson that you are, and would have shorn your hair, that they might call out, 'The Philistines are upon you!'"

Ernestine interrupted him. "Hush, uncle! not one word, in that tone, of a man who is sacred to me!"

"God forbid that I should offend you! I am not speaking of him, but of his lady-mother, who has him fast by her apron-string." And he gave her a quick, keen glance.

"And never mention his mother to me! I hate her!" cried Ernestine angrily, ascending with him the stairs to the laboratory.

Leuthold now knew enough. "I can readily understand that these people should have tried to turn you against me,--for he who seeks to win you must first remove me from his path. This they

well know, and their attempt is natural. But you, with your calm power of reasoning, can soon convince yourself that they require of you no less a sacrifice than your entire self, and that unbounded, although perhaps unconscious, selfishness is the mainspring of their proceedings, while I, as long as you have known me, have treated you with thorough disinterestedness. They humiliated you in your own esteem that you might be bought at a more reasonable price. I can see by your depressed condition how they discouraged you. I will restore your confidence in yourself, and let this act of mine prove to you that I desire nothing of you but that you remain true to yourself. This is all the satisfaction I ask. And now all is right again, is it not?"

"Yes, uncle," said Ernestine, collecting her energies afresh. "And now come, let us try the experiment you spoke of."

Leuthold's light eyes sparkled with triumph as he heard these words, and together they entered the apartment containing her costly scientific apparatus.

But, exert herself as she might, her labour was all in vain. Her hands trembled, everything grew dim before her eyes. Her interest in the matter flagged; other thoughts intruded upon her mind. With superhuman resolution, she made further efforts, and the hectic spot, so alarming to a physician, appeared on either cheek. Leuthold did not notice them. He was so absorbed in his work that he started, as if from a dream, when she fainted away by his side.

## **CHAPTER II.**

### **THE WEAKNESS OF STRENGTH.**

The Bergstrasse was quiet and lonely when Johannes returned from Hochstetten. The inmates of the houses there were all within-doors, shielding themselves from the heat of the midday sun, reflected with oppressive intensity from the white houses. Johannes leaned back motionless in the carriage, his eyes covered with his hand. He never looked up when some dogs came barking around the wheels,--indeed, he did not hear them. The exterior world was dead for him.

"*Halte-là!*" cried a voice from a carriage drawn up before his own door. "*Parbleu! il dort.*"

Johannes raised his head. The Worronska was awaiting him.

His carriage stopped. He got out, and the Worronska beckoned him to her. Contrary to her custom, she was not holding the reins to-day, and was not seated upon the box.

"I am glad you are come. I came myself to see you, Professor Möllner, as I received no answer to my note,--and I was just driving away."

Johannes was confused. He had received the note she had alluded to, but had not opened it.

"Pray lend me your arm. Have you one moment for me?"

"I am at your service," said Johannes gravely, and he helped her out of her carriage.

"Will you grant me a short audience in your house,--or am I unworthy to enter this temple of science?"

Johannes opened the door for her. "My simple dwelling is but poorly adapted for the reception of such distinguished guests. I can scarcely hope that you can be comfortable here, even for a few minutes."

"How pleasant this is!" she cried, as he led the way to his office. "Believe me, I like this much better than my marble halls, where there is no breath of true feeling."

"I should have thought that one like yourself could always collect warm-hearted friends about her," said Johannes absently, only for the sake of saying something.

The countess looked at him for an instant suspiciously. She knew in what repute she was held, and the compliment was perhaps ambiguous. But the cloud upon his brow convinced her that his thoughts were busy elsewhere. She looked in his eyes, but his gaze fell before hers, as we look away from what offends our delicacy. The countess interpreted it otherwise,---his embarrassment flattered her.

"Do you call the crowd of coarse flatterers, who once surrounded me, warm-hearted people?" she asked in a tone of disdain.

"If you found none such amongst them, I must lament that they kept all such from your side. For no man of sincere and warm heart could approach you as long as you were surrounded by such a throng."

The countess rose from the sofa, upon which she had thrown herself. "I sent them from me long ago: there is nothing to prevent the approach of any man of noble character,--but none such attempt it,--I must go half-way to seek them."

Johannes was silent. The conversation was an infinite weariness to him: he had need of all his chivalry to enable him to endure it with becoming patience.

"You are out of spirits, Dr. Möllner. Am I the cause of it?"

"What a question, countess! Could I say yes, even if you were? I must have been guilty of great rudeness towards you, if you can suspect me of such *gaucherie*."

"I certainly cannot boast of any exaggerated courtesy from you."

"I never force upon others what can have no possible value for them," said Johannes coldly.

The countess bit her lip. "Is that meant for me?"

"I do not see how. I said nothing that could in any way apply to you."

"Indeed?"

"It surprises me to have to assure you of it," replied Johannes, who began to divine that he had touched a sensitive spot in the countess's mind.

"Then I believe you. Now let me force upon you what can indeed have no value for you, but what people usually prize greatly,--money."

She opened a pocket-book, and counted out a number of bank-notes. "See, I have come to give you what I can for the little girl who was injured. Here are ten thousand roubles. I have no more ready money just at present. Do you think I may offer this to the people now?"

"You are very generous, countess, but it would be a greater kindness to these simple people not to put the whole sum into their hands at once. If I may advise you, just settle upon the little girl a small annuity for life,--that will preserve her from want,--since she must lose her arm, she will hardly be able to support herself. These people will not know what to do with so large a sum all at once."

"Do you invest it for them, then, in the way you think best. An annuity is out of the question: I might die, and then there would be difficulties thrown in the way of its payment. No. I have written to my agent in St. Petersburg for forty thousand roubles more. Then the child will be in possession of fifty thousand roubles, and can live upon this sum in Germany quite comfortably."

"Countess," cried Johannes, looking at her with unfeigned admiration, "do you know what you are doing? It is the gift of a monarch! I cannot, of course, judge of the proportion that this sum bears to your wealth, but it is my duty to warn you that it is far beyond what these people can possibly expect!"

"Heavens, what a talk about a trifle!" cried the countess impatiently. "I need only a little prudence for a couple of years, and the expenditure will be entirely covered. Even if I should have to deny myself now and then, what is it in comparison with the injury that my heedlessness has inflicted upon the poor child? I would give her more if I had not so many poor relatives whom I must not defraud."

"Such wealth in such hands, Countess Worronska, is a blessing to the poor. I see, for the first time, that this hand can do more than hold the reins and wield the whip, that it can open wide, and scatter with princely liberality what others would amass and hoard. Let me imprint upon it a kiss of fervent gratitude,--I have done you injustice."

"Oh, Möllner," cried the beautiful woman, flushed with delight, "I would give all that I possess, and all that I am, for one such grateful glance from your eyes! I know what the injustice is of which you speak. You have hitherto despised me, and now you see that there is something in me worthy of admiration. Yes, I have lived wildly,--I have not heeded the restraints imposed upon woman by man, because I did not respect mankind. Now, now I acknowledge them, because at last I have found a human being whom I respect from the depths of my soul, and to whom I would gratefully commit the guidance of my life. I can give what is better than a few thousand roubles. I am capable of the sacrifice of myself! If I thought it would win me your esteem, I would throw away whip and rein. My hand should know only the needle. I would never mount horse again,--never rush from place to place, sipping the froth of this world's delights. I would never stir from this spot, but lie here, clasping your knees, a penitential Magdalene. My wealth I would cast at your feet, and lay aside all splendour that might charm other eyes than yours. All that I have to give, so ardently desired by others, should be yours. I should think it an act of mercy if you deigned to accept my gift. I know how I transgress all law and custom when I, a woman, thus

offer myself to him whom I love,—but what would be a departure from womanly delicacy and reserve in others, is for me a return thither. It is not for me to wait proudly for such a man as you to bring me his heart. I am sunk so low that in remorseful humiliation I must sue for esteem and love, try to deserve them by the penitence of a lifetime, and not murmur if they are withheld from me. I feel the disgrace of this; but, oh, if I can only through this disgrace recover my lost honour,—if I can only, by thus transgressing law, cease to be lawless! Believe me, it is no fleeting emotion that speaks through my lips,—it is the despairing effort of a stray soul to grasp the redeeming power of a true love!"

She could scarcely conclude; overcome by passion, she fell upon her knees, stretched out her arms to him as if drowning, and burst into a storm of sobs.

Johannes sought in vain to raise her. He was stunned, as it were, by this volcanic outburst. Suddenly, into the gaping wounds made by Ernestine's coldness, poured the hot lava-stream of a passion of which, in the temperate zone of his German intellectual existence, he had never dreamed. He stood as if before some startling natural phenomenon, amazed, overwhelmed, unable to collect himself. One thought filled his mind. Where he longed for love he could not find it, and where he neither desired nor hoped for it he found it in fullest measure. The contrast was too vivid; as if dazzled, he covered his eyes with his hand, and a profound sigh escaped him.

She drew his hand away from his face, and asked, "Möllner, is that sigh for me?"

"For both of us."

"Möllner!" she said, and her voice was deep and rich, and her soft, gentle touch sought his hand, while her dark, glowing eyes were fixed upon him in an agony of suspense. Thus the beautiful majestic woman knelt there, expiating in the torment of that moment her sin in not keeping herself pure for this long-delayed love, looking up to him as to a redeemer, ready to sacrifice for his sake herself and a life of worldly enjoyment,—for him, the simple student, unadorned by any of the studied graces that distinguished the men that had hitherto crowded around her, and unconscious of having ever sought her love. Could this woman, used only to ask and to have, love him thus, and she, the only one who could ever be to him what his whole soul thirsted for,—she for whom he would only too willingly have sacrificed his life, resign him for an illusion, a chimera, that could never give her one moment's joy? He grew giddy,—he drew his hands from the countess's grasp, and sprang up. She bowed her head upon the lounge that he had just left, and hid her face in her arms, as if awaiting the death-stroke from the sword of the executioner. Now, when she knelt thus in the abandonment of her grief, for the first time he perceived her wonderful loveliness,—but only for one moment,—the next, he turned from her and threw open a shutter, admitting the broad day to chase away the bewildering twilight that filled the room. A cool breeze had arisen,—he inhaled it thirstily, and, when he turned again to the countess, he was calm. Reflection, so native to him, had conquered his agitation, and by his sufferings for Ernestine's sake he knew how to pity this woman who loved so hopelessly. It was the purest compassion that beamed in his eyes as he raised her head, but again his glance had upon her the effect of magic.

"Oh, not that look, Möllner! Do not look thus while you sentence me! it makes my doom doubly hard to bear. If you cannot tell me that you love me, turn those eyes away,—their glance would wake the dead!"

"Good heavens! Countess Worronska, how can I find the right words in which to tell you what I must, if you so increase the labour of the task? I pray you, dear friend, listen to me calmly, and think what you impose upon me,—either I must play the hypocrite, or give the worst offence that can befall a woman."

The countess sprang up, and measured him with a look in which pain and anger strove for the mastery. He took her hands and gently forced her to sit down upon the sofa,—she yielded to him mechanically.

"Dear Countess Worronska, for both our sakes let me preserve the temperate self-possession not easy to so ardent and impulsive a temperament as yours, but all the more incumbent upon the man to whose hands you so confidingly entrust your future destiny. It would be of little avail to tell you that you promise more than you can ever perform. You would not believe me, for the woman who loves thinks no sacrifice too great. But even true affection is subject to natural change. For a time much may be resigned without a murmur, for unaccustomed joy will compensate for unaccustomed privations, but, dear countess, one grows used even to the joy of love, and, though it may not grow cold, it gradually ceases to be an exceptional bliss, and becomes a natural condition, in which the requirements of our nature, the habits of our birth and education, reassert themselves. And if we are unable to meet these, in spite of our affection we become conscious of a want that may in the end deprive us even of the knowledge of our happiness. This fate is unavoidable in a marriage where upon either side a disproportionate sacrifice is made. Formed as you are, you could never content yourself with the trivial domestic affairs of a German scholar; you would soon pine in such captivity, and, without losing your love for me, in the sincerity of which I believe, you would long for your previous mode of living. Those who have never all their lives long recognized the restraints of homely duty can scarcely reconcile themselves to them, however honest their intentions may be. As soon as you felt that your duties to me imposed a restraint upon you,—and you would feel this sooner or later,—you

would be wretched!"

"It is enough, Professor Möllner," cried the countess. "Give yourself no further trouble in persuading me to doubt myself. If you loved me, you could not consider so prudently my advantage in the matter. If you felt for me as I do for you, you would not ask how long we might be happy,--you would enjoy the moment and be willing for it to resign an eternity. Oh, proud and great as you are, you bear the brand of a petty existence upon your brow, although you know it not. In truth, Möllner, your cool repulse does not shame me, for I feel that in the past hour I have been the nobler of the two!"

"You are right, my friend. A woman as beautiful, as high in rank, and as richly endowed as yourself has no cause to blush for having vainly offered to one what thousands covet so greedily. Believe me, if one of us is shamed, it is I, to whom favour has been shown so undeserved, so unhopèd-for,--such favour as only the bountiful gods bestow,--a favour which I can never deserve or repay!" Deeply moved, he took her hand; again her eyes sought his.

"Oh, Möllner, your heart relents,--I see it does. You do not know what love is. Who was there here to teach you? The poor vapid sentiment that they call by its name, suffices, it is true, for domestic use,--little is given, little required,--how were you to differ from the rest? A genuine passion would have caused infinite commotion in your commonplace, every-day circles. Only intense feeling can beget intense feeling, and whoever has known none such has never lived. Such a man as you must not close his ears like a coward when passion calls. Do not withdraw your hand. This moment must decide whether I remain here or return to Russia. My estates are going to ruin. I must either sell them or return to them myself. Give me the smallest hope of winning your affection, and I will sell all my Russian possessions and live here beneath your dear eyes, in conventual retirement and repose, year after year, until at last you take me to your heart and say, 'I believe in you!' Then--then I will surround you with such a heaven as these cold, timid natures about you do not dream of. One word, Möllner,--no promise, only a hope,--and I am your creature!"

Johannes regarded the passionate woman in her demonic beauty with a strange mixture of admiration and horror, sympathy and aversion. At last he adopted a resolution, for he felt that an end must be put to this interview. "Madame," he said,--not without effort, for it was hard for his magnanimous nature to give offence to a woman,--"madame, I see that I must tell you all the truth. Hope nothing. It would certainly inflict a deeper wound were I to tell you I *cannot* love you,--it would be casting doubt upon your personal charms. What man of flesh and blood could swear that he *could* not love you--a woman all perfection from head to foot? Such an oath I could not presume to take, for my senses are as keen as other men's. But, countess, I *will* not love you, and I can swear to what I will, and what I will not do!"

He arose, and the countess arose also, and stood opposite to him, a picture of despair. "And must I content myself with this declaration? Am I not worth the being told why?"

"Let it suffice you to know that I consider myself bound."

"Aha! to the Hartwich!"

Johannes stretched out his hand with a deprecatory gesture. "Do not utter her name, madame. I will not hear it from your lips."

"It is true, then! That proud, frigid wraith--that phantom, in whose veins there flows not one drop of warm blood--has robbed me of you! Curse her!"

"Hush! curse her not, madame; it destroys my new-born pity for you!" cried Johannes. "It is not she that comes between you and me. I could never, never have given you my heart or hand, even had I been entirely free. Do not force me to say to you what no man should say to any woman."

"What is it? Let me drain the last drop in the cup. I will not leave you until I know all."

"Well, since you will have it, listen, and may it prove your cure in a twofold sense. You could bestow upon me, madame, all that the world holds precious, but there is one thing that is no longer yours to give,--your honour! And were a goddess to descend from the skies for my sake, wanting this jewel, she could be nothing to me. I should send her back to her glories, and choose rather to abide here below, a poor solitary man."

A low cry followed these words, and then silence ensued. The Worronska stood like a statue, with eyes, for the first time in her life perhaps, seeking the ground. Johannes approached her and said quietly, "You can never forgive what I have said. I do not ask you to do it; it is best thus. You will hate me for awhile, and then forget me. I shall, all my life, have a melancholy remembrance of you, for you wished to be kind to me and I was obliged to wound you in return. Pour out your hatred upon me; I deserve it at your hands."

"Möllner," said the beautiful woman, drawing her breath with effort, "at this moment I am expiating all the sins I have ever committed. Farewell, and if you hear that I have fallen back into my old manner of life, sign the cross above my memory, and tell her whom you love, 'I might have saved that soul, but I would not.'"

Johannes looked at her sadly. "Madame, if the agony of this moment does not make the thought of your former life hateful to you, my love never could have saved you. I disclaim the terrible responsibility you would thrust upon me. I have done what I could. I have told you the truth, and I cannot believe it will be without effect."

"I thank you," said the despairing woman with bitter irony. Then, with one last tender look at Johannes, which he, standing calmly before her, did not return, she turned to go, with the bearing of a queen. He offered to conduct her to her carriage, but she refused his aid. Her face was ash pale, and not another word passed her compressed lips.

He looked after her as she entered her carriage and buried her face in her hands. He saw how her whole frame was shaken with emotion. The carriage whirled away, the dust rose in clouds. Johannes re-entered his lonely room. "Ernestine!" he exclaimed, as if she could hear him, "Ernestine!"

## **CHAPTER III.**

### **SILVER-ARMED KÄTHCHEN.**

That was wonderful news for the village of Hochstetten! The oldest people there could remember nothing to match it! The Kellers' terrible accident had turned out the greatest good fortune. The Kellers--poor despised day-labourers that they had always been--had come to be rich people, and were to be richer still. Käthchen might well do without her arm, and, since that was all the harm that had been done her, it really was hardly worth so much money. Many a one had suffered greater injuries, and not a mouse had stirred in their behalf,--not even when everything had been pawned in the long idleness that followed. And this lucky child got immense wealth in exchange for her useless little arm! Where was the justice of that, pray? It would have been some comfort to think that it was devil's money, and could bring the Kellers no good, and that it would be better to starve than to use it. At first, indeed, the Kellers thought of refusing it, but the Reverend Father had been too much for the devil. He had advised the Kellers to erect a crucifix by the side of the road where the accident had occurred, and to give the church three hundred gulden for masses for their benefactress's soul. Thus the gift was consecrated, and they could accept it with a clear conscience.

Scarcely four weeks had passed, and the cross was already standing by the roadside just, where Käthchen had been run over. It was finer than any other in all the country round; and the Kellers, husband and wife, tossed their heads, as they passed it, as proudly as if they had placed the Lord Jesus Christ himself there in person. The cross was ten feet high, and stood upon a pedestal five feet high, upon which were inscribed the words, "Erected to the glory of God by Pankrätius Keller and Columbane his wife, Anno Domini 18--. 'Let little children come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven!'" And directly beneath was a beautiful painted tablet, whereon all might read, "Wanderer, pause, and mark how wondrously the promise has been kept to our child!" The painting that was to illustrate these words represented Käthchen with one arm; the other lay upon the ground, and a broad stream of blood was gushing from the maimed shoulder. A carriage was driving furiously away. Above Käthchen's head the heavens were opened, and the infant Christ was seen in the arms of the Madonna, handing down a silver arm.

This most magnificent and ingenious allegory of the silver blessing that had followed Käthchen's misfortune had cost the poet of the village, the highly-gifted Reverend Father, many an anxious thought; and, in consequence of it, the little girl went universally by the name of "Silver-armed Käthchen," although she persistently refused to verify her nickname by making use of an artificial limb. Her father and mother were the objects of great ridicule and envy, but they did not mind it at all, they could laugh in their turn,--they had plenty of money,--and, what was more, they had, by means of it, gained more favour with the Lord than all those who jeered at them. The host of the "Stag" and the burgomaster were the richest people in the village, but neither of them could boast that he had given three hundred gulden to the Church, and the burgomaster had put up a very mean cross over in the meadow, and, for economy's sake, had had only the head and hands and feet of Christ painted upon it, leaving all the rest of the figure to the imagination.

So they could enjoy their wealth without any misgivings. They knew how high in favour they stood with the Lord; and, besides, Frau Keller had sprinkled the package of notes that Möllner had given her with holy water. She had done this entirely of her own mind. It was impossible to be too prudent in such a case. So now that everything had been done to keep off the Evil One, a blessing would be sure to follow. Little Käthchen, however, thought and felt very differently. She was very unhappy to find that the children stood aloof, staring at her as at some strange animal

when she went to sit in the sunshine before the door, and that the big boys called her Silver-arm, and plucked her by the empty sleeve that dangled from her shoulder.

But it was worse than all one day when a cripple came crawling past,--there were many cripples in the country round about, as there always are where human beings are fighting for the mastery with the rude forces of nature. This man stopped before her and muttered, "Oh, yes, you are treated like a princess! Such a poor fellow as myself is worse off than a dog, for when a dog breaks its leg it is shot, but I must hobble about and starve for the sake of Christian charity! Such pious people as you are can always make friends with the Almighty, and therefore a grand coach is sent to drive over you, while only a huge stone in the quarry crushed my hip, and there was no fuss made about it. The grand folks, whose house the stone helped to build, never troubled themselves about the human blood that had sprinkled it. Well, well,--to every one his own!"

And the man went hobbling off upon his crutches, and Käthchen covered her eyes with the one poor hand that was left, and sobbed bitterly.

"Is that my merry little Käthchen that I hear crying?" suddenly asked a familiar voice; and, when the child looked up, she saw Herr Leonhardt approaching, supported by his son.

Young Herr Leonhardt was tall and slender, with a gentle, frank expression of countenance,--such a face and form as one might imagine belonged to the favourite son of the patriarch Jacob. There was a certain poetic grace in the devotion with which he guided the uncertain steps of his blind father. His eyes were bent upon the ground, that every obstruction might be removed against which his father's feet might stumble.

He swung his light straw hat hither and thither in his hand, and his fair hair encircled his broad brow with masses of curls.

Käthchen stopped crying as soon as she saw him. His graceful figure stood alone among the coarse peasant youths, and, truly as she loved and honoured his father, the son was dearer to her childish heart, for he was young, hardly twelve years older than she herself, and youth clings to youth. She arose and walked feebly towards the pair.

"Why, Käthi, brave little girl, that never cried when they cut off her arm, what has happened to you?"

"They tease me," sobbed Käthchen, "because I have such an easy time and was run over by a grand coach. They envy me my good luck, and no one loves me any more. But it shall not be so,--I will not have anything more than the other poor cripples,--I will give them all some of my money. Seppel needs it far more than I do, and he got nothing for the big stone that fell upon him, although he is a grown-up man. I am only a stupid little child, who never earned anything, and yet I get so much, because I have to sit still. But I will not keep it, and my father and mother must not keep it all to themselves,--they are well and strong. I will share it with those who have suffered as I have."

"But, my dear little Käthchen," said Herr Leonhardt, much moved, "you are too generous to the people who tease you so. If you try to share with all the cripples and maimed people in the village, you will have very little left for yourself. If Heaven has decreed that you are to be rich while they remain poor, you may resign yourself gratefully to its inscrutable designs without any qualms of conscience. You can help the needy by giving them work upon your farm that you are to buy with the money that is coming to you. Until then, it would be much better to give them a little money weekly, than to bestow upon such rough men a large sum, that might tempt them to be idle and drink and gamble."

"Yes, it would be better; but mother will not let me have anything. She does not like to have me give away a single kreutzer."

"But what does your father say?" asked Walter, who had been regarding the child with silent admiration.

"Oh, he works all day long in our new field, and does not care for anything. Mother keeps the money, and when she says, 'So it must be,' he does not say a word."

"But how does that agree with your parents' great liberality to the Church?"

"Yes, I told mother she had better give some of the money to these poor people than to the Reverend Father and the stone-mason for the masses and the cross; but then she told me I was too silly,--that she had given the money to the Lord,--and it was far wiser and more profitable to give it to Him than only to men, for He was more powerful than any of them, and could give a great deal better reward for what was done for Him."

Herr Leonhardt turned to his son, and, with a gentle smile, said, "Does not that one sentence show the evil of this false piety? These people turn to the Highest only for the sake of the reward that they expect. For them the Lord is a venal human being, whose protection they can procure by bribery, and they now think themselves absolved from all humane and Christian duty. Oh, holy,--no, not holy,--unhallowed simplicity!"



"Dear father," said Walter, "it is the same old story of indulgences, only in another shape. Tetzels, to be sure, is here no longer, but there are still Tetzels in plenty to be found, and always will be while there are men in the world who prize money beyond all else on earth and think it no way beneath the dignity of the Almighty actually to drive a bargain with them. The noble thought of the antique sacrifice is at the bottom of it all. Polykrates threw the ring into the sea to appease the gods,--the Christian pays his money to erect a crucifix. But the Greek trembled when the gods rejected his offering and the fish brought back his ring. The conceit of our age regards its offering as an investment of capital, and hopes for large interest upon it."

The young man passed his hand through his blonde curls with a light laugh. His father bowed his gray head thoughtfully, and pondered upon what his son had said, and how far mankind still were from a knowledge of the truth. Käthchen looked at both, surprise in her eyes, as if they were speaking some strange tongue. All was quiet around, for the little girl's parents were away in the fields. A couple of doves were picking up the crumbs from Käthchen's supper, and the ducks were diving and whisking their tails in the little brook near the house.

Quick, firm footsteps were heard approaching.

"Here comes our friend Möllner," said the old man, listening. "I know his step from all others."

"Yes, Father Leonhardt, it is I," said Möllner's clear voice. "How are you all?" He drew near the quiet little group. Before him ran three or four geese, greatly terrified and in great anxiety,--but yielding not one jot of their dignity, for they never thought of turning aside; they were left in the middle of the road, when Johannes reached his friends.

"Look, Herr Professor," remarked young Leonhardt gaily, "those stupid birds are priding themselves upon having maintained their place. See with what haughty disdain they are regarding you. They evidently think that they have compelled you to turn aside for them! It is always the way. Wisdom vacates the path shared with stupidity, and the latter swells with the pride of an imagined victory."

Johannes smiled. "What puts these little moral sentiments into your head, my dear Walter? Are you about to compose a new primer for your school?"

"It really would not be a bad idea among such people as these!" said Walter, as he shook hands with Möllner.

Möllner sat down upon the bench before the house and took Käthchen upon his knee. "Would not you like, Käthchen, to have Herr Walter make you a new primer?"

"It might be a capital undertaking, Walter," remarked Herr Leonhardt. "We must not despise small opportunities, since larger ones are denied us."

"Yes, father," laughed the light-hearted young fellow, "but, if my primer is to succeed here, I must have for the letter H,

"H stands for Hartwich, good Christians must know,  
She's a terrible witch, who will work them all woe."

Herr Leonhardt made a sign to the thoughtless speaker, who looked in alarm at Möllner, who preserved a gloomy silence.

"You must not laugh at the lady at the castle," said Käthchen, leaning her pale little face against Johannes' throbbing heart. "My mother complained to-day that I had grown as pale and ugly as the Fräulein, and she prayed the Lord to break the spell that the Fräulein had laid upon me. It made me so sorry, for she cannot help my being so pale. She is so good and kind,--how could she bewitch me?"

Johannes silently drew the child closer to him.

"To be sure, she is good and kind, and would not harm any one," said Herr Leonhardt;--but his son interposed, with youthful exaggeration, "She is a saint,--far too holy for these ignorant people to be permitted to kiss her footprints as she passes!"

Johannes pressed his bearded lips upon the child's head, but did not speak.

"Herr Professor, where are your thoughts?" asked Leonhardt anxiously, laying his hand gently upon Johannes' shoulder.

"With the subject of your conversation, dear friend. It gives me no rest. It is now four weeks since I have seen her. I would not seek her again until I had collected all the material that was necessary to convict her uncle, for I must be prepared for the most determined opposition on his part to my visits. To-day, through my kind old friend Heim, I have discovered a clue to Gleissert's rascalities, and when I compare the intelligence that I have received with the fact of which you informed me, that all his letters are addressed to Unkenheim, I think I have a terrible weapon against him in my possession. And yet,--yet I do not know whether I ought to warn Ernestine by

letter or to go to her myself. Will not,--must not the sight of me be painful to her?"

"As well as I remember, you told me that she begged you not to forsake her," said Herr Leonhardt.

"So she did, old friend. But how do I know how she thinks and feels now, since she never visits you without such anxious inquiries beforehand as to whether I am with you, and never, too, unless accompanied by Gleissert?"

"That is all her uncle's doings," said Walter. "You cannot think, Herr Professor, how he watches and guards her. Since I have been allowed to study in her laboratory, I have never for one moment been alone with her,--that devil is always present. And it was with difficulty that she obtained permission for me to come to the castle. Willmers says that there was a three-days fight about it, but Fräulein Ernestine had made up her mind, and he was at last obliged to give way. It is high time that something were done for the unfortunate lady, for since the completion of her last treatise she has been utterly exhausted, and if she goes on thus much longer she will kill herself."

"I have known that for a long time," said Johannes with a profound sigh, "but what is to be done? I can make no impression either upon her head or heart. My solitary hope now lies in separating her from that villain."

"I think it would be much the best for you to see her yourself," said Walter. "She is really wasting away from day to day."

"Yes, I know that it is so by her hands," added his father; "they grow so thin and small, and are as cold and damp as if she were dying. Ah, Herr Professor, their touch pierces me to the heart! I actually think I can see her suffer, for hands feel so only when they are often wrung in physical or mental anguish."

Johannes put the child from off his knee, and turned away his head, but he could not conceal his emotion from the blind eyes of the schoolmaster.

"Why attempt to suppress a pain that is so natural, dear friend? Go to her quickly. It will do her good."

"Well, then, I will write her a line," said Johannes. "I will ask her whether the sight of me would pain or console her. Good God! I desire nothing but her happiness! You, Walter, will, I know, contrive to let her have my note without her uncle's knowledge. She will, I hope, answer it in the same way."

"Then let us go directly home," said Herr Leonhardt, "that you may write immediately."

The gentlemen started to go.

Käthchen plucked Johannes by his coat. "But, Herr Professor, if you go to see the Fräulein to-morrow, you will not find her."

"How so, Käthchen?" asked Johannes, who had not thought that the child had been listening to the conversation.

"Oh, yes; I know it is true. Frau Willmers from the castle went by here to-day, and whispered to me to tell the gentlemen secretly, if they came to see me to-day, that the Fräulein was going away to-night forever, but I must not let any one know that she had told me, or she should lose her place. And if the Herr Professor did not come, I must tell it to the master, that he might send a messenger to town to the Herr Professor. Frau Willmers cried a great deal, and said she dared not go to the school-house, because,--because the Evil One, who watches the Fräulein so closely, would know it."

"Käthchen!" cried Johannes, "you little angel, how much you have done for me! The Fräulein would have gone to-night, and I should never have known whither, if it had not been for you! Is this all that you know?"

"Yes, this is all,--you may trust me. I listened to all she said."

Johannes took the child in his arms and kissed her. "Child, tell me how I can reward you. Speak. What would you like? Whatever it is, you shall have it."

"Ah, dear Herr Professor, if you would only persuade my father and mother to let me have some money for the poor people. Oh, do, do beg them. And then they will not laugh at me and call me Silver-arm any more. I will make them happy, too, or else I shall be just like the Fräulein, and no one will like me at all,--and I would not have it so for all the money in the world."

"I know what you mean, you good little thing, and I promise you that when the rest of your property is sent to me I will invest it so that your parents shall have no right to any of it, but that you may do with it just what Herr Leonhardt advises."

"Ah, that will be splendid!" cried Käthchen, as she kissed the sleeve of Johannes' coat. "Herr

Walter!" she called out, "then you will find out all the poor people for me, and tell me how much to give them?"

"Yes, Käthi dear, indeed we will!" Walter gladly replied.

Johannes gave the child some pieces of silver. "There, my darling, give those to the next beggar you see, if you want to do so. Farewell, all of you. I will not delay a moment, for it is time to proceed to extremities." He pressed Leonhardt's hand, and walked quickly away in the direction of the castle.

"What can have passed up there between the uncle and niece?" said Leonhardt, shaking his head.

"Father Leonhardt," said Käthchen, "don't you tell, but I know something."

"What is it, my child?"

"That guardian up there is a very bad man."

"That is an old story, Käthi," said Walter.

"Yes, but you don't know what he does; he empties the letter-box at the school-house when it is dark."

"Is that true?"

"Yes, father saw him do it, but he told me he would shut me up for three days if I told any one."

"How did your father happen to see such a thing?" asked Herr Leonhardt, amazed.

"Oh, he told mother all about it, and I ought not to have heard it, but I did hear. Last week, one night when he was biding to try and catch the thief who steals our grapes, he heard some one going softly towards the school-house, and he hid close, thinking it was the thief. And then he saw it was Herr Gleissert, who busied himself about the place where the letters are slipped into the box. And father crept nearer, and saw plainly how he poked something long and thin into the slit and drew out the letters, and then lighted a match and held his hat before it that no one might see it. Then by the light of the match he read all the writing on the letters, and put them back again into the box,—all but one, which he kept. And then he went home to the castle again. Father said he wanted to seize him and hold him, but he did not know what weapons he might have about him, and that there was no use of accusing him, for father would be sure to get the worst of it."

"What mischief can the scoundrel be brewing?" said Herr Leonhardt, anxiously.

Walter laughed. "Ah, father, we are paid now for always reading the addresses of the letters he sent from the castle."

"That is an entirely different case," said Leonhardt "But our friend ought to know this before he reaches the castle. Run, Walter, you are young and strong; try to overtake him, and tell him."

"Yes, father, I can do it easily. Sit down here, I will soon return," said the young man, hurrying away, fleet-footed as a deer.

Herr Leonhardt felt for Käthchen. "My child, are you there?"

"Yes, Father Leonhardt."

"Käthchen, you have repaid me to-day for all the love I have ever given you." He passed his hands over the little, thin face. "I cannot see you; they tell me you are changed,—and I think you must be. But in my mind's eye you will always have the same roguish black eyes and chubby rosy cheeks, with the little berry-stained mouth,—you have never since told what is not true, eh, Käthi?"

"No, Father Leonhardt, on my word and honour, never, and I never will again. I am now the richest child in all the country round, mother says, and I will try to be the best, and thank the kind God, as you say I should, by kindness to others. And, now that I cannot fold my hands any more when I say my prayers, I must pray very hard indeed,—harder than before,—for then I always felt as if I had the dear God between my hands and could keep Him and make Him listen to me, but now that I cannot do that I must call Him oftener, and beg Him to listen to my prayers."

"My dear little child, God is always near you,—he loves to dwell in a pure, childlike heart. Käthchen, you are a flower in the blind man's path. Do you know what that means?"

Käthchen laid her head upon Leonhardt's knee. "I think it means that you love me."

"Yes, my child, and that there are few joys in my life like what you are to me."

"But, father, you have Walter, he is more to you than I can be."

"God bless him! he is my staff and prop in the darkness. He is the best that I have on this earth."

"Father Leonhardt, when I grow up I will marry Walter, and then we will all live together."

"My child, what put that into your little head?"

"Why, my mother says that now I am so rich that I can choose any husband that I please,--and I will choose Walter and no one else--no one."

"But suppose he will not have you?" asked Herr Leonhardt with a smile.

"Oh, but he will have me,--I know he will," said the child confidently.

"Oh, holy, holy simplicity!" whispered the old man, and laid his hand in blessing upon the little girl's head.

And as he sat there, gazing into the night that had closed around him, suddenly to his inner vision all grew light about him. From the vanishing darkness arose the columns of a church, and through the high arched windows the sunlight fell full upon the heads of a youthful pair kneeling at the altar. Around stood a throng of glad relatives and friends, amongst them a hoary blind father, and by his side an old mother, with tears of joy standing in her eyes. The young couple were fair to look upon,--the bridegroom blonde, bearded, manly, the bride blushing in girlish timidity. Her large, frank eyes were swimming in tears of devotion and emotion, but her charming little mouth was slightly stained as if from eating berries.

"What! what!" said the people around her, "picking blackberries upon her wedding-day?"

Then the organ began a well-known hymn, and all present joined in singing it. The bride gave her lover her hand,--only her left, to be sure,--but its clasp was as strong as if there were two to give,--for it was for a lifetime. And then the ceremony was ended, and they all went out into the clear Spring sunshine. A crowd of familiar faces pressed around,--poor, deformed, and maimed figures, that still seemed not unhappy, for they were all well clad and fed,--and they waved their caps in the air, with "Long life to the bridal pair! Since you have made this place your home, there will be no starving or freezing poor here. Long life to our Doctor Walter Leonhardt and to Silver-armed Käthchen!"

Oh, sunny, peaceful picture! how it cheered the blind man's soul! A lovely dream of the future, born of the prattle of a child, hovering around an old man upon the verge of the grave!

"Father Leonhardt, what are you smiling at?" asked the child.

"At something beautiful that I have just seen."

"I thought you could not see any more?"

"I can see, my child, not things that are, but perhaps all the more plainly things that are to be."

## **CHAPTER IV.**

### **BATTLE.**

Ernestine was sitting at her writing-table, arranging books and papers to be packed up. Her uncle was assisting her with trembling haste. From time to time she leaned her head wearily upon her hand.

"It will be impossible for us to leave to-day if you do not make more haste," said Leuthold urgently.

"I am doing all that I can, but I am so weak that I do not know whether I shall be able to travel to-night."

"I cannot imagine how you can give way so. You never used to do it. When I think of the self-control that you were wont to exercise,--your determination would have done honour to a man,--and now! Oh, it is deplorable!"

"You torture me, uncle!" cried Ernestine, as she threw several books into a chest at her side. "You will not believe that I am really much weaker than I have ever been before. It is of my own free will that I am going away--why should I not hasten as much as I can?"

Her uncle looked askance at her with a smile. "You are mistaken, my child. It is not your will that is acting,--it is only a whim that thus urges you on. And a whim is the child of circumstances, and can be controlled by them."

"I do not know what circumstances could control this 'whim,' as you are pleased to call it. Nothing can happen to-day or to-morrow to change my determination. What delay can you apprehend? No one knows of my departure, so that it cannot be impeded by remonstrances from any quarter. I have not even told good old Leonhardt that I am going, and Willmers heard it only this morning. Could I do more to prove to you that I am in earnest?"

Leuthold looked at her again with his sarcastic smile. He knew well that Ernestine had preserved this strict silence concerning her departure only because she did not feel strong enough to withstand any friendly remonstrances. Therefore he trembled lest some unforeseen accident might yet divulge her plans. His very existence depended upon her staying or going. During the four weeks that had elapsed since Ernestine's return from town, Leuthold's entire influence had been exerted to remove Ernestine from this part of the country, and, if possible, from Germany. She must never again see the man who had evidently made such an impression upon her. Now less than ever could she be allowed to form any attachment, for, if she were now to marry, and require her property at his hands, he was lost! He had cautiously managed to secure an appointment, through an American agent, in a large chemical manufactory in New York. To Ernestine he had opened the brilliant prospect of delivering a course of scientific lectures there. The fact that she had received the prize from a German university for one of her papers would surely suffice to make her reputation in America,--and Leuthold had honestly done his best to have her fame as an intellectual phenomenon noised abroad. In his present embarrassed circumstances, it was of the greatest importance to him that she should be placed in a position to support herself, that she might not be a burden to him. If the lectures did not succeed, she would have to earn her living as a "female physician." But upon this point he prudently forbore to enlighten her. He fired her imagination with the enormous advantages, pecuniary and other, that must accrue from her lectures. The means that he employed to win her to his purpose were to an ambitious woman irresistible. She saw before her a future such as no woman had hitherto enjoyed. She saw herself in one of the vast halls of New York, lecturing to a crowd of men who were all listening attentively to--a girl! She saw herself regarded as the miracle of her sex. The most secret dreams of her pride were to be realized,--the seeds of her quiet diligence were to spring up and bud forth in the sight of all,--the world should ring with the fame of what a woman could do. And yet it was hard to decide; it was weeks before she could bring herself to sign the simple letters of her name to the acceptance of these proposals; no labour of her life--nothing whereon she had expended days and nights of study--ever cost her as much as this single signature.

Möllner's grave, earnest face had scared her back from clutching these new honours, as Banquo's ghost frightened the usurper from the royal chair. It seemed to her that she was guilty of a crime towards him,--and at last, in a torment of doubt, she secretly wrote to him. She told him everything, and begged for his counsel and advice. She did not conceal from him that she could not take so decisive a step without his blessing. Why this letter never reached Möllner, no one knew besides Leuthold, except Käthchen and her parents.

Day after day passed, and of course Ernestine waited in vain for an answer. She waited as if for a decree of life or death. Sleep refused to visit her burning eyelids. She took barely sufficient nourishment to support life. She pined with desire for only one word--one single word--from Möllner,--and it did not come. She was no longer worth a stroke of his pen. Since her refusal of his suit, he would none of her. He had conquered himself,--had given her up,--and in how short a time!

And the more she had longed for a letter or a visit from him, the greater was her bitterness of mind,--the offence to her pride,--when she received neither. As often as she approached her writing-table, her eyes were greeted by the large capitals of the flattering proposal she had received, with all its alluring promises. What was there now to wait for? Why should she hesitate now? And so she signed her acceptance.

And now nothing should cause her to waver in her pride of purpose. She would have the revenge of being irrevocably lost to him, she would vanish without one word of farewell, that from a distant quarter of the globe the fame of her greatness might reach his ears.

She did not even confide in Willmers, for she dreaded her garrulity. Only on the very last day the housekeeper received orders to dispose of Ernestine's movables as quickly as possible, and then to follow her, for Leuthold wished, before sailing, to take leave of Gretchen, whom he purposed to leave in Germany for the present. But Ernestine was to accompany him. He would not,--he dared not now,--lose sight of her for a moment.

She wrote a fervent, heartfelt farewell letter to Leonhardt, and begged him to keep her books and apparatus until she should claim them again. As she did not know yet where her future home would be, she could not make use of them herself. Walter might find them useful. Thus delicately

she bestowed upon Walter the costly gift of the instruments for the further pursuit of his studies.

After their departure, her uncle was to be informed of her disposal of the physiological works and apparatus, which he had ordered Willmers to sell. He would never have consented to it, for Ernestine had often, to her surprise, noticed how desirous he was of ready money.

She bound Willmers by a solemn promise not to deliver the letter to Herr Leonhardt until the writer had departed, and thus everything was provided for,--everything was thought of,--everything except Ernestine's physical condition. The inflexible girl had been accustomed to take so little care of her health that she had given no heed to her increasing exhaustion,--the natural consequence of the superhuman efforts of the last few weeks. But to-day she could hardly stand, and the thought of undertaking so long a journey began to alarm her.

She sat there before her uncle the picture of weariness. He regarded her dubiously. Could he succeed in getting her on board of the steamer? Then, if she were taken ill, it would of course be ascribed to seasickness, which scarcely any one escapes. And if she died? Then all would be well with her. He would bury her under the billows of the ocean, and all his hatred, his alarm, and his crimes would sink with her beneath the waves, which, as they swathed her dead body, would wash away from him all disgrace and guilt. This thought was as boundless in comfort as the ocean that was beginning to open upon his horizon.

"Uncle, do not gaze so strangely at nothing," said Ernestine. "You look as if you were devising no good."

Leuthold smiled. "You are nervous indeed, my child. Since when has my face looked strange to you?"

Ernestine did not reply. She went on wrapping a book in paper, to pack it in the chest.

"Is that old fairy-book to go too?" asked Leuthold ironically.

"Yes," was the curt, decided reply.

"Well! well! Have you not a doll somewhere that I can pack with it?"

Ernestine started up. "Uncle, I told you once before that I will not endure that tone!"

"Beg pardon, but such folly provokes a jest. Or perhaps the book has a deeper value for you? You need not blush,--I can guess. It is a remembrance of the knight of the oak,--Möllner! Ah, then indeed we must certainly take it with us."

"Uncle," cried Ernestine, taking the book from him as he was about to put it in with some others, "you know how to depreciate with your sneering speeches everything that I have held dear. Let the book alone; I will give it to little Käthchen."

"And when Professor Möllner visits her, and finds it there, it will touch his heart, that the friend whom he has forsaken has guarded his memory so faithfully until now. If he turns over its leaves, he will doubtless find the oak leaf that you have pressed among them. Perhaps he will think it a mute farewell, and bestow upon you a tear of compassion. How gratifying it will be!"

"Uncle, if I thought that, I would rather burn the book!"

"And that would, at all events, be the best thing to do with it. That self-conceited fellow is not worth the remembrance that you cherish of him. I would efface it, as I would every impression that is unworthy of you. Indeed, I have long been indignant, although I never spoke of it to you, at his so easily forgetting you. Such a woman as you are is not to be resigned like an article of merchandise about which buyer and seller cannot agree. He never loved you, or he would never have dreamed of making conditions in his proposal to you, as if you were to deem it a great honour that he should condescend to you. Trust me, I know the world and mankind thoroughly. He was in the greatest embarrassment, for he felt himself morally obliged to offer you his hand."

Ernestine started.

Leuthold continued, "I do not know how you conducted yourself towards him, but, with your inexperience and the preference that you entertain for him,--do not deny it,--it is reasonable to suppose that you must have made advances."

Ernestine bit her lip, and looked down.

"The one fact that you accompanied him to his house alone, without any intimate acquaintance with him,--without an invitation from his mother,--must have led him to fancy that you were desperately in love with him, and he was conscientious enough to wish to efface the stain that you had thus unwittingly cast upon your honour, by asking you to be his wife. I do not question for a moment that his intentions towards you from the very beginning were honourable and kind, but his feelings seem to me to have been those of simple friendship, until your advances forced him, as it were, to a declaration. Probably he is now congratulating himself in silence upon his fortunate escape. But you sigh and languish like a love-sick girl over his memory, and would carry the only gift that you have ever received from him, bestowed upon you out of sheer

compassion when you were a fright of a child, across the ocean with you as a relic! Ernestine, what is the matter with you? For Heaven's sake, control yourself! What nonsense! You have actually contracted a habit of fainting!"

He supported her drooping head and fanned her pale face.

She looked up at him wearily, then thrust him from her with evident aversion, and stood up. Leuthold said nothing more. For the first time she had allowed him to speak of Möllner, and he had seized the opportunity to pour into her soul the surest poison that ever destroyed love,—he was content now to let it work.

Ernestine walked several times to and fro: her step, her bearing, was queenly,—she seemed suddenly to have grown taller. Her uncle might be right,—she hated him for it, but still he might be right. What must Johannes—what must his mother think of her for so throwing herself at him? This was why his mother had treated her so,—this was the cause of the cool conditions proposed to her by the son! She repeated to herself every one of Johannes's words,—they were almost all words either of grave warning or stern reproof. Even when he had been kind to her, it had been the kindness of a father or a judge. Never, not even when suing for her hand, had he laid aside the proud, measured bearing that was native to him. His pity had been that of a superior being for a soul astray, not of a lover for his beloved. And she! She recalled every cordial word, every kindly glance, that she had bestowed upon Johannes, and she persuaded herself that she had been too fond, that her behaviour, in contrast with her usual cold demeanour, had verged upon impropriety, and must have been construed by him into an advance. Yes, possibly he despised her for it,—and she had even gone so far as to write to him! All the little merit of not consenting under the proposed conditions to become his wife was annulled by this last act, which must have been regarded by him as a fresh advance, and, as such, silently repulsed. She could have fled from him to the ends of the earth,—the mere thought of him was enough to drive the hot blood to her cheeks. Away, away, across the ocean!—this suddenly became the one desire of her heart. She stood still as she passed the fireplace, and said to Leuthold, "Burn the book!" They were the first words that passed her lips.

The instant the words were spoken, Leuthold threw the volume into the midst of the flames. Ernestine stood by and watched them curling around the covers, which bent and rolled up in the heat. They were soon destroyed, and with invisible, soft-crackling fingers the fiery draught toyed with the burning book, and, as page after page opened to the glow, the flame—greedy reader—devoured them. Ernestine watched it all. She saw the names which had been so dear to her, flash out and vanish. The cold, glittering snow queen,—the little mermaid in her watery home,—all perished in the red heat!

Now the oak leaf, that she had once snatched from the dear old tree, fell away to ashes,—the whole book dropped apart and blazed up afresh,—the loosened leaves were tossed up and down in the wreathing flames. There,—there was one more name,—the swan. The leaf flew aloft, and the swan, the beautiful swan, was burned to ashes. Never again would it spread its plumage for her,—never arise, a second phoenix, from its funeral pyre. The little fairy world had vanished, and only a few sparks remained, shooting hither and thither, as if in search of the transformed shapes of the creatures of fairy lore.

Ernestine turned away. The fire seemed to have scorched the pinions of her soul. She hung her head, like the god with the inverted torch, and wept!

Leuthold did not disturb her; he felt that he must spare her now.

Suddenly the door opened, and Frau Willmers said in a tone of great trepidation, "Herr Professor Möllner!"

Leuthold started as if struck by an arrow. Ernestine leaned against the chimney-piece, or she would have fallen.

"How dare you admit any one just at this moment?—how dare you?" he said, transported with rage and terror.

"I cannot help it, Herr Doctor. I could not do otherwise,—the gentleman declared positively that he would not stir from the spot until I had announced him."

"Tell the gentleman that we cannot receive visitors."

Frau Willmers looked hesitatingly at Ernestine, who stood as pale and immovable as ever.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" asked Leuthold, and there was a threat conveyed in his tone and manner.

"I am going,—I will go instantly," replied the woman, and hurried from the room.

Ernestine took one step forward, as if she would have followed her. But she controlled herself. She was a prey to a storm of emotions that almost deprived her of consciousness. He had come, then,—he had not utterly given her up. It almost broke her benumbed heart to send him away. But no,—she rebuked her own weakness,—he had waited long before coming, and perhaps had come

at last only because he felt it his duty to obey her summons. She would--she could yield to no further weakness.

Leuthold stood by the door, and held his breath while he listened to hear Johannes depart; but, to his immense discomfiture, Frau Willmers reappeared.

"The gentleman will not go," she said with secret exultation. "He says he came to see the Fräulein, and will take no dismissal from her uncle, for, as the Fräulein has been of age for several years, it is for her to say whom she does or does not wish to see."

Ernestine listened eagerly. "What--what does that mean?" She turned with a look of inquiry to her uncle, and was shocked at the great and evident alarm expressed in his countenance. "Uncle," she asked again, "what does this mean? Answer me!"

"Do not heed such stupid gossip. The fellow is a liar--or----"

"Tell him so yourself, if you have the courage," Ernestine interrupted him in rising wrath. "Ask the gentleman to walk in," she said authoritatively.

Willmers hurried out.

"Ernestine!" cried Leuthold in despair,--"this to me?"

"I will understand what this means about my being of age," cried the girl, with a glance at Leuthold before which his eyes sought the ground.

Möllner entered. He regarded Leuthold with entire composure and profound contempt, then bowed to Ernestine without looking at her. He wished to spare her, to give her time to collect herself. She misunderstood him. She thought he was cold, and met him with coldness.

A long pause ensued.

Leuthold, wishing to appear quite at his ease, broke the silence. "Allow me to ask, sir, what, after all that has passed between my niece and yourself, procures us the honour of a visit from you."

"I am about to inform Fräulein von Hartwich upon that head, and you will greatly oblige me by remaining present at this interview."

"Be pleased, then, to be seated," said Leuthold, motioning Johannes to a chair, "and let me request you to be brief, since we are just on the eve of departure."

"You will not go, Doctor Gleissert."

"Sir! Are you better instructed than ourselves concerning our plans?"

Johannes waited until Ernestine was seated, and then, taking a chair, replied with decision, "Not concerning your plans, but their fulfilment,--which I shall, in case of necessity, prevent by your arrest."

Leuthold was stunned for one moment, but, recovering himself, smiled at Ernestine, who looked astounded, and said, "Ah, here we have the genuine knight of the oak! It is a pity that we do not live in feudal times, when an honest man could be seized upon the highway and flung into a dungeon."

"Oh, no. Doctor Gleissert. A quiet scholar like myself has no taste for such adventures. I prefer safer and legal means. I shall simply, in case you attempt to depart from this place, have you detained by the gens-d'armes stationed here, until your business relations with Fräulein von Hartwich are satisfactorily explained. Then you will be perfectly free to go whithersoever you may please. My interest in you will be at an end."

"Herr Professor," cried Leuthold, "I can only suppose that some one has shamefully calumniated me to you. Let me beg you to come with me to my study, that we may not distress my niece by these representations. She needs the utmost consideration at present."

"If Fräulein von Hartwich is strong enough to undertake the voyage to New York, of which Frau Willmers tells me, she can certainly support this conversation. But, first of all, let me ask you, Ernestine, whether you are leaving your home of your own free will."

"Yes," she breathed scarcely audibly.

"Of course you are your own mistress. But, before you carry out your intentions, you must know what you are doing. This you do not know at present, and I am here to inform you. If you depart with Herr Gleissert, you link your destiny to a villain's!"

Ernestine and Leuthold started up. Johannes arose at the same time, and, leaning one hand upon the table, regarded them steadily without a word.



Leuthold found it impossible to speak. Ernestine was lost in gazing at the noble form of his adversary.

Johannes continued, "You will require the proofs of such an accusation. I have had them in my possession only since early this morning,--here they are." He took several papers from his breast-pocket, and unfolded one of them. Leuthold glanced at it, staggered back, and sank upon a seat.

"Did you write that?" asked Johannes, handing the sheet to Ernestine. "Pray read it."

"No!" she said in evident surprise, as she ran over its contents.

"Or did you affix your name to a deed, ignorant of its contents, in presence of a notary?"

"Never!" was the decided reply.

Möllner breathed freely. "This, then, is the proof that could send your uncle to jail, if I made use of it, for it is a forgery!"

Ernestine made a gesture of dissent, as if she could and would hear no more. But Johannes was not to be deterred. "From your first letter to Helm, and from your conversation with my mother, it is evident, Ernestine, that you consider yourself still a minor. It is true that you are so by the laws of your country, which make the period of minority terminate at the age of twenty-four,--and you are only twenty-two years old. But through Dr. Heim, who was present at the drawing up of your father's will, I know that you are by it declared legally of age at eighteen. This your uncle has concealed from you. We will speak by-and-by of his reasons for this concealment."

"Then I have been my own mistress now for four years?" cried Ernestine in inconceivable amazement,--"and you, uncle, have treated me as if I were a child?"

"More than that,--he has withheld your property from you. Here is a copy of your father's will. You will see that it accords you the right, at eighteen years of age, to take possession of the estate, put in trust for you in the guardians' court, and dispose of it as you please. Of course you could not avail yourself of this right, as you were kept in utter ignorance of it, as well as of the fact that you had attained your majority. But your uncle has availed himself of it in your stead. He has contrived--Heaven only knows how--to imitate your handwriting--and forge the signature to the document by which the guardians' court delivered over to you--that is, to your uncle--the property in its charge for you. There was no doubt cast upon the authenticity of the document, for it was drawn up in due form by an Italian notary and accredited by two witnesses to your personal identity. When I suspected that your uncle had purposely kept you in ignorance of your affairs, I acquainted the court with my suspicions, and they delivered to me this copy of the document which I have just handed you for identification. You have declared it a forgery. Whether I now spare or destroy this man will depend upon the result of what we have to say to each other. That I allow him one word of explanation is due to my regard, not for him, but for your sense of delicacy, Ernestine, which would suffer deeply in your uncle's disgrace."

Having thus spoken, while Ernestine had listened in mute amazement, Johannes turned to Leuthold. "I ask you, Doctor Gleissert, what you have done with the money that you have hitherto withheld from your niece."

"Before I answer you, sir," replied Leuthold, who had regained his composure, "allow me to ask you when you exchanged the pursuit of physiology, wherein you have rendered such important service to science, for the study of the law, in which, I fear, you will hardly prove so great a proficient."

"I did so," said Johannes calmly, "when I felt it my duty to protect with the shield of law a young creature most grossly defrauded. And I think, sir, that I am already sufficiently versed in my newly-espoused science thoroughly to expose your frauds. But let me ask you again to account, without further circumlocution, for the property we have spoken of."

"And I demand of you, Herr Professor, what legal right you possess to subject me to such an inquiry."

Johannes looked at him composedly. "So be it. If you prefer to answer my question to a court of justice, I will withdraw my request for an explanation between ourselves. Take time to consider which you prefer in this matter."

"I should, at all events, have less to fear from a legal investigation than from a madman, who, in defiance of custom and decorum, and regardless of domestic privacy, invades a home, and, with a knife at the throats of its inmates, demands 'your money or your life,' like any highway robber."

"Uncle," interposed Ernestine, "I forbid you, in my presence, to insult my friend. If you can clear yourself of the terrible suspicion that he has cast upon you, do so with dignity. Useless insults cannot convince us."

"And you, Ernestine,--do you take part against me?" cried Leuthold pathetically.

"I take part with no one; on the contrary, I tremble to think that the man who has brought me up may be a criminal. But I will not and cannot shield you from the discovery of the truth. You yourself have taught me to subject every duty, every impulse of the heart, to cool investigation,--to search everything to the foundation,--even at the price of the most sacred illusions. Now, cruel preceptor, reap what you have sown!"

"Well, then, I am ready to answer you, since you desire it. There is one point upon which I owe you an explanation.--the minority in which I have kept you in spite of your father's weak will. My course in this respect I think entirely justifiable, for every right-minded person who knows you must agree with me that it would have been unprincipled in the extreme to leave you to yourself at eighteen, inexperienced and immature as you were. It was an arbitrary measure on my part, but it was well meant, and was the result of an exaggerated affection and anxiety for you. The thought that you were to live without me, and I without you, was unendurable to me. This is my crime,--this is all that I can say. To this gentleman's charges I answer nothing. My life is open to the scrutiny of all, it has been passed in unpretending repose,--in the calm pursuit of science, and in the delight--now, alas! disturbed indeed--of educating you. I regard all your machinations, sir, with indifference. Your heated fancy would fail to see the truth in my defence of my actions. Only a legal investigation can satisfy you of my innocence. Why should I waste further words upon you?"

Johannes smiled. "I reserve my answer to the first part of your remarks, but with regard to the last I cannot refrain from asking you how you can venture to speak of innocence after your niece has denied, in my presence, the signature of this document to be hers, thus proving that it is a forgery?"

"Yes, sir, it is certainly a forgery,--no one can deny that. But does it follow that I executed it? I had a friend in Italy to whom unfortunately I intrusted every fact in relation to our family affairs, placing in him a confidence that prudence could not warrant, and, in view of this present revelation, I cannot but fear that he has played the traitor, and, assisted by some unprincipled notary----" He shrugged his shoulders, as if unwilling to complete so grave a charge.

Johannes smiled again, almost compassionately. "Will you attempt to support your defence upon such a foundation? and do you venture to meet me upon this plea alone?"

"I do, sir; for the law will, I trust, shortly discover the witnesses of the crime who can testify as to whether I or my false friend committed the forgery."

Johannes bethought himself for an instant, and then said, looking Leuthold directly in the eye, "Is this same false friend the purchaser of the factory at Unkenheim? Or did you find in Italy what you certainly failed to find here,--such wealth of friends?"

Leuthold's cheek blanched again, and Johannes saw that he had thrust his probe into a deep wound. He instantly availed himself of his advantage. "I suppose that the superintendent at Unkenheim, acquainted as he is with your Italian friends, will shortly be able to produce the witnesses required for the vindication of your innocence, and I will do all that I can to bring about this desirable termination of the affair." Then, with a glance at Leuthold, who could scarcely hold up his head, "Now, Herr Gleissert, I will give you twenty-four hours in which to decide whether you prefer an explanation with me or in a court of justice. If by to-morrow evening you are not ready to explain matters thoroughly with regard to Fräulein von Hartwich's property, and either to produce the same or, if it is invested in the Unkenheim factory, to give sufficient security for it, your fate is sealed. From this hour your house will be watched day and night. You are now my prisoner. At the slightest attempt to escape, you will be handed over to the custody of the law, even although I should be forced to deliver you up with my own hands. You see I am resolved to proceed to extremities. You have nothing to hope for, either from my weakness or your cunning, even if a miracle could be worked in your favour, and the costly expedient succeed of bribing some Italian rogue to personate 'the false friend,' to declare your crime his own and endure the punishment of it,--even although the notary, who could establish your identity and the drawing up of the deed, were dead,---even then you could never hope to escape the punishment for mail-robbery!"

Leuthold started as if stung.

"You can hardly accuse of falsehood the sharp eyes of a peasant of this place, who can testify that, in default of other amusement, you selected for your perusal the contents of the village letter-box, retaining in your own possession whatever especially interested you." Johannes turned to Ernestine. "I do not know, Fräulein Ernestine, whether you have done me the honour to write to me lately, but, if you have, your uncle probably knows the contents of your letter much better than I, who have never received it. At all events, this little occurrence, for which I can produce witnesses, is a significant illustration of your uncle's character. And you, Herr Gleissert, can now understand that there is no escape for you unless you fulfil the conditions upon which alone I will spare Fräulein von Hartwich the disgrace of having so near a relative occupy a criminal's cell. You are beset on all sides,--entangled in your own crimes. There is no hope for you!"

He ceased. Leuthold sat still, pale and mute. Ernestine looked down at him with compassion. Then she glanced at Johannes with admiration bordering on awe. "You are, as I have always known you, upright, but severe!"

"Severe? No, by Heaven! The punishment too severe for this unprincipled man is yet to be devised. My imagination is not cruel enough for the task!" He regarded Ernestine mournfully. "You are worn out,--you need repose." Then he awaited a reply, but none came. The setting sun threw its crimson rays across the room. Ernestine stood silent, her hands hanging clasped before her, exerting all her self-control. Leuthold had propped his head upon his hand, and did not stir. Johannes took his hat. "Farewell, Ernestine. Permit me to return to-morrow to learn your uncle's final decision." He stepped up to her side. "I will not weary you. Let me watch over your destiny. I ask it as the right of friendship,--nothing more,--I assure you,--nothing more!"

"Nothing more!" It echoed harshly in Ernestine's heart, and, without a word or a look, with only a cold inclination of the head, she dismissed him. "He does not love me," she said to herself, and her heart grew like ice. He watched over her as a man of honour, not as a lover. He knew that she cared for him,--she had not concealed it from him; he had thrust the obstacle to their union between them in the shape of his narrow-minded conditions--he knew that these were all that separated them, and he preferred to relinquish her rather than his own stubborn will! He demanded of her every concession, without making any, even the smallest, himself! No, her uncle was right, he had never loved her. How could she make advances now without proof that she was the object of his love? How could she humble herself to make the required sacrifice, possessed by the terrible doubt that he had required it in the full conviction that it would not be made? The least advance on his side, the faintest sign that he would yield one jot of the prejudice that separated them, would have given her new life and made her happy. But from this day their union was impossible,--it was not to be thought of.

Leuthold interrupted her reverie. He had left the room, and now returned with a letter. With the air of a man resolved upon death, he held it out to his niece. "Read that, and then show me how truly great you are!"

Ernestine, in surprise, unfolded the letter. It was from the superintendent, received the day previous. It contained the announcement in a few words that the establishment was bankrupt and Leuthold ruined. If he did not escape by instant flight, he would be overtaken by the punishment of his crime. Ernestine read and re-read the letter; she seemed unable to understand it "What does it mean?" she asked at last.

"It means that Möllner is right when he calls me forger and thief."

"Uncle!" cried Ernestine in the greatest alarm.

"The money that is lost in the Unkenheim factory was yours----" Leuthold faltered.

"You have, then, deprived me of my fortune?" she asked in a low tone.

Leuthold stood before her apparently annihilated. "Yes!"

There was silence. Ernestine uttered a low cry and recoiled from him. He breathed with difficulty, and continued, "I could and would confess nothing to that man. There is only one soul on earth magnanimous enough to forgive me, and to it alone I will reveal all my weakness. Ernestine, I have shown you before, in my love and care for you, the reasons that induced me to conceal from you the termination of your minority. Did you believe me?"

"I will believe it."

"I never dreamed into what fearful temptation I was thereby led. The consequences of what I did were these:--I was obliged, in order to conceal the fact of your majority from you, to appropriate in your name the amount that was yours when you reached the age of eighteen, and this without your knowledge. I did it with the firm intention of doing what was best for you. I executed the forgery, never dreaming of the punishment that it would entail upon me. For months I kept your money in my possession, guarding it like the apple of my eye. Hitherto I had been an honest man, even although, with the best intentions, I had transgressed the letter of the law. Now, Ernestine, came the turning-point of my life, and I implore you to lend a lenient ear to this terrible confession. The brother of the Staatsrätin Möllner was just bankrupt, and the Unkenheim factory was advertised for sale upon the most favourable conditions. To this temptation I succumbed. Can you not divine how a man is fascinated by the one pursuit to which he has given the best years of his life, that is in a certain sense the work of his mind and hands? It had been a bitter pain to me to relinquish the flourishing business to which I had so long devoted my best energies, and now it was again in the market. Want of knowledge and capacity had ruined it. I, who knew every part of it most thoroughly, could easily build it up again if I had the means to buy it. I resisted a long time,--the advertisement of its sale appeared a second and a third time. I consulted a merchant in Naples who was, I heard, on the point of visiting Germany. He offered to make the purchase for me in my name,--he persuaded me to allow him to do it. The opportunity was so favourable,--the money lay idle in my hands,--I was so certain of doubling it, and thus securing my own and my poor child's future,--I knew as surely that when you should come to know it, you would never reproach me for thus investing your money. Ten times I stood upon your threshold, determined to tell you everything and entreat your permission to dispose of your property thus. I knew you would not withhold it from me. But the insane dread of losing you as soon as you knew you were of age always deterred me. I took the money, firmly resolved to restore it to the uttermost farthing. This is the story of my crime. Now for the tale of my

misfortunes. I failed in what I undertook. I enlarged the factory at considerable expense, and suddenly unforeseen obstacles, in the nature of the soil, presented themselves, material that I had purchased at a high price sunk in value before it could be manufactured, and I lost fifty per cent, in the sale of the finished goods. Such disasters as these followed each other in rapid succession. There was a curse upon everything that I undertook,--the curse, I admit it, of an overestimate of my own powers,--for I should have known that a clever scholar is not necessarily a merchant, and that the technical knowledge as a chemist which had stood me in such stead in a comparatively small establishment was not business capacity for an immense undertaking. But what now avails my remorse, my late confession? Your fortune, Ernestine, has been the price of the terrible lesson. I can give you no more of it than will pay for your passage to New York,--can offer you no indemnification for it but the revenge which this frank confession will afford you the means of gratifying. Decide; do with me what you will,--I will accept my fate from your hand, but from no other."

The hypocrite sank at her feet, as though utterly crushed, and pressed the tips of her cold fingers to his lips.

"Uncle," began Ernestine, and her voice trembled, "stand up! I cannot endure the sight of a man before whom I have been used to stand in awe, grovelling at my feet like a crushed serpent, whose writhings excite aversion rather than compassion. Stand up! I pray you stand up!" She turned from him, that she might no longer see him.

"Ernestine," cried Leuthold terrified, "you are marble!"

"I am what you have made me."

He had expected a different result from his confession, and he watched Ernestine with the greatest anxiety. She read the letter once more, and then sank on the sofa and buried her face in the cushions.

"Ernestine, be composed!" he cried, with a degree of his native insolence which could not all be concealed behind the mask that he had assumed. "Punish my crime, take what revenge you will, but spare me the sight of your humiliating despair at the loss of wealth."

"Do you imagine, man of no conscience, that I mourn for my lost wealth?" said Ernestine wrathfully, but with dignity. "If you had asked me honourably for the money and then lost it through some misfortune, I would have died sooner than have reproached you by a word or a tear. But I must despise the only human being in the world upon whom I have any claim. All that I have is lost through crime, and this passes my endurance. You know well what depends upon the shining bits of metal of which you have robbed me--freedom of thought and action,--the noblest possessions that life can give. For the sake of these you have robbed me, for you are no thief to steal money only for the sake of money. You know, too, what a loss it is for a woman,--that it entails upon her dependence perhaps servitude,--yes, servitude, to become a mere machine, obeying unquestioningly another's will,--and this for a soul that would have bowed to no power on earth or in heaven, but that rejoiced in its pride in being the centre of its own self-created world! And you, knowing how in this thought I die a thousand deaths, dare to reproach me with despair at the loss of mere wealth! Look you, I do not forget, even in this terrible moment, what you have done for me since my childhood,--what an inexhaustible mine of intellectual wealth you have revealed to me in exchange for the earthly treasure you have taken from me,--and, remembering this, I renounce the revenge that you offer me. Save yourself if you can, but do not require of me sufficient 'greatness of soul' to forgive you!"

Leuthold breathed freely once more. This was all he wished to hear,--that she would not deliver him up to justice. The worst was over. If she thus in the first outburst of her anger rejected the idea of bringing punishment upon him, she might, when more composed, be brought to connive at and share his flight.

"Ernestine," he said, after a moment of reflection, "every one of your words is like a coal of fire upon my guilty head. Even in your righteous indignation you are noble and gentle. You tell me I may save myself, but do you imagine that I can go away without you? Could I endure the thought of you struggling with poverty, without me to labour for you and to shield you? Have I tended you for all these years with a mother's solicitude, to leave you to your fate now, when you need me more than ever? Girl, if you think thus of me, you do me grievous wrong!" Ernestine looked at him in surprise.

"Either you fly with me, or I remain and brave the worst!" said Leuthold with heroic resolution.

Ernestine recoiled. "I go with you! No, I cannot descend so low,--our paths in life lie, from this moment, far, far apart."

Leuthold saw her aversion. He was lost if she persisted in her refusal. For even although he might succeed in escaping Möllner's vigilance for the time, it would soon be known abroad that he had embezzled Ernestine's fortune and left her impoverished, and his foe would only pursue him all the more obstinately. Ernestine would be required by the law to speak, and, truthful as she was, there was no doubt that she would expose all his villainy. Only by keeping her with him

could she be rendered harmless; concealment without her was impossible.

"You hate me, and it is natural for you to do so," said he. "I will not recall to you all the time and trouble that I have expended upon you since your childhood,--the patience with which I have endured your caprices, nor the love with which, when Heim gave you up, I watched over and preserved your life. All this you know, and you believe it fully repaid by your magnanimous resolve not to deliver up your uncle to a jail. You best know your duty in this matter. But, Ernestine, you should not hate me more than you do your father, whom you have long since forgiven, and upon whom you now bestow so much sympathy, for I can truly affirm that I have dealt more kindly by you than he. He was a drunkard,--a man degraded to the level of a brute. He did not bring you up; I have done it. He scarcely clothed and fed you. I have surrounded you with everything that your heart could desire. He always hated you, I have loved you from a child. You must remember well how often I protected you from his ill treatment, and that once, when I was not by, he almost killed you. He never would have provided for you as a father should, had he not been driven to it by remorse for his conduct towards you. Two-thirds of the property, Ernestine, that he bequeathed to you were mine by right. I had earned it in his service. He bequeathed it to you, and I acquiesced silently. I resigned it without even hinting to you my just claims. I separated myself from my child that she might be educated as became her moderate expectations, a sure proof that I had no designs upon your wealth. For all this self-sacrifice I asked only the delight, the great delight, of training to full perfection a young mind,--such a mind as no woman was ever before possessed of. You can bear me witness that I have taught you nothing evil,--that I have opened your eyes to the good and the beautiful, helping you to decipher the book of nature, where only what can elevate the mind is to be found. You can comprehend, by the aversion with which you now regard your fallen teacher, how pure his teachings have preserved your heart. I ask you to reflect, Ernestine, whether all this does not give me at least the same claim upon your sympathy as that which you now yield to your father."

Ernestine listened with increasing emotion and sympathy. She buried her face in the cushions of the sofa, and burst into tears.

Leuthold regarded her with satisfaction. He knew that the woman who weeps yields. He continued, "You have convinced me that I have nothing to fear from your hatred. You have told me that you renounce your revenge, and a nature like yours performs what it promises. But, Ernestine, this does not content me. My tortured conscience cannot rest until you permit me to take charge of your future. Let me at least try to atone for my crime. Grant me this alleviation of the burden that weighs me to the earth. Pity me, and allow me the only expiation that is possible for me!"

"What shall I do, then?" asked Ernestine in broken accents.

"Go with me, my child, that I may share with you the bread that I earn,--that I may open such a future to you as you could never enjoy in Germany. You have just signed a brilliant engagement; you cannot break it now, just when you need a means of support. It would be madness to reject what offers you a position commensurate with your ability. But you can never occupy it satisfactorily without my aid. You well know how indispensable I am to you in every new undertaking. You must pursue fresh studies. Not for the world must you allow a flaw to be found in your acquirements on the other side of the water. Hate me, despise me, if you will, but consent to avail yourself of my protection on the long voyage to New York. Trust me, I detest sentimentality, as you know, but it is hard to bury one of your kin before he is dead. You will find it harder than you think. One cannot tear one's self loose in a moment from the memory of hours, days, and years spent together striving for a common aim, and the buried companion will knock upon his coffin-lid when such memories arise." He paused. Ernestine's short, quick breathing showed what a struggle was going on within her. At last she shook her head, sprang up, and walked undecidedly to and fro.

Leuthold continued, "You cannot help it,--you must go with me,--what else can you do? Reflect, what course can you adopt if you remain here?"

"I do not know," she murmured gloomily in a low tone.

"There are none here to whom you could turn, except the Möllners----"

Ernestine added, "And old Dr. Helm."

"Yes, Heim and the Möllners are like one family. Naturally, they would all do what they could for you. Heim would exult greatly in the fulfilment of his prophecies."

Ernestine bit her lip.

"To be sure, after what has occurred, you may safely look to them for the means of support. Perhaps they may find you a place as a governess, if they should become tired of you. But the question is whether that would not be a deeper humiliation than going abroad with me. Good heavens! in this world you must call many a one comrade whose conscience is far from clear, and whom you must not ask for a certificate of character. Let your uncle be to you one of these. I will not intrude upon you,--will not enter your presence, if you do not desire it."

He waited for an answer. Ernestine's eyes were fixed broodingly upon the ground.

"Or possibly you would rather reconsider your determination, and go to the Frau Staatsrätin and beg to be forgiven. I fear,--I greatly fear,--the prudent mother would say, 'Aha, she was haughty enough as long as she had plenty of money, but, now that it has all gone, she grows humble and is quite willing to ask for shelter and countenance. She asks for bread now that she is hungry. The most savage brutes are tamed by hunger,--when its pangs are keen the heart is weak.'"

"Hush, uncle! oh, hush!" cried Ernestine with a shudder.

But Leuthold was not to be silenced. He was in his element again. "That is what the supercilious mother would say, for these intellectual aristocrats are filled with the pride of independence, and exact it from others. And the Herr Professor? Naturally, he would feel it doubly his duty to marry you and cherish the starving woman. But when the first enthusiasm of sympathy was past, what, think you, Ernestine, would be his reflections in cooler moments?"

"He would say, 'Necessity made her my wife,--not love.'"

"And why should I give love in return?" Leuthold completed the thought.

"Or even esteem," Ernestine added with a spasmodic shiver. "No, no! it shall not come to that. I will not sink so low. Noble and true as he is, he shall not accuse me of such selfishness. His proud, suspicious mother shall not find me a beggar at her door,--rather a grave in mid-ocean!" She drew near to Leuthold. Her breath came in gasps, her pulses throbbed. "Uncle, you have destroyed my happiness in life, help me to preserve all that is left for me,--my self-respect!"

"Then come with me. Not until the ocean rolls between you and this man can you be secure from your own weakness."

Ernestine sank down exhausted. "So be it! You have conquered!"

## **CHAPTER V.**

### **SCIENCE AND FAITH.**

The dawning day strove in vain to lift the misty veil that a rainy night had spread over hill and dale. It was one of those mornings when the waning summer--like a belle whose charms are of the past in her morning dishabille--showed plainly that its glories were fading. The rising sun crept behind the cold, misty clouds, and the bushes were dripping with tears of regret. The faithful watcher, who had stood on guard all night near the castle, shook the wet from his cloak and shivered as he looked in the direction of the school-house, whence relief was to arrive.

He did not wait long. The powerful figure of a young man appeared briskly advancing through the mist. Slowly and sleepily the clock in the tower of the village church tolled half-past four.

"To a moment!" cried the watcher to the new arrival. "This is punctuality indeed!"

"Good-morning!" said Walter. "Brr! the air is cold. You must be almost frozen."

"Not more so than the huntsman on the watch," replied Johannes. "Ardour for the chase makes him warm. I burn and long to clutch that beast of prey up there. Oh, Walter, I am not easily roused,--my nature is a quiet one,--but if that man had tried to slip away in the night, and had fallen into my hands, I could not have answered for the consequences."

"I do not wonder at you," laughed Walter. "Nothing would gratify me more than a chance at the fellow. How did you spend the night? Could you not sit down?"

"No, I was not calm enough to do anything but pace to and fro, and now it is beginning to tell upon my wearied limbs."

"Make haste, then, and get dry and warm. My father is impatiently expecting you. He is up and dressed, and my mother has a good cup of coffee waiting for you."

"How kind you all are!" said Johannes. "But I am very anxious, Walter. Gleissert was with Ernestine until midnight. From the hill yonder I could see their heads through the window. They appeared to be in eager conversation, and moved about, as if they were packing. Oh, if she can possibly intend----"

"Do not be in the least alarmed,--she cannot, after what you have told her."

"But how, after what I have told her, can she endure that man about her for hours? How can she breathe the air of the room where he is, for even ten minutes?"

"Hm--it does seem incredible. But, whatever happens, we have nothing to do but to watch and be ready. I will do my duty in this respect. Go, now, and rest for a couple of hours, that you may relieve me at school-time. Had you only allowed me to watch in your place, he would have found me as difficult as you to deal with."

"You help me enough by assisting me during the day. Good-by, then. I shall be back at eight o'clock." And Johannes walked slowly and wearily towards the school-house. When he entered the low, dimly-lighted room, he found the steaming coffee-pot already upon the table. Frau Leonhardt had seen him coming, and all was in readiness for him.

Herr Leonhardt sat in his place by the stove, and held out his hand with a kind but anxious "Good-morning! How are you after your unwonted duty through the night?"

"Tolerably, old friend," replied Johannes, "but I cannot deny that my respect has considerably increased since yesterday for the honourable guild of watchmen.--No, thank you, Frau Leonhardt, I cannot eat anything."

"Oh, do not drink your coffee without a morsel of something solid. Well, if you do not wish it--but, you see, here it is!"

"Yes, my dear Frau Leonhardt, I see it," Johannes assured her, with a smiling glance at the great basketful of biscuits.

"You must know that my Brigitta was up half the night to prepare her most tempting biscuits for your breakfast,--it is all she could do for you. Yes, Brigitta, the Herr Professor can appreciate your good will."

"Indeed I can," said Johannes. "Such womanly kindness is dear to me wherever I meet with it. Your labour shall not be in vain." And he forced himself to eat.

"Oh," said Brigitta, "if the Fräulein had known that you were walking up and down beneath her windows in the cold night, she would have been grieved enough, and filled with pity!"

"The Fräulein knows no pity, my dear Frau Leonhardt," said Johannes bitterly.

The old man laid his hand kindly upon Johannes' shoulder. "You do not mean what you say. You cannot think so meanly of her--your impatience speaks now, not you. If you could only understand her noble nature as I do, who am not blinded by passion!"

"But, Father Leonhardt, I do not deny Ernestine's noble nature. Should I devote myself to her as I am now doing after her rejection of me, if I did not know her to be more than worthy of all that I can do? But if you could have seen her rigid, marble face yesterday, you would have questioned, as I did, whether that young girl really possessed a heart."

"Indeed, indeed she does possess one," affirmed the old man. "But remember, Herr Professor, her heart has hitherto been fed solely through her understanding. She has had nothing to love but ideas. Human beings she has known nothing of. What wonder, then, if she imagines that she should love only where her intellect can say Amen? That Amen cannot be said in your case, for you have opposed all that has hitherto had the warrant of her intellect, which must needs be in arms against you, and the oppressed young heart must mutely acquiesce. Ernestine's intellect is that of a full-grown man, while her sensibilities are as undeveloped as those of a girl of fifteen. The consequence is that incessant contradictions appear in her conduct. Give these undeveloped sensibilities time, do not stunt them by coldness, and you will see them assert their rights in opposition to the intellect. She might almost be called a kind of Caspar Hauser in the world of sentiment. She is not at home there. She needs a patient teacher, and such a one she will find in you, I am sure. Do all that you can to prevent her from going to America; if she goes, she is as good as dead for us."

"Rely upon me, faithful and wise old friend," cried Johannes, and fresh resolution was depicted on his face. "I will do all that I can for her,--not for my own sake, but for hers."

"If you have finished your breakfast, you must take some rest," said Leonhardt. "My wife has arranged a bed for you."

"I accept your kindness gratefully," replied Johannes, "for I am exhausted, and have a fatiguing day before me."

"Then let me show you to your room. That service even a blind man can render you," said the old man with a smile.

And the two ascended to the upper story, where Herr Leonhardt opened a door and showed his guest into a scrupulously neat little apartment, containing a most inviting bed. Then he groped about, assuring himself that all was as it should be, and returned to the room below, saying, as he closed the door, "Take a good sleep,--you may need the strength it will give you."

"Thanks, a thousand thanks, Father Leonhardt!" Johannes cried after him, and he listened to the careful tread of his kind host upon the narrow stairway. Then his eyes closed. Frau Brigitta's words sounded in his ears, "If the Fräulein had known that you were walking up and down beneath her windows in the cold night----"

She must have known it. He had told her plainly enough that he should do so, and she had not even opened a window or looked out at him. But stay,--stay! She would come out to him herself. See! see! The gate opened softly. Was her uncle with her? No! She was alone,--quite alone! "Come," she whispered, "you are cold. Come in." And she took his hands and breathed upon them and rubbed them. "Will you not come into the house?" she asked. "There you can watch for my uncle and be out of the rain, and I will stay with you and never, never leave you."

"Ernestine," cried Johannes, stretching out his arms to embrace her. The sudden motion awoke him, and he found himself alone. He could not have slept more than a quarter of an hour, and yet he could not go to sleep again. He lay quietly resting for a time, and then arose, prepared to go through with the decisive day that awaited him.

Evening had come. As on the previous day, Ernestine was sitting at her writing-table, but it was empty now. Its contents were packed up in the chests which were standing in the room, locked and ready for the voyage. Ernestine sat idly, with her hands in her lap, listening to her uncle's directions to the weeping housekeeper in reference to the price at which she was to dispose of the furniture of the house.

"The scientific works and the apparatus I shall leave to Walter Leonhardt," she said.

"What!" cried Leuthold. "Are you going to give away at least a thousand thalers?" He paused, with a glance at Frau Willmers, who had the tact to leave the room. "Why throw money out of the window, now that we are beggared?"

"The thousand thalers that the things would bring would not keep me from starving, while they will secure the young man's future. He has talents that must not run to waste, and which I can foster by giving him the means of pursuing his studies."

"Is it possible? You think it your duty, then, to foster all neglected genius?"

"Uncle," said Ernestine with cold severity, "I pray you spare me your opinion of my conduct. The habit of submission, it appears, is more easily discarded than that of ruling. I have cast aside the former, since yesterday, like a garment. It would be well for you to do the same with the latter."

"But I thought I might at least be suffered to advise," observed Leuthold.

"I will ask your advice when I think it necessary. In this matter it is enough that I choose to do as I have said."

Leuthold regarded her immovable features with a mixture of fear and hatred, and thought to himself, "Once let me get you on the other side of the water, and in my power, and you shall atone bitterly for all the trouble that you give me now."

And his restless fancy painted vividly before his mind's eye the revenge that awaited him in that new world, and an ugly smile was upon his lips as he thought of all that his niece's proud nature would have to endure.

Ernestine arose. "There are only a few hours left before our departure," she said. "I must be sure that my intentions will be carried out."

She went into her laboratory, and packed up, as well as she could, the apparatus that she designed for Walter. Then she reopened the letter that she was to leave with Willmers for Leonhardt, and added these words, "Come what may, I pray you preserve these books and instruments for me as relics. Say they are yours, or they will be snatched from you and from me."

Thus she made her gift secure from the clutches of the law. She knew Leuthold well enough to feel sure that he would not seek to prevent its removal from the house if he could not keep it for his niece. Then she sent off the chests from the laboratory, and went into the library to select the books that Walter was to have. Leuthold hurried in, and said to her, "Möllner is coming! Now, Ernestine, summon up all your resolution!" His teeth fairly chattered with agitation. "Be strong, Ernestine. A human life is at stake! If you do not save me from Möllner's revenge and from the law, I am a dead man! By the life of my child,--dearer to me than aught else on earth,--I swear to you that I will commit suicide sooner than put on a convict's jacket! Now act accordingly."

Ernestine gazed at him with horror. At last he was speaking the truth! Sheer, blank despair was painted on his features.

"Uncle," she cried, "be calm! I will not drive you to suicide! My resolve is firm. Will you not be present?"



"No, that would make mischief. I will get everything ready for our departure, that nothing may detain us. Do not forget. We are reconciled,--do you hear? Will you tell him so?"

"I promise you."

"I will go. I will not meet him. Bless you for every kind word, and curses upon you if you should betray me."

He hurried away, and Ernestine looked after him with a shudder. A human life hung upon her lips! A curse awaited every thoughtless word that she might utter! She stood alone and helpless, burdened thus heavily, a young, inexperienced creature, scarcely able to bear the responsibility of her own actions. She spurred on her fainting energies to accomplish the almost superhuman task allotted to her.

Her dreaded visitor entered.

"Forgive me, Ernestine," he said, "for thus intruding unannounced. Your housekeeper directed me hither. This is no time for empty formalities. It is time for action, and, if need be, for a life-and-death struggle. I have just seen the chests sent off to Herr Leonhardt. I learn from Frau Willmers that you are going,--really going,--with your uncle. Ernestine, I have no words for the anguish that I am now enduring! I could submit to your rejection of my suit, for I might still love you, but to find you unworthy of my love, Ernestine, would be more than I can bear."

"And what could so degrade me in your eyes?" asked Ernestine with offended pride.

"Your not fleeing from such a villain, as from the Evil One himself,--your harbouring the intention of going forth into the world with one abhorred alike of God and man, not feeling sufficient detestation of the crime to induce you to avoid the criminal who must be shunned by every honest man. Oh, Ernestine, I cannot believe it now! I would rather die than believe it!"

"He has excused himself in my eyes," said Ernestine, deeply wounded. "He has convinced me that no human being should condemn another unheard. I am not conscious of such perfection and infallibility in myself as would permit me to dare to judge and denounce. That must be left for those better and stronger than I. The tie that bound me to him is, it is true, broken, but I must tread the same path that he treads. I cannot refuse to share his wanderings."

"Do you not fear the disgrace that will attach to you by thus joining your lot with that of a criminal, amenable to the law?"

"The law has no power over him. He has satisfied me with regard to my property, and, if I am content, it is enough."

"Good heavens! What security has he offered you? You are so inexperienced in such matters, he will deceive you again. Tell me, at least, what he has told you."

Ernestine stood more erect. Agitation almost choked her utterance, and, to conceal it, she put on a colder, sterner manner than usual. "When I tell you I am satisfied, it seems to me that should content you."

"Ernestine," cried Johannes, "why do you adopt this tone with me? I am acting and thinking only for you and your interest, and you treat me like a foe."

"For all that you have done and are doing for me, I am grateful to you, as also for your kind intentions. But now, I pray you, leave to me all care for my future fate. I feel fully competent to direct it."

"I tell you, Ernestine, that, whether you will it or not, I must snatch you from the abyss upon whose brink you are tottering. And first I will make sure of your companion. He has not given me the securities for your property that I required, the respite that I allowed him is past, the twenty-four hours for reflection have gone." He turned towards the door.

"Dr. Möllner, what are you about to do?" cried Ernestine.

"Give him up to justice."

Ernestine placed herself in his way. "You must not do that!"

"And why not?"

"You will not attempt to avenge what I have forgiven. You will not so intrude into my life as to make it impossible for me to decide whether I will punish or forgive a crime that affects me alone. You are about to publish abroad my affairs, and I demand for myself the right to regulate my own private affairs as it may seem to me best. I cannot allow a stranger--yes, I say, a stranger--to meddle thus with the concerns of two human beings, as if he were an emissary of the Holy Vehm!"

"Ernestine!" gasped Johannes.

"I repeat it," she continued, "I am grateful for your kind intentions. But the best intentions result in unwelcome violence when they would rob a human being, of the right of free choice. I insist upon this most sacred of all rights, and forbid you any further interference with my fate, and, as my uncle's lot is so closely allied to mine that in striking him you would harm me, I hope you are sufficiently chivalric to desist from further persecution of him." Almost fainting, she leaned against the door.

"Fräulein von Hartwich," replied Johannes, controlling himself with difficulty, "you propose a hard trial for my patience. But I can forgive you, for you are a true woman." Ernestine started at these words, but he entreated silence by a gesture. "You are a woman, and, as such, easily aroused, easily deceived. Your uncle has taken advantage of this fact. You do not dream what you are doing in following the fortunes of this bad man. I thought I had opened your eyes yesterday, but I was mistaken. You saw, but I did not teach you to understand what you saw. I will retrieve my error. I will explain to you the motives for your uncle's course of action."

"I have already told you," replied Ernestine, "that I know them. I need no further explanation. He has sinned, grievously sinned,--who can deny it? Not he himself. But his life has been dedicated to me with a devotion rare enough in our selfish world. He has lived for me ever since I was a child, and all his errors sprang from the dread of losing me. This is, perhaps, incredible to you, because from your point of view it is inconceivable that a man should entirely give himself up to the training of a woman's mind. To you a life spent solely in intellectual association with a woman seems impossible, and of course you would accuse of falsehood a man who professes to prefer such a life to all others. Therefore I know beforehand all you would say, and would be spared the listening to it now."

"Ernestine," cried Johannes, fairly roused, "you must hear me, or, by Heaven, I do not know you!"

He paused for one moment. Ernestine looked down, and apparently awaited what he had to say.

"Yes, then, yes,--you are perfectly right. It does seem to me an impossibility that a man should make it the sole aim of his existence to develop the intellect of a woman. I can love as deeply as man can love. You know that I love you, and, were you mine, I would adore you, and you only, with my whole heart and soul, truly and unchangeably, until death separated us. But, in my love for you, to forego all other interests and duties in life, to idle away in delicious intercourse with you all opportunities for true manly exertion,--that I could not do, truly and warmly as I love you. It would be the part of a woman,--not of a man, who has public as well as private duties to fulfil. I have no confidence in a man who pretends to lead such a life out of simple affection for a relative. He must have some other purpose in view, and I believe that your uncle's purpose in this matter was a detestable one, leading him to sin against you in a way that God alone can justly punish. He would sacrifice everything for money--he would murder alike body and soul. Stay--be calm for a few moments. I will justify these terrible accusations. The theft of your fortune has been the purpose that he has kept steadily in view ever since he was your guardian. The possession of this property seems to have been the fixed idea of his life, for he induced your father at one time to bequeath it to him, leaving you, notwithstanding his boasted affection for you, only what the law accords to you. Heim prevailed upon your father to destroy this will and to reinstate you in your rights. But he was not sufficiently prudent, for the will that your father then dictated left too much margin for your uncle's administration. He longed to recover what he had lost, and circumstances favoured his desire. Your father, in his will, as you can see from this copy of it, stated that in case of your dying unmarried your entire fortune should go to Gleissert or his children. When your father died, matters looked propitious for Leuthold, for little Ernestine was such a frail, sickly child that he cherished a hope almost amounting to a certainty that the delicate cord of life that kept him from his inheritance would soon break, and give him all that he coveted. But the pale, quiet child confounded his plans by recovering her health and strength. Hers was a rare nature, and recuperated quickly, both physically and mentally. The hope that she would die grew fainter and fainter, but he could not so easily relinquish the prospect of possessing her fortune. If he might not secure the inheritance, he could at least secure the person of the heir, and contrive to keep you, Ernestine, from marrying, since the money could be his only in the event of your dying single. To this end, you must be secluded from the world, and, that you might not miss its amusements, your restless spirit must be introduced to a new realm,--the realm of the intellect. Therefore he studiously concealed from you your coming of age, lest it should occur to you to break the bonds of the strict control to which you were subjected, and mingle with your kind. This was the plan of your education, this the reason of your uncle's tender solicitude for you. The time and trouble expended upon you were all in the way of business, a fair exchange for the ninety thousand thalers and the contingent advantages that he trusted to obtain thereby. He could never have attained such a competency as a German professor. This is criminal legacy-hunting. And now for my accusation of murder. I do not mean by it a murder with poison or dagger,--he is too cowardly and too prudent for that,--but he made use of a poison which, if it were not as quick in its effects as arsenic, at least possessed this advantage over it--no chemist could detect it, and no law punish its use. The body was to be destroyed through the mind. He knew how to foster in your passionate heart an ambition that dreaded no labour, that, in its burning desire to attain its ends, pursued them with a feverish haste that never heeded whether the physical frame were equal or not to such unceasing exertion. Oh, the plan was ingenious, but there were eyes, thank God! that saw through it. It is true he did not stand at your back with a

rod, like a severe schoolmaster, to urge you on,--he did not compel you to work all night long, denying yourself the only refreshment that could strengthen your shattered nerves,--sleep,--but he contrived that you should do all this voluntarily. He saw you droop, and took no notice of it. He would not kill you with his own hand, but he put into yours the poison with which you should do it yourself, and, when the natural love of life in you spoke out and entreated aid, he forbade you to summon a physician, lest he should save you by an antidote! Thus, consciously and voluntarily, he has let you sicken and languish, and now he would carry you to America to bury you there. So much for the grounds of my accusation of physical murder. And now as to his murder of your soul. I said before that your uncle had secluded you from the world to make sure of your never marrying. How could he do this? By making you an object of aversion to society at large--by hardening your heart, so that you might never feel the desire for loving intercourse and companionship stirring within you. He accomplished these ends by making you a skeptic. And were this the only crime that he is guilty of towards you, it would justify any punishment, however severe,--any contempt, however profound."

"If this is all that you have to say, I can only reply that you talk like a theologian, not like a physiologist," said Ernestine, vainly endeavouring to conceal her horror. "It is possible that there is some foundation for your other accusations of Doctor Gleissert,--I will not decide upon them at present,--but for this last there is none, or, at least, none in the degree that you mean. Yes, he did take from me my faith, but in its place he gave me that philosophy which is the resting-place of all thought, and wherein alone the doubting spirit can find peace."

"Oh, what a miserable mistake!" cried Johannes. "Do you suppose that anything can take the place of faith in the world? Can a soul as lofty as your own be content with the mere knowledge of the laws that rule the universe, without raising reverential eyes to the Power whom those laws represent? Forgive me if I talk like a theologian. Let me be clear with you upon this point too, before we part. I would at least restore to you one possession of which your uncle has robbed you, and that belongs to women in an eminent degree, far more than to men,--the power of seeing heaven open when the earth does not suffice us!"

Ernestine gazed at him in utter amazement: "Do you speak thus, you, a man of exact science,--a science that teaches how everything in existence is developed from itself! What is left for us to reverence in the God whom you would seem to declare, after we have learned that nature of itself alone creates and achieves everything?"

Johannes shook his head. "Oh, Ernestine, can we believe in Him only by believing that his Spirit hovered over the face of the waters and created the heavens and the earth in six days? I think we have learned to separate this gross material representation from the actual being of God! Thus only can faith and knowledge join hands, and I am one of those in whose minds they have thus formed an alliance, although perhaps not without a struggle. I can give my belief no concrete shape, I have not the simplicity that is satisfied with a Deity compounded of human attributes and powers, but the fervent aspiration that looks up and holds fast to my formless God,--this aspiration is my rock of safety."

"That is only a subjective emotion. What does it prove?"

"Nothing!" said Johannes. "For the existence of a God can be as little proved as disproved. I might say He is to the world what the soul is to the body, and we cannot give form to the soul in our minds. The organs of the body work in obedience to unchangeable laws, but, although they thus work, they are under the control of the soul, and, although we can explain never so exactly the mechanism that the soul puts in motion at its good pleasure, we cannot explain how it thinks and desires. Are we therefore to deny that it does think and desire? But I know what little value will attach to such comparisons in your eyes, for you will demand logical proof of the truth of my parallel, and this I cannot give you."

Ernestine was lost in thought. "I never should have conceived it possible that such a man as you are could believe in the existence of a God!"

"If you will listen, I will tell you how faith first entered into my heart. I was a wayward lad, just emancipated from the ignorant illusions of childhood, with a living desire for the Infinite in my heart,--longing to prove scientifically the existence of the God in whom I no longer believed. In my ignorance of myself, I naturally fell into the way of that spurious philosophy which the science of to-day looks back upon with contempt, and--to use Du Bois' words--racked my brain for awhile over the riddle of Being, human and divine. My affections were warm,--I loved those belonging to me, and especially my little sister Angelika. One day the child was taken dangerously ill, and, as she was more devoted to me than to any other member of the family, I watched with her through long nights with fraternal tenderness. The child suffered greatly, and one night in particular her cries fairly broke my heart. My mother at last took her little hands in her own, clasped them, and said, 'Pray, my darling,--pray to God. He may grant your prayer!' And the child, suppressing her sobs, cried, 'Ah, dear God, take away my pain!' And I--I flung myself upon my knees and prayed fervently, I knew not what,--I knew not to whom,--no matter! I prayed. I heard my mother's voice say Amen, and I repeated Amen,--almost unconsciously. The child was soothed, grew calm, looked up to heaven with childlike trust, then smiled upon us and went to sleep with her head upon my breast,--her first sound sleep after a week of suffering. I listened to her breathing, it was soft and regular. I was filled then with an emotion such as I had never before experienced,--tears came to my eyes. I could have embraced the world in my delight,--no, a world would not suffice

me, I needed a God beside. What shall I say,--how explain it in words? Like the girl born blind, in the poem, that believed she *saw* when she *loved*, I loved the God to whom I had prayed, and because I loved Him I saw Him with my heart!"

He paused, and looked at Ernestine, who had listened with sympathy.

"That is the very essence of faith," he continued. "No reason can give it to you or take it from you. One single agonized moment taught me what science and philosophy had failed to teach. I found by the bedside of a child the God for whom my intellect had vainly searched earth and skies. From this time I learned to keep myself open to conviction. I now first became an exact physiologist. I no longer set fantastic bounds to science, I no longer adulterated my pure contemplation of nature with metaphysical notions, but confined myself strictly to the actual, and it never conflicted with my feelings, for Science itself pauses before the first cause of all Being, and says, 'Thus far, and no farther,' and here, where my knowledge ceases, my faith begins!"

"You speak well, but you do not convince me," said Ernestine sadly.

"I see. I know that the remedy for your disease does not lie in the words or the example of others, but in your own experience. I prophesy, if you are ever overwhelmed by a moment of despair, that you will waken to the need of that God whom you now ignore. Even were it not to be so, I could only pity you, for a woman who cannot pray is a bird with broken wings. I maintain that there is no woman who does not believe,--for there is none who does not *fear*, and fear looks in reverence to God, whether as avenging justice or protecting love, to which to flee when all other aid fails. Can you be the sole exception to this rule?"

"I hope so," said Ernestine proudly. "I am not one of those weaklings who dread danger in the dark. I look every phantom of terror boldly in the face, and can recognize its natural origin. I fear nothing, and have no need of a God."

"You fear nothing?" asked Johannes, and then, struck by a sudden thought, added, "Not even death?"

"Not even death! I know that I am but a part of universal matter, and must return to it again. What is there to fear? The dissolution of a personal existence in the great sum of things,--the transformation of one substance into another? Since I learned to think, I have constantly pondered this great law of nature, and have accustomed myself to consider my insignificant existence only as part and parcel of the wondrous transmutation of matter perpetually taking place in the universe. Only when we have attained this conviction can we smilingly renounce our vain claim to individual immortality, and see in death the due tribute that we pay to nature for our life."

"Indeed? And you imagine that this consolation will stand you in stead when the time really comes for you to descend into that dark abyss which is illuminated for you by no ray of faith or hope?"

"I am sure of it."

"And if you were plunged into it before the appointed time?"

"I should not quarrel with the measure of existence that nature accorded me."

"You would not, however, curtail that existence intentionally?"

Ernestine looked at him in surprise. "No, assuredly not."

"Are you not afraid of doing so by going to America?"

"Why should I fear it?--on account of the dangers of the sea, perhaps? Oh, no. It has borne millions of lives in safety upon its waves,--why not mine also? It will be more merciful than my kind, I think."

"Then you are still determined to go, after all that I have told you of your uncle?"

"With him or without him, I shall go," said Ernestine.

"Well, then, God is my witness that I have tried my best! Now,--you will think me cruel, but I cannot help it,--one remedy still is left me,--a terrible one, but your proud courage gives me strength to use it. Ernestine, if you persist in your determination to undertake this voyage, I fear the time is close at hand when the genuineness of your philosophical consolation will be tried indeed. You will hardly live to reach New York."

Ernestine grew, if possible, paler than before at these words. "What reason have you to say so?" she faltered.

"I will tell you, for there is no time left for concealment." He looked at the clock. "I cannot understand how, with your understanding and the knowledge that you possess, you should fail to see that you are ill,--not only nervous and prostrated, but seriously ill."

Ernestine looked at him in alarm.

"I am firmly convinced that you are lost if you continue your present mode of life, as you will and must in America. Notwithstanding all your uncle may have told you, I know that, once in New York, you will have no chance of recovering from him one thaler of your fortune, even supposing that, in accordance with your wishes, I allow him to leave this country. You will be forced to earn your daily support, and, I tell you truly, your life, under such conditions, will not last one year. You will die in your bloom in an American hospital, and be buried in a nameless grave!"

Ernestine turned away.

"Are you still determined to go?" Johannes asked after a pause.

Ernestine pondered for one moment of bitter agony. She knew only too well that he was right. But what should she do? He had no idea that her fortune was actually lost,—that she would be forced to earn her bread if she stayed as surely as if she went,—that she must labour incessantly, if she would not be a dependent beggar. Think and reflect as she might, she saw nothing before her but death in a hospital! And she would far rather perish in a foreign land than here, where all knew her, and where all would triumph over her downfall, that they had prophesied so often. No! she must fly! Like the dying bird in winter, hiding himself in his death-agony from every eye, she would conceal, in a distant quarter of the globe, her poverty, her degradation and disgrace, from the arrogant man of whom she had been so haughtily independent in the day of her prosperity.

At last she raised her head, and, with a great effort, said, "There is no choice left me. I must fulfil my contract,—I *must* go to America!"

Johannes had awaited her decision with breathless eagerness. He lost almost entirely his hardly-won self-control. "Ernestine," he exclaimed, seizing both her hands, "Ernestine, I plead for life and death. Do you not hear?—I tell you there is no hope for you but in absolute repose. Will you voluntarily hurry into the grave yawning at your feet? I have watched you with the eyes of a physician and a lover, and I swear to you, by my honour, that I have been continually discovering fresh cause for anxiety. You look as if you were in a decline at this moment. You have the feeble, capricious pulse and the cold hands of a victim of disease of the heart. Yesterday I heard from Frau Willmers of symptoms that filled me with alarm for you,—I grasp at the hope that they may be only the effects of your unnaturally forced manner of life. But these effects may become causes, in your present exhausted condition, causes of mortal disease, if you do not spare yourself I cannot, in duty or conscience, let you go without, hard as it is, enlightening you with regard to your physical condition. I would have spared you the cruel truth, but your determined obstinacy extorts it from me. Have some compassion upon me, and do not go before you have seen Heim. He is a man of experience, let him judge whether I am right or not. I entreat you to see him. Do, Ernestine, do, for my sake, if you would not leave me plunged in the depths of despair."

Still he held her hands firmly clasped in his. His chest heaved, his cheeks were flushed with emotion. All the strength of his passionate affection for her seethed and glowed in his imperious and imploring entreaties.

Ernestine stood pale and calm before him. No human eye could divine her thoughts.

Whilst they stood thus silently gazing into each other's eyes, there was a sound as of a carriage driving from the door below. Johannes, in his agitation, never heard it. Ernestine thought it was possibly her uncle, but she did not care. She had suddenly grown strangely indifferent to everything in the world.

"Ernestine, have you no answer for me?" asked Johannes.

"I will—reflect—until to-morrow."

"Thank God!" burst from the depths of Johannes' heart. As he dropped Ernestine's hands, he fairly staggered with exhaustion.

Again a few moments passed in gloomy silence.

"Ernestine," he then said, "you have in this last hour punished an innocent man for all the sins of his sex. Let it suffice you—indeed you are avenged."

Ernestine did not speak.

Johannes continued. "I will intrude no longer. May I come with Heim to-morrow?"

"You shall learn my decision to-morrow."

"Your hand upon it. No? Then farewell!"

Ernestine was alone. She stood motionless for awhile, never thinking of Johannes, nor of her uncle, who, strangely enough, did not appear, but with one sentence ringing in her ears,—"Your pulse is that of a victim to disease of the heart." Those words had stung like a scorpion. There was no doubt, then, that Johannes considered her past all hope of recovering,—he had plainly

intimated as much, although he had refrained from bluntly telling her so. But was Dr. Möllner capable of forming a correct judgment in her case? Yes, certainly, both as physiologist and physician, he was thoroughly able to form a just diagnosis. She did not understand how she could so long have ignored the signs in herself of physical decline. He was right,—her uncle was her murderer. She shuddered at the thought. How near death seemed to her now! She thought, and thought called to mind every peculiar sensation that she had lately been conscious of, weighed the evidence, and drew conclusions.

It was remarkable how everything betokened trouble with her heart. Johannes wished to consult Heim. He would not have done that, had he not thought her dangerously ill. What could he or Heim tell her that she did not know herself? Had he any means of obtaining knowledge that were not hers also? Had she not a pathological library, filled with all that a physician needed,—the same that she had destined for Walter, but had not yet sent to him? She would consult it and know the truth that very day.

Night had fallen—the rain was dripping outside—the room lay in dreary shadow. She rang for lights. Frau Willmers brought a study-lamp with a green shade, and left her alone again.

Ernestine placed a small library-ladder against one of the tall, heavily-carved bookcases, and mounted it, with the lamp in her hand. She took out one book after another, without finding the one for which she was searching. Impatiently she rummaged among the dusty folios, that had not been touched for months. At last, by the dim light of her lamp, she saw the title that she was looking for, but it was beneath a pile of books hastily heaped above it. She dragged it out with feverish impatience. The volumes tumbled about, some hard, heavy object, lying among them, fell upon her head, almost stunning her, and then shattered the lamp in her hand, falling afterwards upon the floor with a dull noise amidst the broken glass that accompanied it. Ernestine, her book under her arm, got down from the ladder with trembling knees, to see, by the expiring flame of the wick of the lamp, what it was that had caused the mischief. As she stooped to pick it up, a fleshless, grinning face stared into her own. She started back with a cry. It was one of the skulls that she had put away in the library and long forgotten. The dim light of the lamp died out, but through the darkness the white jaws still grinned horribly. Almost insane with horror, she called again for lights. To her overwrought nerves, the trifling accident was in strange harmony with the thoughts that were tormenting her. It was as if nature thus gave her ominous warning of her fate.

When lights were brought, she forced herself to look the hateful thing in the face again. She picked up the head by its empty eye-sockets. "Thus shall I shortly look,—no fairer than this horror!" And she went up to a mirror, and, in a kind of bravado, compared her own head with the fleshless thing. "You must learn to recognize the family likeness," she said to her own reflection, and in feverish fancy she began to analyze her own fair, noble features and imagine all the changes that they must pass through before their resemblance to their mute, bleached companion should be complete. Disgust and dread mastered her again, and she feared her own reflection in the mirror as much as the skull. She threw it from her, and then started at the noise it made as it fell into the corner of the room. The blood rushed to her head, and she was deafened by the whirr and singing in her ears, although, through it all, she seemed to hear something, she knew not what, that she could not comprehend, and that increased her terror. The death's-head in the corner would not—so it seemed to her—keep quiet; it was rolling about there. She could not stay in the room,—there was something evil in the air. She took the book that she had found, and the candle, and fled like a hunted deer to her own apartment, never looking around her in the desolate rooms, in fear lest the formless thing that so filled her with dread should take visible shape and stare at her from some dim recess. But it followed at her heels, dogging her footsteps, surrounding her like an atmosphere, and with its hundred arms so oppressing her chest and throat, even in the quiet of her own room, that it scarcely left space for her heart to beat. How strangely it did beat,—so irregularly! now faint, now strong, as only a diseased heart can beat! And she opened the book and read her doom,—read the pages devoted to diseases of the heart, hastily, feverishly, with little comprehension of their meaning, for by this time thought was merged in fear, and of course she gave the words a meaning they did not possess, in dread of finding what she wanted to know and yet greedily searching for it. Yes, it was just as she feared. Not a symptom here described that she had not felt. Now it was beyond all doubt, she was lost,—no cure was possible,—only delay, and even that, in her present state of weakness, was hardly to be hoped. She tossed the book aside, and went to the window for air. Damp with rain and close as it was, still it was air,—freer and purer than any that she would have in her coffin. Then, to be sure, she would need it no more, but it was still delightful to breathe, and the thought of lying beneath that close coffin-lid was suffocation!

And she was to die soon! Johannes had not been mistaken. It was true. And her strength had been failing for a long time. What was she afraid of? What was there to fear? The pain that she might suffer? Thousands had suffered the same agony, and the hour of her release was perhaps closer at hand than she thought. Then she would be strong,—this hope should sustain her. She would not falsify, even to herself, the declaration that she had made to Johannes scarcely an hour before. Fear? What? Annihilation,—to cease to be,—it was not cheering, and certainly not sad,—it was simply nothing! It was not annihilation that she feared, but a continuation of existence that might be worse than death,—the uncertainty whether the soul perished with the body. "True," she said to herself, "if our eyes are blinded they are not conscious of light, our closed ears cannot hear. Let this physical mechanism, that is our means of communication with the exterior world,

pause in its working, and communication ceases. But suppose thought should be independent of this mechanism? Oh! horrible, horrible! why is there no proof that it cannot be so? What if memory lives on and there are no eyes for seeing, and of course no light,--no ears for hearing, and no sound, no body sensitive to touch, no time or space,--nothing but eternal night, eternal silence, only informed by the memory of what we have seen and heard, and the longing for light, sound, and feeling?"

This was the worst of all,--more dreadful than personal annihilation; this was what she feared. Eternal night, eternal silence, and eternal solitude! Whose blood would not curdle at the thought, except theirs, perhaps, who were weary and worn with existence, or who, looking back upon life's long labour well performed, needed not shun an eternity of remembrance? But she? She was not weary of the world, she had not yet began to enjoy it,--she was not old, she was just beginning to live. She had done nothing towards fulfilling her high purposes, nothing that she could look back upon with satisfaction. It was too soon,--if she must go now, she had nothing to look forward to but an eternity of remorse! And how long must she endure this dread before the horrible certainty came upon her? "Oh, cruel death!" she moaned, "to assail me thus insidiously in his most horrid shape,--of slow, languishing disease! If he would only attack me like an assassin, that I might do battle with him,--meet me in the shape of some falling fragment of rock that I might try to avoid, or in engulfing waves that I could breast and strive against,--it would be kinder than to steal upon me thus, invisible, impalpable, inevitable! Let me flee across the ocean to the farthest ends of the earth, I cannot escape him, I take him with me! Let me mount the swiftest steed and be borne wildly over hill and valley, I cannot escape him, he will ride with me! Let me climb the loftiest Alps,--in vain! in vain! He nestles within me." She fell upon her knees. "Oh, omnipotent nature, cruel mother who refuseth me your bounteous nourishment, have compassion upon me, and save your child,--do not give my thought, my life, to annihilation, and its garment to decay! Millions breathe and prosper who are not worthy of your blessings,--will you thrust out me, your priestess, from your grace?" And she lay prostrate, wringing her hands, as if awaiting an answer to her entreaty. All around her was silent. There was no pity for her. She bethought herself, "Oh, nature is implacable, why should I pray to her? she does not hear, she does not think or feel, but sweeps me from her path in the blind despotism of her eternal mechanism. Is there no hand to aid? no judge of the worth of an existence, to say, 'Thou art worthy to live, therefore live?' There is, there is! By the agony of this hour, I know there must be a higher justice, a Divinity other than nature. The spirit that now in dread of death wrestles with nature must have another refuge, a loftier destiny than the life of this world!" She clasped her hands upon her breast. "Oh, Faith! Faith! and if it be so,--if there be a God, what claim can I have upon His pity? Could my vain pride sustain me before such a judge? What have I done to make me worthy of His compassion? Have I been of any use in the world,--conferred happiness upon a single human being, formed one tie pleasant to contemplate? Have I not all my life long denied His existence, and now, like a coward, do I fly to Him for succour? Can I expect aid, and dare to raise my eyes to heaven and seek there what the earth denies me? No! I will not deceive myself; there is no pity for me,--none in nature, none in mankind, none in God!"

And Faith overwhelmed her with its terrors, for only to the loving heart is Faith revealed as Love. To those who have shunned and denied it, it comes like an avenging blast. It bore her poor diseased mind away upon its wings like a withered leaf from the tree of knowledge, and tossed it down into the night of despair.

A cry, "Johannes, come! save me!" burst from Ernestine's lips, and, in a vain effort to reach the door, she fell senseless upon the ground.

## **CHAPTER VI.**

### **SENTENCED.**

Leuthold had listened to the conversation between Johannes and Ernestine until it reached the point where he saw that Johannes would prevail. Several times he wondered whether it might not be best to break in upon them and try to give their interview another colour, but he reflected that the attempt would be useless with a man of Möllner's determination, and that he should only be forced to listen to fresh accusations. Then he devised another plan, and determined to make use of the opportunity to effect his own escape. Convinced now that his game was lost, he gathered together the contents of his strong box, and wrote a few lines to Ernestine that might be found upon his writing-table when his absence was discovered. They ran thus:

"I have listened to your conversation, and have heard the unfortunate turn for me that it has taken. I can no longer cherish any hope, and all that I can do is to outwit this fellow and escape

while he is with you. I take with me whatever of money there is in the house, to defray the expenses of my journey. I cannot wait until Möllner has gone to ask you for it, for he would stand guard at the door again, and I should never escape from his clutches. My life, and my child's future existence, are at stake. I cannot delay. If you should still decide to leave with me to-day, you will find me at the railroad-station. There are still two hours before the departure of the train. If you remain, I will send you the money for the journey as soon as I can. Farewell, and, I hope, *au revoir*."

Having written these lines, he slipped out to the stables, had the horses put into the carriage, and drove to the station. In two hours his fate would be decided! Once off in the train, and he was safe!

The time spent by Ernestine in mortal struggle with her doubts and reawakening faith was no less a time of torture to him who was the cause of all her woe. Any one who has waited a couple of hours for the arrival of a railroad-train at some insignificant station knows the meaning of the word "patience." To stand about upon a desolate platform, stamping your feet to keep them warm, now peering forward to look along the endless level road, in hopes of discovering the red spark in the distance, then walking up and down the narrow space again, and interrogating the sleepy superintendent as often as you think his patience will permit, as to whether the train will not soon arrive, and always hearing the same answer, "It will soon be here now,"--an assertion which the official himself does not believe,--then, for a change, to wander into the dreary refreshment-room, with its eternal leathery sandwiches and its faded waiter-girls, who reward you with such an offensive want of interest because you are not sufficiently exhausted by a long journey to be brought down to the point of purchasing any of their stale provisions,--to look at the clock every ten minutes, under the full conviction that at least half an hour must have elapsed since you looked last,--and finally, when, stupefied with fatigue and dully resigned to waiting, you have sunk upon a seat, to be roused with a start by the shrill whistle of the locomotive, causing you hastily to collect your seven bundles and rush out, only to be stopped by the station-porter, because this is not the train you want, but one that passes before your train,--all these are the miseries of human life at a railroad-station that every one is familiar with. But for him who is waiting for the iron steed to save him from pursuit and death, they become the most terrible tortures that malicious demons can devise.

Leuthold experienced them to the utmost, with the added anxiety of watching in two different directions,--in that whence the train was to approach, and in that whence he himself had come, and where the avenger might now be upon his track. Thus he passed two hours upon a mental rack--and when at last the glittering point appeared upon the horizon, and, coming nearer and nearer, the train swept up before the station, he thought he should fall senseless at the sound of the whistle that rung in his ears. With all the strength that he was master of, he mounted the high steps of the car, and the black, red-eyed, guardian angel of thieves and murderers spread abroad its smoky pinions and steamed away with him into the night.

Safety seemed assured. Upon the iron path, along which he was carried with such fiery speed, no pursuit could overtake him, except through the electric spark,--that might outstrip him and cause his arrest at some other station. But this fear did not trouble him greatly, for no one knew whither he had fled. To baffle pursuit, he had purchased a ticket for a distant town on the left bank of the Rhine while he intended going directly to Hamburg, first stopping at Hanover to take his daughter from her boarding-school.

It was a cold, disagreeable night. Overpowered by fatigue, he fell asleep once or twice. He dreamed he was in the cabin of a vessel upon the ocean,--once more he breathed freely--his fears were at an end. And as we are apt to say, when some danger is past, "Now we are on dry land again," he, on the contrary, exulted in being on the water. But suddenly the cruel guard shouted in at the door his monotonous "Five minutes for refreshment!" and recalled him to the consciousness that he was still on the land, on the land where for him there was no real safety. Thus the night passed between waking and sleeping. The other travellers looked compassionately, by the flickering light of the car-lamp, at the pale, beardless man leaning back so wearily in the corner, and thought he must be very ill.

At last the dawn flushed the horizon, and revealed the uninteresting level landscape. The usual beverage was offered at all the stopping-places, and drank for coffee by the chilly travellers, who, reduced to a state of physical and mental weakness, made no complaints, only murmured, "At least it is something warm!"

An old lady, who had got into the car during the night, and, seated by Leuthold, fairly drank herself through the whole journey, was greatly troubled by the presence of the pale man who appeared impervious to earthly needs and sat perfectly motionless in his corner. What kind of a man could this be, who never stirred, never took any refreshment, never smoked, never spoke, not even to answer the usual question, "Where are we now?" which is almost sure to open a conversation? Nothing makes friends more speedily than common discomfort in travelling at night. All the other travellers in the car had grown confidential,--had stretched themselves, and told whether and how they had slept. Leuthold alone was as if deaf and dumb. Of course the others leagued against him. They watched him curiously, and made whispered remarks upon his appearance. At last he grew very uncomfortable. The restlessness of the old lady by his side



tormented him, she was perpetually burying him beneath her huge fur cloak, which, she informed him, she had brought into the car with her because it would not go into her trunk, and now it had turned out quite useful--who would have thought a September night would be so cool? Still, she must take it off, lest she should take cold, and she disentangled herself from the voluminous garment, almost smothering Leuthold in the process. The other gentlemen smilingly assisted her, and Leuthold extricated himself impatiently. The cloak was at last, with considerable pains, secured in the place made for portmanteaus on one side of the car, during which process the towers of the capital, looming in the light of morning, were approached unperceived. The pains had been fruitless, for the guard opened the door with the words that would release Leuthold, "Tickets for Hanover, gentlemen!"

"Oh, good gracious I are we there already?" cried the old lady, rummaging her pockets for her ticket, which Leuthold fortunately picked up from the floor and handed to her.

Appeased by his courtesy, she asked him if he too was going to get out at Hanover, and, upon his answering by a brief "Yes," she informed him, to his horror, that she was going to take her youngest daughter from the boarding-school there, to establish her as companion with a lady in Copenhagen. She had a hard journey before her, for she should continue it that very night.

Therefore he determined not to take the night train for Hamburg, as he had at first intended, since then he would have to travel the long road thither from Hanover in company with this officious old gossip and her daughter. He could not avoid them, as the daughter was in the same boarding-school with Gretchen, and probably one of her friends. It was incumbent upon him to have no companions to whom he might become known and who could thus afford intelligence to the authorities concerning his route. Great as was the danger in delay, this peril was still greater. He must choose the lesser evil, and lose a day.

The train stopped. The old lady emerged from the car, like a mole from the earth, and was greeted with a joyful exclamation from her daughter, who was waiting for her at the station.

Leuthold threw himself into a droschky, and drove to a hotel, whence he dispatched a few lines to his daughter, requesting her to come to him.

A long half-hour ensued. What would the daughter be whom he had not seen for seven years? Was she what she seemed in her letters? If she were, how should he meet her and gaze into her innocent eyes?

There was a gentle knock at the door. "Come in," he cried eagerly, and there entered a creature so lovely in her budding maidenhood that Leuthold could only open his arms to her in mute delight.

The girl stood for one moment timidly upon the threshold, and then threw herself upon her father's breast with a cry of joy,--a cry in which all the home-sickness of years was dissolved in the rapture of reunion. Closer and closer each clasped the other,--neither could utter a word. The child wept tears of joy in her father's arms, and bitter drops fell from Leuthold's eyes upon the head that he pressed to his breast as if this happiness were to be his only for a few minutes.

"Father, let me look at you," Gretchen said at last, extricating herself from his embrace. And she put her hands upon either side of his head, and gazed into his eyes with the clear, frank glance of innocence. He bore her look as he would have borne to look at the sun: it seemed to him that it must blind him, and that he should never be able to raise his eyelids again.

"Father dear, I can see how you have laboured and suffered," said Gretchen sadly. "It was high time for you to allow yourself a little relaxation. Ah, how good it is of you to come to me,--to me!" And her emotion found vent in kisses. "But the surprise!" she cried with a long breath, "the surprise! I could hardly believe my eyes when your note was handed to me. 'My father's hand,' I thought, 'and from here?' I opened the note and read,--and read,--in distinct letters, that my father was really here. I gave such a cry of delight that every one came running to know what was the matter. I was just out of bed, and would gladly have run to you in my dressing-gown! Oh, heavens! I could scarcely dress myself--everything went wrong. I should never have got through if the Fräulein had not helped me,--I was in such a hurry!" And she laughed, and cried, and threw her arms around her father again, as if she feared he might vanish from her sight. "Ah, father, what shall I call you? My own darling father, is this really you? Are you going to stay with me now for a while? Are you half as glad to see me as I am to see you?"

Thus the innocent, joyous creature overwhelmed him with love and caresses, and he, lost as he was, heard his condemnation in every one of her tender words.

Could this angel ever descend from her upper sphere to a knowledge of her father's crime? Could her pure soul ever be stained with thoughts of sin, of which as yet she had no idea, and learn to despise, as a criminal, him whom she now held dearest in the world?

But this was not all that he feared. What if his disgrace were to be visited upon his child? What if this young bud should be buried beneath the ruins of his shattered existence? Who would have anything to do with the daughter of a criminal?

"Visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation!" These

words, hitherto only empty sounds to him, haunted his memory in terrible distinctness. They perfectly expressed the dread that possessed him.

"Father, how silent you are!" said Gretchen timidly.

"Oh, my child,--my life! I can do nothing but look at you and delight in you! Your loveliness is like a revelation to me from on high! I have become a new man since I know myself the father of such a child! I cannot jest and laugh,--my joy is too deep! So let me be silent, and, believe me, the graver I am, the more I love you."

Gretchen instantly understood and sympathized with her father's mood. "You are right,--we do not jest and laugh in church, and yet I am so filled there with gratitude for God's kindness to me! How I thank Him now for this moment! I have prayed Him for so many years to send you to me, and now my prayer is answered,--you are here. His way is always the best. He has not sent you before, because I was not old enough to appreciate this happiness." Leuthold had seated himself by this time, and she stood beside him and pillowed his head upon her breast. "You are worn out, father dear. You look so sad. But now you are mine, and I will tend you and cherish you until you forget all your care and anxiety. Oh that Ernestine,--I will not wish her ill, but would she only give back to me every smile that she has stolen from you,--to me, who have nothing but your smile in this world!" She imprinted upon his forehead a kiss that burned there like a coal of fire.

"We will not speak of Ernestine now, my child," said Leuthold. "Let her be what she is. We will talk of her by-and-by. Lately she has not been so hard to control, and has often spoken of you affectionately. I think she will shortly marry, and then she will be gentler, for love always ennobles. She has not quite decided as to her future course yet, but I think she will marry. At all events, she will take care of you if anything should happen to me. Yes, she will,--I am sure of it."

"Father," cried Gretchen in alarm, "how can you talk so? What could happen to you?"

"Why, my child, I might die suddenly. We must be prepared for everything, the future is in God's hand."

Gretchen knelt down beside him, and pressed her rosy lips upon his slender hand. "Father dear, why cast a shadow upon this happy hour? Just as I have found you, must I think of losing you? Oh, my Heavenly Father cannot be so cruel! You are in His hand, and He who has brought you to me will let me keep you."

She laid her head upon his knee with childlike tenderness, and was silent.

"Visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children" rang again in the ears of the happy and yet miserable father. Thus several hours passed, amid the girl's loving talk and laughing jests, until at last, at noon, she sprang up and declared she must go home to dinner. Leuthold would not let her go. He said they would not expect her at the school,--they would know she would stay with her father. And so they dined together, for the first time after so many years. But to Leuthold the meal was like the last before his execution.

After dinner he went to see the governess of the Institute, and asked her to allow Gretchen to take a pleasure-trip of a few weeks with him,--a request that was readily granted, although madame declared that she could not tell how she should do without Gretchen so long. "For I assure you," said she, "that Gretchen has richly rewarded us for our trouble. When she really leaves me, she will carry a large piece of my heart with her."

"Oh, how can I thank you?" cried Gretchen, throwing herself into her kind friend's arms.

Leuthold was deeply troubled. Should he snatch this child from the soil into which she had struck root so securely, and where she had blossomed so fairly in the sunshine of peace and good will? And yet could he leave her here to lose her forever? If justice should pursue him to America, he never could send for his daughter without betraying his place of refuge. She was his child. He had a sacred claim upon her, and, since he had seen her again, was less able than ever to do without her. She should share his fate.

While he was in the parlour of the Institute, the old lady who had been his travelling companion, and who had passed the whole day with her daughter, entered, and was charmed to meet him again, only regretting that they were not to continue their journey together that evening.

Madame invited him to return to tea,--an invitation that he could not refuse,--and he left the house for awhile for a walk with Gretchen. The girl's delight knew no bounds when she found herself promenading the streets upon her father's arm. She had on her prettiest bonnet and her best dress,--she wished to be a credit to her father and to please him, and she entirely succeeded. She was charming. Leuthold regarded her with increasing admiration, and his busy mind began to weave fresh plans for the future out of her brown hair and long eyelashes. The world stood open for this angel, might she not pass scathless through it with a father who had been proscribed? Who could withstand those half-laughing, half-pensive gazelle-eyes, and those pouting lips; pleading for a father?

As she walked beside him thus, her elastic form lightly supported upon his arm, prattling on

with all the grace of a nature full of sense and sensibility, he too began to smile and to revive. He might be most wretched as a man, but he was greatly to be envied as a father.

Gretchen interrupted his reverie. "Father," she said in a low voice, "when I was a little child, you never liked to have me speak of my mother. But I want very much to know what became of her after she married that head-waiter. Will you tell me to-day?"

"I can tell you nothing,--I know nothing of her since she left Marburg, after her father's death. At the time of the divorce she sent me the sum that she was to contribute to the expenses of your education, and her coarse husband permitted no further correspondence between us. He sent back to me unopened every letter in which I tried to arrange matters more methodically. I learned through a third person that she had left Marburg. I do not know where she is living now."

Gretchen shook her head and said nothing.

"I look like you, father, do I not?" she asked anxiously. She did not want to resemble her faithless mother in anything.

"You inherit her beauty, refined and ennobled, and my way of thinking and feeling."

Gretchen nestled close to his side. "I would like to grow more like you every day."

"God forbid!" Leuthold thought to himself, in the full consciousness of what he was, as he turned to go back to the Institute. If he could only have thus retraced his steps in the path of life!

The evening passed more slowly than if he had been alone with Gretchen, although he was delighted by fresh proofs of her ability and progress. He was especially surprised by her artistic talent,--her drawings and sketches in colour. She had not exaggerated when she wrote to him that she was as entirely fitted as a girl could be to earn her own livelihood. He was perfectly satisfied upon that point. And as he lay down to rest at night, a sense of relief filled his mind greater than any he had felt for a long time, and it soothed him to repose.

The next morning Gretchen heard, to her surprise, that her kind father desired to give her a glimpse of the ocean. He would wait until they were on board of the steamer, he thought, before he told her of his real plans. They took the early train for Hamburg, and arrived there towards evening. Leuthold thought it advisable to go directly to a large hotel, where an individual would not excite as much observation as in a smaller house. He selected one of the most splendid hotels in the gayest street in Hamburg.

Gretchen was enchanted with the sight of this northern Venice. The extensive basin of the Alster lay before them, framed in hundreds of bright lights, on its bank the brilliantly illuminated Alster Pavilion, while the rippling waves reflected the moon's rays in a long path of shining silver. Like pictures in a magic lantern, the gondolas glided hither and thither, and the fresh sea-breeze wafted the notes of gay music from the other side. The waves of the sea of light and of sound burst in harmony upon Gretchen's eyes and ears, and made her fairly giddy with delight. She could almost believe that the Nixies, scared away to their depths during the day by the passing to and fro upon the waters of so much life and vivacity, were now beginning to sport there in the moonlight, playing around the skiff's and singing their enticing strains. And when she turned her eyes to the shore, bordered by palaces and crowded with restless throngs of pedestrians and gay equipages, presenting a scene of reality to counteract the dreamy impression produced by the expanse of water, the world seemed to the child a garden of enchantment, and her father the mighty magician reigning over it, who had brought her hither to enjoy its splendours. She threw her arms around him and kissed his hands, and could not thank him enough for giving her such new delight.

The carriage stopped at the entrance of the magnificent hotel, and the attendants came running to offer their services. The head-waiter stood in the doorway, ready to receive the new arrivals. Leuthold helped out Gretchen and handed over the baggage to a servant. As he ascended the steps, he glanced for the first time at the dignified and trim deputy of the host. He started, and the man too was evidently startled. Each seemed familiar to the other; one moment of reflection, and the recognition was mutual. Leuthold held fast by Gretchen, or he would have staggered. There stood the headwaiter of his father-in-law's inn,--Bertha's husband.

They exchanged a hostile glance of recognition. Then the man cried with a perfectly unconcerned air, "Louis, show Dr. Gleissert and his daughter to Nos. 42 and 43."

It seemed to Leuthold that the servant smiled at the mention of his name, and that he exchanged a significant glance with his chief. But this was probably only an illusion of his excited fancy. He hesitated whether it would not be better to go to another hotel. But that would look like flight,--he had been recognized, and, if the man chose to pursue him, he could follow him to any inn in Hamburg.

His enemy stood aside with a contemptuous obeisance, and Leuthold followed his guide up to the fourth story. "Have you no room in a lower story?" he asked.

"Very sorry, sir," replied the servant with a smile, "they are all occupied--you have a very good view here of the river."

Leuthold was silent. He seemed to have fallen into a trap. How had he come to choose in all this wide city the very house where dwelt his worst enemy? How did the fellow come here?

The servant Louis opened a charming room, looking out upon the water, and Gretchen could not suppress an exclamation of delight as she looked down from such a height upon all the beauty below them. It seemed like heaven to her. Louis lighted the candles, and awaited further orders.

"How long has Herr Meyer been head-waiter here?" Leuthold asked as if incidentally.

"For about a year," Louis replied, arranging his napkin upon his arm. "He is a relative of the proprietor of this house, who, when his only son died, sent for Herr Meyer, that the business might not pass into strange hands."

"Indeed--then will Herr Meyer succeed him?"

"I believe so,--yes, sir."

Leuthold walked to and fro upon the soft carpet.

"Will you have supper, sir?"

"Yes."

"Will you go down to the dining-hall, sir?"

"No, I had rather not mount those four flights of stairs again. Bring our supper here, if you please."

"Very well, sir, I will get you the bill of fare instantly."

"Here--stop a moment--"

"What do you wish, sir?"

"Bring me up a couple of newspapers at the same time."

"Very well, sir."

As the door closed behind the man, Gretchen turned round from the window, where she had been standing with clasped hands. "Father," said she, "I am fairly dazzled with all that I see. I never was so happy in my life before. But, in the midst of it all, I never forget whom I have to thank for all this pleasure." And she knelt upon the carpet and laid her head upon the lap of her father, who had flung himself exhausted into a chair. "Do not you too, father, feel easy and free up here in the pure, clear air, with this lovely view of the shining water?"

"Oh, yes, dear child," said Leuthold, his breast filled the while with deadly forebodings.

Gretchen sprang up again, and took two or three deep breaths. "Oh," she cried, running to the window again, "it seems to me that I have been thirsty all my life, and am now drinking deep refreshing draughts in looking at those rolling waves." She leaned her fair forehead against the window-frame, and eagerly inhaled the fresh breeze that blew into the room from the Alster. "How happy those are who are at home upon two elements," she continued, "land and water! We, poor land-rats, must cling to the soil. Think of inhabiting all four of the elements, now working and walking upon the earth, then soaring aloft into the air, now floating dreamily upon the waves, and dancing in the ardent glow of fire,--would not that be glorious?"

"Then you would be man, fish, bird, and salamander all at once," said Leuthold, smiling in surprise at the girl's earnest tone. "Well, well, it might be all very delightful at sixteen, but a man as aged as your old father is thankful if he can live respectably upon the earth only."

"My old father!" laughed Gretchen, hastening to his side again--"you darling papa, how can you call yourself aged? Come with me to the window, the prospect there will make you twenty years younger." She drew him towards it. "It is very strange, I think, but certainly a new revelation of beauty should make the old younger, and the young older. It is a new experience for the young, and experience always makes us mature. It is a memory for the old, for they are sure to have seen something of the kind in previous years, and it carries them back to the earlier and youthful sensations that it first awakened in them. Such a memory should lighten the soul of ten years at least."

Leuthold looked at his daughter with unfeigned surprise. "Child, where did you learn all that?"

"Why, out of some book that I have read, I suppose," said Gretchen modestly. "One always remembers something, you know."

"Blessed be the day that gave you to me,--you are all that I have."

There was a knock at the door, and the servant entered with the bill of fare and the

newspapers.

"Excuse me, sir, for keeping you waiting. I had to go to Madame for to-day's paper."

"No matter," said Leuthold, almost gaily. His talk with his daughter had done him good.

He ordered a little supper, and, when the man left the room, seated himself on a sofa and began to read.

Gretchen took her work,--she was just at the age when affection finds instant pleasure in embroidering or crocheting some article for the beloved object. So she sat and sewed diligently upon a letter-case that she was embroidering for her father while he read. Now and then she turned and looked out of the window, to be sure that all the splendour there had not vanished.

Suddenly she was startled by a profound sigh from her father, and, looking up, she saw him sitting pale as ashes, staring at the paper that had fallen from his hands. In an instant he sprang to his feet and walked up and down the room in mute despair.

"What is the matter, dear, dear father? what is it?" she asked in alarm, but, receiving no reply, she picked up the newspaper, to see if she could discover from it what had caused his agitation. She read unobserved by him--he was leaning out of the window for air--read what seemed to her a strange tongue, to be deciphered only in her heart's blood. It was a telegraphic order from the magistrate of W---. "Dr. Leuthold Gleissert, former Professor in Pr--, is charged with having appropriated, by means of forgery, and expended upon his own account, the property, amounting to upwards of ninety thousand thalers, of his ward Ernestine von Hartwich, of Hochstetten, and also of having robbed the mail. You are desired to arrest and detain him." A personal description of him followed, but Gretchen had read enough. "Father!" she screamed, "father! father!" And, as if in these three words she had summed up all there was to say, she fell forward with her face upon the floor, as though never to raise it again.

There stood the guilty man, forced to behold his child crushed beneath the ruins of his shattered existence. He did not venture to touch the sacred form extended before him in anguish. He looked down upon her like one almost bereft of reason. God had visited his sin upon him, probing the only place in his heart sensitive to human feeling--his punishment lay in the sight of his child's agony without the power to relieve it.

Suddenly Gretchen raised her head and looked at him with those clear, conscious eyes whose gaze he had always endured with difficulty, and before which his own eyes now drooped instantly. "It is not true--it cannot be! Father, you are innocent--you cannot have done this thing!"

"For God's sake, Gretchen, do not speak so loud," Leuthold entreated.

"You tremble--you will not look at me. Father, if you have thus burdened your soul, I cannot be your judge--I will be your conscience. I will not let you enjoy a single hour of rest or sleep until you have restored what does not belong to you. I will die of hunger before your eyes, rather than taste a morsel that is not honestly earned. But what am I saying? I am beside myself! It is not possible!--not possible! Relieve me from my misery by one word. My soul is in darkness, cast one ray of light into it." She clasped his knees imploringly. "Father, swear to me that you are innocent----"

"My child----"

She interrupted him. "No, no oath, no asseveration--there is no need between us of any such--only a simple yes or no, and I will believe you! Look at me, father,--oh, look at me! Do not speak, do not even say yes or no,--let me but look into your eyes, and my doubts will disappear."

"Gretchen," whispered Leuthold, trying to extricate himself from her clasping arms, "listen to me!"

"No, father, no, I will not let you go. I want no explanation, no argument. If you have committed this crime, nothing can extenuate it. I will hear nothing, know nothing, but whether you have committed it or not." She sought, in childlike eagerness, to meet his eye--she unclasped her arms from his knees to seize his hands and cover them with kisses, while a flood of tears relieved her heart. "Forgive me, forgive me for daring to speak thus to you, a child to a father. Oh, God! how unworthy I am of your affection! The false accusation invented by evil men could lead me astray, and I dare to ask if you are innocent! Forgive me, my kind, patient father--see, I will not ask you again, I will not even look inquiringly into your eyes. The touch of your hand, this dear, faithful hand, suffices to reassure me and lead me back to the knowledge of a daughter's duty." And she laid her face, wet with tears, upon his hands, with a touching humility that cut him more deeply than any accusations could have done.

"There--that's quite enough!" suddenly said a voice behind them, that curdled the blood in Leuthold's veins. "I will teach you a daughter's duty!" And from the doorway of the adjoining room Bertha's stout figure made its appearance boldly advancing.

"Good God, my mother!" shrieked Gretchen, and she recoiled involuntarily.

"Gretel," said the woman, "are you afraid of your mother while you are on your knees to that villain?"

Leuthold stepped between her and his child. "Bertha," said he, "it seems to me my punishment is sufficient. Surely you need not avenge yourself by snatching from me my child's heart,--a heart that you never prized, and will never win to yourself. If there is a particle of maternal tenderness in your breast, spare, not me, but this innocent angel. Do not destroy the most precious possession of a youthful heart,--confidence in her father. Bertha, Bertha, you will harm the daughter more than the parent! Give heed to your maternal heart, which must throb more quickly at sight of this fair flower, and spare me a blow that would annihilate her."

Frau Bertha folded her arms, and looked upon Leuthold with exceeding disdain. "Oho! now it is your turn to beg. I am no longer rude, clumsy, and coarse as a brute, as I was when you drove me off because I was too awkward to help you to steal the inheritance."

"Bertha!" cried Leuthold, pointing to Gretchen, whose imploring eyes were turning from one parent to the other in increasing distress.

"Yes, yes, she shall hear it all! She shall know what a charming papa she has, and that you are not unjustly accused in the papers. Why should you stop at such a crime as that, when you would have beggared Ernestine as a child, persuading old Hartwich to make you his heir? There is nothing that you would not do. I can tell her that,--I, your wife, who lived with you for years. And your child shall curse you, instead of adoring you as a saint. No one can tell what a fine game you might have played, if you had once got off to America with such a pretty girl."

At these words Gretchen uttered a loud shriek.

Bertha pitilessly continued, "And just because I have maternal feeling enough to try to save my child, I will prevent your evil designs. You shall not carry the poor thing away with you to such a life as yours,--not while I live!"

"Bertha," cried Leuthold, forgetting all caution, "hush, or mischief will be done here!"

"What mischief? Will you try to throttle me, as you did when Hartwich made Ernestine his heir instead of you? Only lay a finger on me! There is a police-officer outside in the passage, whom my husband placed there lest Louis should not be able to serve my fine gentleman with sufficient elegance."

"Great God!" gasped Gretchen, staggering as if mortally wounded.

"Is it really so? Could your mean desire for revenge degrade you thus?" asked Leuthold, still incredulous.

"It was not I, but my husband, who owes you a grudge because I played him false and married you. A gentleman came here this morning with the chief of police to search this house, as well as all the other hotels in the city, and left orders that if you arrived here he was to be informed of it. My husband sent for him, and, for greater security's sake, for a police-officer too,--I only wanted to speak to poor Gretel beforehand, and take her under my protection when her father was arrested." She approached the girl, who fled like some frightened animal to the farthest corner of the room.

"Go!" she cried, trembling in every limb. "Do not touch me! You can do nothing for me now but kill me, and put an end to the agony you have brought upon me."

She burst into a piteous fit of sobbing. No one observed that the door had been gently opened, and that a young man was standing upon the threshold, regarding the unfortunate girl with the deepest compassion.

"My child," said Leuthold, going timidly up to her, "my child, will you not listen to one word from your unworthy father?"

"Do not speak, father. What good can it do? I cannot believe you any more,--cannot save you,--cannot, although I would so gladly do it,--wash away your guilt, even with my heart's blood. I can only weep for you."

"Forgive one entirely unknown to you for intruding upon such grief," the stranger now said, in a voice trembling with pity. "I am compelled by cruel circumstances to appear as an enemy, when I would gladly act the part of a friend and comforter." He turned to Bertha. "May I entreat you to leave us a few minutes alone?"

She went out grumbling.

"Herr Gleissert," he continued, "my name is Hilsborn. Do not start. I am not come to avenge my dead father. His sainted spirit would disdain revenge. He forgave you freely while he lived. I come in place of my friend Möllner, who is detained by the dangerous illness of your niece, to vindicate the rights of Fräulein Ernestine. We learned from Frau Willmers that you had sent your effects to Hamburg *poste-restante* several days ago, and that you would of course be obliged to

come hither to reclaim them. Möllner requested me to pursue you without delay, and, without one thought of personal revenge, I consented to assist my friend in reinstating your unfortunate ward in her rights. I little knew what my acceptance of this duty would cost me, for the few minutes that I lingered on that threshold taught me that my task is not alone to hand you over to justice, but to deprive a daughter of her father."

"You shame me, sir, by such kindness at a moment when a less magnanimous man would have believed himself justified in heaping me with insult. I am the more grateful to you since you, of all others, have most reason to hate me. Your humanity, under these sad circumstances, relieves me with regard to the fate of my unfortunate child, for it emboldens me to hope that you will extend your chivalrous kindness to her also."

"Rely upon it, I will do so," Hilsborn assured him.

"And let me hope, my child, that you will not reject the noble protection thus offered you. Herr Hilsborn, remember, has done your father no wrong,--he has only, in his natural desire for justice, lent his aid to the hand that is pursuing me. I presume," continued he, turning to Hilsborn, "that you have provided for my immediate arrest?"

"Yes, Herr Gleissert," said Hilsborn gently, "the superintendent of the hotel has assisted me to do so."

"Then I will place no unnecessary obstacles in your way. I shall submit to the investigation with a good conscience."

Hilsborn laid his hand lightly upon Leuthold's arm. "Herr Gleissert, do not reject advice that is well meant." He spoke in a whisper, that Gretchen, who was listening with feverish eagerness, might not hear what he said.

"Well?" asked Leuthold.

"Do not attempt denial, you will only weaken your case. The proofs of your crime are most decisive."

"How so?" asked Leuthold quietly, believing that he had destroyed every scrap of paper that could criminate him.

"On the evening of your flight, a letter was received from a former maid of Fräulein Hartwich's, who travelled in Italy with you, demanding immediate payment of her yearly stipend, for which she had written several times in vain. She reminds you, Herr Gleissert, of what she has done for you,--how she worked sometimes all night long, trying to imitate Fräulein von Hartwich's signature, that she might be able to counterfeit her successfully before the notary. In short, the letter proves beyond a doubt that you deceived the notary by substituting the person as well as the signature of the maid for your ward's, that the deed might be complete by which the Orphans' Court was induced to resign the estate in its charge."

Leuthold stood before the young man pale and mute. Hilsborn saw the terrible agony of his soul.

"I do not tell you this to humiliate you or to increase your pain, but only to warn you," he continued, "that you may not lose any time by a false plan of defence, and perhaps thereby deprive yourself of the sympathy sure to await a man of your culture who makes frank and remorseful confession of his guilt."

Leuthold's lips quivered at these well-meant words. "Have steps been taken to secure the person of the maid?" he inquired, in the tone in which he would have asked, "How long have I to live?"

"Professor Möllner telegraphed immediately to O---, the girl's present place of abode, and just before I left him he received intelligence that she had been placed under arrest. The notary also has been summoned. Be assured that, as your arrest has been conducted with the greatest foresight, no measures will be neglected to insure your conviction. The only course left for you is to endeavour to secure the sympathies of the jury."

"I thank you!" said Leuthold.

Gretchen had been standing leaning against the window-frame, and had understood more than Hilsborn had intended that she should. The waters of the Alster were still rolling below her, the lights were sparkling, and, in the terrible silence that now ensued, the music of the waltzes in the pavilion could be plainly heard. Was it possible that there was no change outside, while she felt as if the world were crumbling in pieces around her?

Again the door opened, and several figures appeared. Everything swam before Gretchen's eyes, her heart beat as though every throb were its last. An official entered, "Excuse me, sir," he said to Hilsborn, "I cannot wait any longer."

Leuthold looked towards the door. Two police-officers were standing outside, and Bertha with

her husband. And who were those? Other figures were constantly appearing in the brilliantly lighted hall, inmates of the house, eager to witness the arrest. And was he to be led through all that gaping, staring crowd? He, who, with all his crimes, had always preserved appearances,--was he at last to be as it were held up to public contempt, dragged through the lighted passages and down the staircases by policemen, like a common thief? Of course there would be an eager crowd below, and another upon his arrival at N--. His only road now lay through long rows of curious faces, dragged from examination to examination, from disgrace to disgrace,--he, a man who had always preserved an outward respectability,--until he should end either in a convict's coat or the strait-jacket of a madman! The time for reflection was over. He turned a little, only a very little, aside, and drew a folded paper from his pocket,--it did not take a moment, no one observed the motion. And what else? it was so easy to put his hand to his lips and swallow the powder that the paper contained, far easier than to pass through that brilliant hall, through that murmuring, staring mob, to the courtroom, and thence to a jail! Only an instant,--it was done. It tasted bitter, and he drank a glass of water to destroy the taste upon his tongue. Then he stepped up to Gretchen, who was upon her knees, her face buried in her hands. "Gretchen," he said almost inaudibly, "forgive your unhappy father!"

"Father? Almighty God, I have no father!" burst from the lips of his tortured child.

Leuthold looked at her with dim eyes. "I am condemned!" was all he could say.

Then he turned to the officials. "Gentlemen, at such a moment as this, it is surely natural for a father to provide for the future of those whom he may leave behind him. I am ill, and may die at any moment. In case of my demise, therefore, I appoint, before all these witnesses, Herr Professor Hilsborn my daughter's guardian, as I hold her mother, who survives me, entirely unfit in every respect to be her guide and protector. The fact of her having forsaken her daughter at a tender age, and never troubling herself to inquire concerning her afterwards, will prove the justice of what I say. I pray you, gentlemen, to attest the validity of this my last will, when the hour for doing so arrives. Observe that I am at present in full possession of my mental faculties."

The by-standers looked at him in amazement. Bertha would have spoken, but her husband restrained her.

The officer said, coldly but politely, "Your directions shall, if necessary, receive due attention. Rely upon it."

"You have no objections to make?" Leuthold asked Hilsborn.

"Your wish shall be sacred to me," the young man assured him.

"And now, sir, I beg for one great favour," Leuthold whispered to the officer. "Grant me one half-hour's delay."

"I am sorry, but I have waited too long already."

"Only one-half hour, sir, for the love of Heaven,--a quarter of an hour!" Leuthold pleaded. The poison was beginning to work. His knees trembled, his gray eyes were glassy in their sockets, his features grew rigid.

"Not a minute longer!" the official replied impatiently, and beckoned to the police-officers.

"Have some pity!" the tortured man gasped out to Hilsborn. "I have taken poison. For humanity's sake, induce him to let me die here with my child."

"Good God!" exclaimed Hilsborn. "Let instant aid----"

Leuthold clutched his arm, and with a ghastly smile whispered, "It will be of no use, my friend!"

Hilsborn was horror-struck. "Sir," he said, "I unite my entreaties to those of Herr Gleissert. Allow him to remain here only until I have spoken with your chief."

"If the arrest is an unjust one, it will soon be at an end. I have nothing to do with that. I must obey orders."

Hilsborn whispered a few words in his ear, but he shrugged his shoulders. "Any man could say that. We will stop at a physician's as we drive past. That is not contrary to orders. We must go!" The policemen entered.

Hilsborn whispered to Leuthold, "I will bring you an antidote. I hope, for your child's sake, that you will take it. God have mercy on you!"

Leuthold would have replied, but a spasm prevented him from uttering a word.

Hilsborn saw that the poison had already infected the blood, and that all aid would come too late. Nevertheless, he would do what he could. In passing, he lightly touched Gretchen's shoulder. "Fräulein Gleissert, your father is going. Say one word to him."



Gretchen started, as if from a swoon, looked around her, and saw Leuthold between the officers. "Father!" she shrieked, and rushed towards him. She clasped him in her arms, and pressed kiss after kiss upon his blue lips. Her cries wrung the souls of the by-standers, and Bertha hurried away, that she might not hear them.

"I take back what I said," Gretchen moaned. "How could I say I had no father? Now that I am going to lose you, I feel that I can never forsake you!"

Leuthold writhed in agony in her embrace, but he managed to speak once more. "My child," he gasped thickly, "if there is a God, may He bless you! and when you hear that your father took his own life, remember that estate, freedom, honour, were gone past recall, but that by his own act he at least avoided a public exposure."

Gretchen gazed at him speechless. She tried to reply, but her lips refused her utterance. She only knew that her father was taken from her, and that stranger hands loosened her frantic clutch of his garments. She heard footsteps retreating, a door closed, and there was silence. For a few moments she lost consciousness. But other noises roused her from the fainting-fit that had brought her repose from grief, and recalled her to herself. Were the footsteps approaching again? Yes, they came on to the door of her room. What a strange murmur mingled with them! She raised her weary head with a mixture of fear and hope.

The door was thrown open as wide as it could go. Four men entered, bearing a well-nigh senseless burden. Her father had returned to her,--but how? They laid him upon the bed. Gretchen would have thrown herself into his arms, but he thrust her from him convulsively, for her clasping arms, her loving kiss, were tortures too great to be borne. He tried to speak, but in vain. Amidst frightful spasms, alternating with utter exhaustion, he breathed his last sigh, and his spirit bore its burden of guilt to new, unknown spheres of existence.

He had avoided all "public exposure."

But the only judge that he had acknowledged upon earth,--his child,--lay crushed at his feet expiating the crimes of the condemned.

## **CHAPTER VII.**

### **THE ORPHAN.**

Day was again mirrored brightly in the waters of the Alster, and again the streets swarmed with life. The prattle and laughter of children on their way to school, the monotonous cries of the street-hawkers, the rattle of passing vehicles, were all borne aloft into the quiet room where Leuthold had died, and where Gretchen still knelt beside the bed, and, by her constantly recurring bursts of grief, showed that the long night had not sufficed to exhaust the fountains of her tears. Her head lay upon the edge of the bed, and her arms were stretched across the empty mattress,--for the host had insisted upon the immediate removal from his house of the body of the suicide. But Gretchen could not yet be induced to leave the desolate room, the vacant couch. Since she was not allowed to follow her father's corpse, she would at least pillow her head where he had lain. She repulsed all her mother's advances. When everything had been done that the law requires in such terrible cases, and the officials had vacated the apartment, she shot the bolt of the door behind them, and thanked God that she was alone with her misery, alone by her father's death-bed.

What human eye can pierce the depths of a young heart lacerated by such anguish? All that goes on in the soul at such moments, when the creature wrestles with its Creator, must remain a profound mystery,--a mystery known to almost every human being, but never to be revealed, no mortal language can declare God's revelations to us in our direst need. Experience alone can enlighten us, and those who have lived through such a time can only clasp the hand of a fellow-sufferer, and say, "I know what it is," and henceforth there is a bond between them that is none the less close because it can never be explained.

Thus was it with Gretchen and Hilsborn when the latter's low knock at the door aroused the girl from her grief, and she arose from her knees and admitted him. She put her hand in the one he held out to her, and looked confidingly into his serious blue eyes.

"You never went to bed, dear Fräulein Gleissert," said he. "I can see that."

"How could I rest?" she replied. "They would not even let me watch by his body. All that I could do was to wake and pray for him here where he drew his last breath. How hard it is to have to leave what one has loved so dearly, and not to be allowed to cling to it at least until it is

consigned to the earth! Suppose he were not quite dead. If he should stir, no one will be near to fan the spark of life into a flame. If he should open his eyes once more and find himself alone, and then die in helpless despair---Oh, the thought is madness!"

"I can assure you, Fräulein Gleissert," said Hilsborn quietly, "that your father sleeps peacefully. I did what you were not permitted to do,--I spent the night by his body."

"Could you do this for the man for whom you could have had no regard?" cried Gretchen.

"I did it for you. I could imagine all you felt, and I knew it would be some comfort to you this morning to know that I had done it."

"Oh, how can I thank you, sir? I am too childish and insignificant to thank you as I ought. My heart is filled with gratitude that will not clothe itself in words! You watched by my father from pure humanity,--compelled by no duty, no obligation,--only that you might soothe the grief of a poor orphan. I cannot express what I feel. You must know----" She could go no further. Tears gushed from her eyes. She took his hand, and, before he knew what she was doing, had imprinted upon it a fervent kiss.

"Fräulein Gleissert!" cried Hilsborn, in great embarrassment. And a deep blush overspread his cheeks.

Gretchen never dreamed that she had committed any impropriety,--how could she, at such a moment? And Hilsborn knew this, and would not shame her by hastily withdrawing his hand. She was still but a child, in spite of her blooming maidenhood, and the kiss was prompted by the purest impulse of her heart.

"You reward me far more richly than I deserve," he said softly. "Although it is long since I suffered the same sorrow, I know what it is. Grief for the death of my father never deserts me. Sorrow easily unites with sorrow, and you are more to me in your affliction than any of the gay, laughter-loving girls of my acquaintance. Let me do what I can for you,--it will be done with my whole heart,--and, for your own sake, do not give way to grief. Remember,--it is a melancholy consolation, nevertheless it is a consolation,--that it is far better for him to die before his crime brought its dreadful consequences. His home could never again have been among honourable men. What, then, would have become of you? Believe me, it is better as it is!"

"Do you think, then, my father does not deserve these tears? I know how great his offences were, and that every one is justified in condemning him,--every one but his child,--I cannot blame him. Do you think I ought not to grieve for him as I should for an honourable father? Ah, sir, is it less sad to lose a father thus, just as I was reunited to him, to find that he whom I so revered was a criminal, and to have him vanish in his sin before I could even breathe a prayer to God for mercy upon him? Whatever he may have done, I must mourn for him all the more, for he was and always will be my father. And there never was a kinder father. Let others curse his memory, I can only mourn for him. If the holy words are true, 'With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again,' I must give him nothing but love, for he never meted to me anything else. Do not despise me. I do not feel his guilt the less, although I cannot love him less."

Hilsborn looked down at her with admiration. "How can you suppose that I could despise this sacred filial affection? I respect you all the more for it. It reveals in you treasures of womanly tenderness! Most certainly he who had such a daughter, and knew how unworthy he was of her, is doubly to be pitied. I will not try to console you. You have in yourself a richer consolation than any that mortal words can give. What can such a stranger as I say to you or be to you? I can only stand ready to protect and advise you, should you need advice or protection."

"If you will be so kind as to direct my first steps in life, it lies all so untried before me, my poor father will bless you from beyond the grave."

She paused, startled, for the door opened hastily, and Bertha entered. She regarded her daughter with a satisfaction that equalled the aversion that she excited in her child. Bertha's beauty had been of a kind that endures only for a season and then gradually becomes a caricature of its former self. Her fresh colour had turned to purple. Her mouth had grown full and sensual, with a drooping under-lip. Her sparkling black eyes had receded behind her fat cheeks, and had an expression of low cunning. An immense double chin and a round, waddling figure added to the coarseness of her appearance. This was the woman who stood ready to claim affection from a daughter whose whole education had tended to create disgust at her mother's chief characteristic--coarseness. What was this woman to her? She had heard that she was her mother, but she had never felt it. She had not seen her since she was scarcely five years old. She could feel no stirring of affection for. She could hardly connect her with the image in her mind of her father's faithless wife. While she was thus regarding Bertha with aversion, the man entered the room whom she was henceforward to consider in the light of a father,--her mother's second husband.

Involuntarily Gretchen retreated a step nearer to Hilsborn, as if seeking in him a refuge from the pair.

"Well," began Bertha, "if Fräulein Gretel is at home to young gentlemen, surely her father and mother----"

"Forgive me," said Gretchen gently but with decision, "my father is just dead, and I lost my mother when I was very young. I pray you to respect my grief and not mention names so sacred to me."

"Just hear the girl!" exclaimed Bertha. "Instead of thanking God that she still has parents to take care of her and not feel her a disgrace, she pretends to have no other father than the thief, the----"

"You must not speak thus in Fräulein Gleissert's presence," cried Hilsborn indignantly. "Can you not see how you wring her heart?"

"Oh, sir, I thank you," said Gretchen with dignity. She turned to Bertha. "Whatever your unfortunate first husband may have been, he was my father in the truest sense of the word, and no one can have a second father. Just so a mother who has once ceased to be such can never be a mother again. Call me false and heartless if you will,--God, who sees my heart, knows how it can love."

"This is all one gets for kindness," grumbled Bertha. "Here have I been beating my brains half the night to think what I could do for the girl, how I could take care of her, and this is all the thanks I get! Well, it's no wonder. 'What's bred in the bone will never come out of the flesh.'"

"Mammy! mammy! they want you to get out some clean sheets," a bullet-headed lad called aloud at the door.

"Come here, Fritz," cried Bertha. "There, look at your sister." And she drew the boy towards her, evidently expecting the sight of him to produce a deep impression upon Gretchen. "Look, Gretel, this is your brother,--doesn't this touch you? We have three more of them. But that makes no difference, you shall be the fifth; I want some one to take care of the little ones. Only think how fine it is for you to find parents and brothers and sisters all at once. They'll take care of you." And suddenly a tear rolled down her fat cheek. "For you are my child, after all!"

And she took Gretchen's face between her hands and pressed upon it a smacking kiss. The girl patiently endured the caress, but when her mother released her she stood erect again, like a fair flower upon which dust has been cast without robbing it of its fragrance or soiling its purity. As the flower differs from the soil whence it springs, this child differed from her mother. And as surely as the flower turns from the ground to the sun, the girl's pure spirit turned from her mother to the light that her education and training had revealed to her.

"Mammy," the boy persisted, plucking Bertha by the skirts, "come, hurry!"

"You'll tear my dress, you bad boy!" cried his mother, slapping his hand.

The boy screamed. "You're so slow when any one is in a hurry, I had to call you."

"Hold your tongue!" his father now interposed. "Leave the room. What will your new sister think of you?"

"I don't mind her," said the boy insolently, as he left the room.

Gretchen and Hilsborn exchanged one long look. It was as if they were old acquaintances and could understand each other without a word. Gretchen shuddered at the thought of living in this family, and, besides, she had during the night formed a resolution that she was determined to carry out although it should cost her her life.

Her step-father broke the silence. "We shall never come to any conclusion in this way. Where's the good in talking? You must be taken care of, whether you like us or not. You might at least show some gratitude to us for taking any trouble about you." He stroked his smooth, oily head as he spoke, and his artistic fingers gave a fresh curl to the lock just above his ear. "The case is simply this: My wife thinks it her duty to support you. As you may suppose, it comes rather heavy upon us with our four children, and it stands to reason that you should do a little something for yourself. We will not ask anything unsuitable of you, for I can see plainly that you are a young lady of education. But, if we are to fulfil the duty of parents towards you, it is only fair that we should claim some filial duty from you in return."

He concluded his speech with the bow that he always made in presenting travellers with their little account.

"Oh, is that all?" said Gretchen, greatly relieved. "Then do not have any anxiety on my account. I renounce all claim to a support, and, in the presence of this witness, to any parental duties from you. I ask nothing of you, and shall never ask anything of you, but that you will allow me to depart without hindrance."

The man looked significantly at Bertha, who clasped her hands in amazement. "Do you want to go, then? Why, what will such a child as you do without money or friends?"

Here Hilsborn interposed. "You forget that your deceased husband appointed me his daughter's guardian, and I assure you solemnly, I have never valued my life as I do now that this

duty is mine,--a duty that I am determined not to give up."

Gretchen looked confidently at Hilsborn. "You see, I am not without friends. I will go with this gentleman. There is but one path for me in this world, and that leads me to Ernestine's feet. There is but one duty for me,--atonement for my father's sin. I cannot restore to Ernestine what has been taken from her,--that I learned from the papers yesterday. I can offer her nothing but two strong young arms to work for her. The Bible says, 'The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children,' but I will not wait until they are visited upon me. I will blot them out, as far as I may, and make the curse powerless, that rests upon my unhappy father's grave. I will do what he had no time to do here,--make atonement for his crime." She raised her hands to Bertha in entreaty. "Oh, if you are my mother, open your heart to the first and last request of your child, and do not take from me the hope of obtaining pardon for my father by my labour and suffering!"

And she fell upon her knees before Bertha, who sobbed aloud.

"Ah, Gretel, my child, you are a dear, good girl. How could I ever forsake such a true, brave child? I see now how wrong and foolish I was. But I will do better. You shall learn to love me again. Only give up this silly idea of doing penance for your father. Why should you, innocent creature, suffer for his fault? you are not responsible for his actions."

"I am his flesh and blood, a part of him,--his honour is mine. The curse that strikes him strikes me too. Whatever burdened his conscience weighs upon mine. How could I find rest, living or dying, if I did not do all that I could to make good what he did that was wrong? If he took what was not his, ought I to keep it? Is it not my duty to restore it? And, if I cannot do this, should I not try to pay the debt, although I can do so in no other way than by constant labour?"

"But tell me what you want to do. Your cousin has nothing more. What will you both live upon?" asked Bertha.

"I do not know yet I only know that, thanks to my poor father, I have been taught everything to enable me to support myself, and even another besides. I only know that I will dedicate my whole future life to Ernestine. I long to go to her,--she has suffered most from my father's fault."

The head-waiter drew Bertha aside, and whispered to her, "Let her go, be thankful that we have not a fifth child to support."

"But, oh, I love the girl so much!" said Bertha.

"That's all very well,--but are we in a condition to take such a charge upon ourselves, just for a whim? And do you suppose that, if we force her to stay, this spoiled princess will be of the least use to us? She would cry from morning until night, instead of working. Let her go wherever she chooses. You have done without her long enough not to make such a fuss now about having her with you. I should think four children were enough for you."

"Yes, but----"

"Hush, now, or we will leave the room," her husband whispered emphatically. "I will not burden myself with Dr. Gleissert's daughter against her will. Let her go with her new champion, and let us hear no more of her!"

"As you choose, then. It is my fault, and I must bear the consequences," said Bertha, for the first time with real sorrow.

"Fräulein Gleissert," the man said, turning to Gretchen, who had meanwhile been talking in a low tone with Hilsborn, "if you will not make any claim upon us hereafter, we are ready now, hard as it is, to relinquish our rights in favour of this gentleman, who was appointed your guardian by your father."

"I will promise never to do so, sir," replied Gretchen with a long sigh of relief. "I am ready to give you all the security I can."

"There is no need of that," replied Herr Meyer politely, with great satisfaction. "You know that the giving up of our claims depends upon your keeping your promise."

"Yes, I know that."

"Well, then, we will not trouble you further. Probably you would prefer settling the account for this room. It is not much,--you have eaten nothing."

"Come, that is too mean of you!" Bertha here interposed. "Is my own child to pay for the shelter of this roof for one night? No, I will not have it. Gretel, do not listen to him,--you shall have something to eat, too, before you go. I am not quite such an unnatural mother. And now come, Meyer, you ought to be ashamed of playing such a disgraceful part."

And half angrily, half good-naturedly, she drew her smart husband from the room.

"O God, I thank thee!" cried Gretchen from the depths of her soul. Suddenly she paused, and reflected with evident hesitation and embarrassment. Hilsborn took her hand.

"Well, my dear little ward, will you not tell me what is troubling you?"

Gretchen blushed and still hesitated. At last she conquered herself, and confided this grief also to her faithful friend.

"It has just occurred to me that I am not sure that I have money enough to pay my travelling expenses. I have something with me that I can sell, but if it should not be enough!"

Hilsborn smiled. "Is that all? Oh, never mind that, I have enough for both of us."

Gretchen looked mortified. "But I cannot take it from you, certainly not."

"What, Gretchen, will you not take it from your guardian? Why, this is a guardian's duty. And I will not give it to you, I will only lend it, and you can repay me when you are able."

"You will have to wait a long time,--I have so little that I can call my own. It will embarrass me very much to be in your debt."

"Gretchen," said the young man earnestly, "do not let us speak of such trifles. I transport you to N---, you transport me to heaven. Which owes most to the other--you or I?"

Gretchen could not reply. These new, strange words bewildered her. The sunlight streaming from them penetrated her heart, crushed by the tempest of grief that had swept over it. The blossom opened,--she was no longer a child!

She looked down in confusion. Hilsborn too was embarrassed. Neither could immediately recover from a certain constraint.

"Will you do me a great favour?" the girl asked at last

"Well?"

"Take me to where my father is lying, and let me bid him farewell once more."

"My dear Fräulein Gleissert, I would do so with all my heart, but it would take us half an hour to reach the house where he lies, and the train starts in three-quarters of an hour. If you will remain here another day, I will do what you ask."

"No, oh, no!" cried Gretchen in alarm. "I would not for the world trespass any longer upon Herr Meyer's hospitality, or wound my mother's new-found affection any further. It is better to go as quickly as possible. If my poor father still sees and hears me, he must know that I feel the pain of parting from him thus quite as much as if I were allowed to weep beside his lifeless body."

"That is right. Better dwell in thought upon the spirit that was all affection for you, than linger beside the senseless clay that it informed----" He ceased, for Frau Bertha entered with breakfast. She had a black dress hanging upon her arm.

"There, Gretel, my dear, is something to eat. I will not let you go until you have taken something. And, if the gentleman will be kind enough to step out one minute, we will try on this dress. You must have some mourning, and where else can you get it, poor child?"

She spread the table hastily, and Hilsborn left the room.

"Now come here, and let us see how this fits. It is the very dress that I bought ten years ago, when your step-uncle Hartwich died. But it is as good as new. I have worn it but little, and, if you put the skirt on over the pointed waist, it has quite a modern air. Just look! It is not much too large. I was smaller then than I am now, and I have taken it in wherever I could. I was afraid it would be too big for you. Look at that little spot,--that is where you threw your cake into my lap when you were a little thing. I hid it so,--in a fold. Dear, dear! I had this very dress on when I left you. I never thought then that you would one day put it on and leave me, as I was leaving you!"

There was something touching in these simple words, and, for the first time, Gretchen threw herself into her mother's arms and burst into tears. "Gretel," said Bertha, crying bitterly, "you must one day feel that you are my child, just as I feel that I am your mother. I hope you will not then repent leaving me."

"Ah, mother," sobbed Gretchen, "how could you be so cruel to my poor father? How could you so wring my heart when I first saw you again that I turned away from you? I might have learned to love you. A child must try to honour its parents. I would never have reproached you for forsaking me, but the abyss into which you plunged my father lies between us, and can never be bridged over."

"But, Gretchen, Gretchen," cried Bertha, "I have done no worse than the young gentleman whom you think so much of. Why do you not blame him?"

"He only did his duty by a friend, and performed it in the kindest way possible. My father saw that, and reposed the greatest confidence in him in intrusting me to his care. But you, mother, permitted Herr Meyer to bring the stranger here who came to hand over my father to

punishment, and to whom my father was only the enemy of his friend. It was not his duty to spare my father. But, mother, he had once been your husband, he was the father of your child, and yet, when, hunted and pursued, he sought the shelter of your roof, you had the heart to betray him and deliver him up to death and disgrace. I will not judge you, but ask yourself, mother, did he deserve such treatment at your hands?"

"Ah, merciful Heaven! you may be right, but it really seemed that it was to be so. I had forgotten everything but the wrong he did me. He has had his punishment, and I must have mine, for, indeed, to love you and lose you so is a heavy trial."

Hilsborn knocked at the door. "Frau Meyer, it is almost time to go."

"Yes, yes. Come in," cried Bertha. "Gretchen is dressed."

Hilsborn entered. He regarded compassionately the touching figure in the black dress,--the lovely childlike face, with those sad, large eyes, reminding him of a wounded doe's. His heart overflowed with pity, and he held out his hand, with, "Come, we must be upon our way."

"I am ready," Gretchen murmured.

"Stop," cried Bertha. "You must take something first." And she poured out a cup of chocolate, and followed Gretchen, who was collecting her various trifles for her travelling-bag, about the room, until she persuaded her to take some of it. "And you must eat some of this cake. You used to be so fond of it, and your lamented,--well, yes,--your lamented father too. Ah, I used to be well treated when I put that cake on the table! Will you not taste it? Well, then, take some with you." And she crammed as much of it as she could into the girl's travelling-bag.

One minute more, and Gretchen was ready to leave the room. "Good-by, mother," she said, throwing herself once more into the arms of her mother, whose hot tears fell upon her child's neck. "I will never forget your kindness to me to-day, and if you ever need me you will find me a daughter to you."

"My child, my good child!" sobbed Bertha. "Try to think as well of me as you can."

"Yes, yes, dear mother. God bless you and yours!"

Hilsborn hurried the girl away. She gently extricated herself from her mother's arms, and, in anguish of soul, descended the stairs that her father had on the previous day ascended for the first and last time.

"Write to me now and then," Bertha called after her.

"Indeed I will, I promise you."

When they reached the hall, they found there a crowd of curious idlers, all eager to see the suicide's daughter. Gretchen paused, overcome with dismay. She could hardly trust her limbs to bear her through the throng. A soft, warm hand clasped hers,--it was Hilsborn's. He drew the little hand under his arm, and led her through the gaping loiterers to the carriage. Gretchen was scarcely conscious, she only felt that, supported by this arm, she could raise her head once more, and she was filled with gratitude towards the man who did not shrink from thus espousing the cause of the child of a criminal.

Herr Meyer made them a formal bow as they entered the carriage, and it rolled away past the gay, sparkling waters of the Alster, now swarming with boats.

Gretchen looked out of the carriage window. Yesterday all this had been the world to her,--to-day her world was within, and all this was mere outward show.

## **CHAPTER VIII.**

### **BLOSSOMS ON THE BORDER OF THE GRAVE.**

"Come quick, Johannes, Hilsborn has arrived," the Staatsrätthin whispered from the door of the apartment. Johannes was seated by Ernestine's bedside, her head leaning upon his hand, while the poor girl moved restlessly from side to side, muttering unintelligibly. He motioned to Willmers to take his place, and went softly out.

"Thank God, you are back again. Have you brought him with you?"

"He has escaped."

"Hilsborn, that is terrible!"

"He is gone whither he cannot be pursued, and whence he can work no more mischief."

"Is he dead?"

"He is dead, and he died in fearful agony."

"God have mercy on his soul! Did he take poison?" asked the Staatsrätin.

"Yes, just after his arrest I arranged matters as well as I could, but he had only a little over two thousand gulden in his possession. He had put all the property in the Unkenheim factory."

"And that is bankrupt, so we shall not be able to save anything for Ernestine," said Johannes.

"I am very sorry for that."

"But Hilsborn, faithful friend, I am quite forgetting to thank you. How shall I repay you for taking this journey for me?" said Johannes warmly.

"I am already paid."

"Indeed? What possible pleasure could result from such a mission?" inquired the Staatsrätin.

Hilsborn smiled. "Such pleasure as I never dreamed of. Gleissert bequeathed me a treasure whose possession no one, God willing, shall dispute with me. May I show it to you? I would like to intrust it to your keeping, dear friends, for awhile."

Johannes and his mother exchanged looks of surprise. Was Hilsborn quite right in his mind?

"I will tell you nothing more," he said. "See for yourselves." He left the room, and appeared again in a few moments with Gretchen upon his arm. The poor child ventured only one timid, beseeching look at the strangers, but the touching expression of her eyes won their hearts immediately.

"Good God! his child?" asked the Staatsrätin.

"His child," Hilsborn replied with grave emphasis.

The old lady went up instantly to the lovely, shrinking girl and embraced her, saying significantly to Hilsborn, "Now I understand you!"

"Dear Fräulein Gleissert," said Johannes, "you are most welcome, and you must allow us to offer you a home until you find a better."

"You are too kind," stammered Gretchen. "I know how bold I am, but my guardian----"

"What! Hilsborn, are you her guardian?"

"Her dying father wished it to be so, and therefore I brought her here to place her under your protection, although she wished to see no one except Ernestine."

"She can hardly see her for sometime yet," said Möllner. "Ernestine's fever may be infectious."

"Oh, is that all?" Gretchen ventured to remonstrate. "Then pray let me go to her. Nothing can harm me when I am doing my duty. Better to die than live on without being permitted to do as I know I ought. Oh, dear Herr Hilsborn, you know what I mean, speak for me!"

"Do not refuse her, Johannes. She will not be content until she is with Ernestine. I make a fearful sacrifice in exposing her to this danger, when I would guard her like the apple of my eye, but I know how she is longing for Ernestine."

"Then, Fräulein Gleissert, you shall share with my mother the care of the invalid."

"Thank you all a thousand times! May I go now?"

"Take her to Ernestine's room, mother dear, while I speak with Hilsborn," said Johannes.

"Come, then, my child." The Staatsrätin opened the door of the darkened apartment, and the girl entered.

Gretchen stood as if rooted to the spot. There lay the dreaded, mute accuser of her father, the unfortunate victim of his crimes, pale and beautiful as an ideal embodiment of death,--a glorious lily, prostrated, perhaps never again to stand erect, by the same hand that a few days before had been laid in blessing upon Gretchen's head. The poor child, crushed by the sight, sank upon her knees, and, extending her arms, cried in a suppressed voice of agony, "Forgive, forgive!"

Ernestine did not reply, for she did not hear. Reason was dethroned behind that pale, broad brow, and confused dreams were running riot there in the wildest anarchy.

Only when Gretchen perceived that Ernestine was wholly unconscious, did she dare to approach close to her. Gazing at her with admiring pity, she murmured to herself, "No, my father did not understand, or he maligned you. You are not bad, you cannot be bad!" And, kneeling, she breathed a gentle kiss upon the small hand.

Did the invalid feel that something loving was near? She put out her hand towards the kneeling girl, and, detaining her by the dress, leaned her head upon her shoulder.

"She will let me stay by her," whispered Gretchen with a face of delight.

The Staatsrätthin could not help stroking the brow of the charming child, and Frau Willmers felt as if this stranger were an angel, come to lead Ernestine into a better world.

"Such a sick-room I like to see," suddenly said a suppressed bass voice that made Gretchen start. "This is a pretty sight," it continued, and old Heim looked searchingly at Gretchen from beneath his bushy white eyebrows.

The girl would have arisen, but Ernestine would not release her, and Heim motioned to her to be quiet. "You have one hand free, my child, give it to me. I am your guardian's foster-father, and I know what a good child you are. The fellow was right to bring you here,--I would have brought you myself. God bless you!"

He seated himself by the bedside, and a deep expectant silence reigned in the room as he felt Ernestine's pulse. Besides Gretchen's, two other anxious eyes were riveted upon his face. Möllner had just entered noiselessly. "Well, what do you think?" he asked eagerly.

Heim shrugged his shoulders. "I do not think it is typhus. Nevertheless----"

Scarcely had the invalid heard Johannes' voice when she released Gretchen and turned her face towards the spot where Möllner was standing. He approached the bed and leaned over her. She put out her arms to him, but instantly dropped them again, as if, even in her delirium, she would not confess herself conquered. And then she talked wildly on, at times declaring that she could not get rid of the skull,--it would follow her everywhere, and then pleading piteously that she was not yet dead, and they must not put her down into the narrow grave.

"This is the result of a woman's giving herself up to anatomical studies," said Möllner.

"There has been dreadful work with the nerves here, and with the brain too," muttered Heim. "The fever has increased since I have been sitting here. If we could only disabuse her mind of these delirious fancies!"

"I have tried that, but contradiction only excites her."

"Let this child try, then. It is impossible to say what effect she might produce," said Heim. "Have you the courage, my child, to watch with your cousin tonight?"

"Oh, sir, I think I can never touch my bed until Ernestine has left hers."

"There's a brave girl! upon my word, I've seen nothing so charming for a long while. She will soon rival Ernestine in my heart!"

Johannes laid a cloth dipped in ice-water upon Ernestine's forehead, who continued to moan bitterly that she was not dead and they must not treat her thus.

"Ernestine," said Gretchen in her clear, bell-like voice, "no one shall harm you. Be quiet, dear."

"Do you not see," wailed the sick girl, "that they are trying to weigh my brain? and it hurts! oh, how it hurts!"

"Ernestine, you are dreaming," said Gretchen. "This is only a damp cloth. Feel it yourself."

"Remember that, although I am dead, my soul is living. Oh, if I could only stop thinking! Dying is nothing! living is the worst of all!"

Johannes turned away, and wrung his hands. "Ah, Johannes!" she exclaimed, "my uncle's knife is sharp, I cannot get away. Why did they bind me here, if they thought me dead?" And in an instant she thrust Gretchen aside, and would have leaped from the bed, had not Johannes gently but firmly thrown his strong arm around her and forced her back among the pillows.

"Let me go! let go!" she moaned. "Who ever heard of dissection before death?"

"Ernestine," Johannes cried in despair, "it is I,--Johannes. No one shall harm you!"

But she either did not hear or did not understand him, and she struggled so that Johannes could scarcely hold her.



"This is dreadful!" said the Staatsrätthin, supporting Gretchen's tottering form. "Do you still think, Father Heim, after this, that physiology is the study for a woman's nerves? Can a woman's nature take a more terrible revenge than this?"

Heim shook his head, and grumbled, "Frail stuff, indeed, but yet I thought she could stand it. Well, well, one is never too old to learn."

And still Ernestine raved on, ceaselessly haunted by the same grim phantoms created by the fearful struggle that she had lately passed through.

At last exhaustion supervened, and she lay perfectly silent and motionless. Heim took his hat and cane. "I think she will have a quieter night. You should take some rest, Johannes. You cannot stand such uninterrupted watching."

"I have done all that I could to persuade him to lie down," said his mother. "I can easily watch one night, especially now since I have such a dear little assistant. And Willmers too will wear herself out. She is as obstinate as Johannes."

"There is nothing to be done with him," said Heim. "It is a good thing that it is vacation, or this would soon come to an end. Well, I must go. It is quite a drive to town."

"It would have been better if we could have taken her home with us," said the Staatsrätthin. "But the illness was so sudden and violent that she could not be moved, and we had to come out here to nurse her."

"You are good people!" And Heim held out his hand to them. "God will reward you for your kindness to the poor child."

"All that I do, dear friend, is done for my son's sake. I am sure he will thank me."

"Indeed he will, mother," Johannes declared with emphasis.

When Heim entered the next room, he found Hilsborn there, standing at the window, lost in dreamy reverie.

"Well, my boy, will you have a seat in my carriage?"

"Why, father, I should like to stay here to-day and assist Möllner," said Hilsborn, slightly confused.

"Assist Möllner? Hm----" Heim paused, and riveted his piercing eyes with infinite humour upon Hilsborn's blushing face. "Well, well, my boy, since you wish it, pray assist Möllner. You have my free consent to do so."

The young man clasped his foster-father's hand with an emotion of gratitude that he hardly understood himself.

"Hm," said Heim again. "We understand! we understand! All right! Anything else would be unnatural. There's no need to be ashamed of your choice. Good night, and"--a good-humoured smile played about his mouth--"do assist Möllner diligently. Do you hear?"

And the genial old man went chuckling out of the room.

Hilsborn bethought himself awhile, then looked cautiously into the sick-room and beckoned to Gretchen. She instantly came to him.

"Only a moment," he begged, and gently drew her away with him. "You must have a little fresh air. All the others think only of Ernestine. I am here to take care of you, and to see that you do not overtask your strength. Come, take a few turns with me in the garden."

"As you please," said the girl meekly.

"Not as I please, Gretchen. You must not talk in that way. I do not like it." He threw a shawl over her shoulders, and gave her his arm. Together they went down into the garden.

"This garden," said Gretchen, "reminds me of ours at the pension."

"Were you happy there?" asked her companion.

"Oh, very! I had so many kind teachers and companions!"

"It must be very hard for you to leave such a home."

"My home now is with Ernestine. I am content only by her bedside. I wish for nothing else. I do not choose to wish for anything else."

Hilsborn broke off a fading acacia-sprig from the tree.

"Give it to me?" said Gretchen. "I will try whether Ernestine will recover or not." And she

pulled off the leaves, one after another. "Yes,--no,--yes,--no. Yes, she will get well!"

"Do you know Faust?"

"No. We were never allowed to read Goethe."

"Your namesake in Faust plucks off the leaves of a daisy, to answer a question that she puts it, but the question is a different one."

"What is it?"

"She asks whether she is beloved."

Gretchen looked down.

"Did you never put that question?"

"How could I? I was sure that my father, my teachers and friends loved me, and I knew no one else."

"And yet you must often have consulted your flower oracle?"

"Oh, yes. There was plenty to ask,--whether I was to take the first, second, or third rank in the examination,--whether I was to have a letter from my father that day,--and ever so many things besides. But that is all over. There are few flowers or questions for me now."

"You must not indulge such gloomy, autumnal fancies. The flowers will bloom again, and with them many a youthful hope in your heart. You will, perhaps, one day want to know whether one whom you love loves you."

Gretchen looked seriously and kindly at him from out her brown eyes.

"If Ernestine only loves me, and----"

"Well, and----?"

"And you, I will ask nothing more."

"Gretchen, do you not believe that I love you?"

"Yes, I think you do," the girl replied frankly.

"By the good God, who sees all hearts, I think so too," cried Hilsborn, clasping the little hand that lay upon his arm more closely to his heart.

They stood still for one moment together in the gathering twilight, and then walked slowly on. It was an unusually mild autumn evening. The crescent of the new moon glimmered, like a gleaming diamond upon dark locks, just above the tall firs that crowned the hill that had been Ernestine's favourite spot. As she looked up, Gretchen's eyes were moist.

"The moon is the sun of the unhappy," she said suddenly. "Hers is the only light that weeping eyes can endure. They must close in the garish rays of the sun, but they can look up to her through their tears. When she reigns in the sky, repose comes to the weary after the day's dull pain. And you, my kind guardian, seem to me like the moon,--you are so calm and still. I shrink from the others, it seems to me they must despise me, but with you I can weep freely, and rest from all my pain."

"I thank you, Gretchen, for these words," said Hilsborn.

And the girl, in the self-abandonment of her grief, leaned her head upon Hilsborn's shoulder and wept silently.

Thus they walked slowly on for a time, without a word. The moon began to disappear behind the firs, and only gleamed through them when the night breeze stirred their boughs. A low whisper,--a soft suggestion of the resurrection,--trembled among the withered leaves and leafless branches. The little silver skiff glided quietly down the horizon, and misty vapours floated about the youthful pair like a bridal veil. Their innocent hearts mourned over scarcely-closed graves in the midst of nature, enlivened by no young blossoms, no nightingale's song, and yet a future spring was gently stirring around and within them, amid tears and autumn desolation.

"We must return," said Gretchen, suddenly rousing herself from her sad thoughts. "They will miss us." And she hastened on in advance of her friend. At the door of the sick-room he detained her for one moment. "Gretchen, you have done more than I can tell for me in this last half-hour, but yet not enough. You will give me just such another every evening, will you not?"

"With all my heart!"

"And, Gretchen, I shall pass this night watching here in this room. Come to the door now and then, and give me one look."

"Why?" she asked, with a blush.

"Because your face is the dearest sight in the world to me."

"Oh, I am glad of that!" she faltered.

"Remember sometimes to give me a smile,--will you not? I shall wait for it from minute to minute and from hour to hour."

"You shall not wait in vain. How could I refuse to gratify a wish of yours?"

And with these words, that were more to the young man than she herself dreamed of, she left him, and entered the sick-room with her heart filled with mingled joy and pain.

Johannes was kneeling by the bed, his forehead leaning upon Ernestine's arm, that was hanging down outside the coverlet. His mother gave Gretchen a kindly nod. No one ventured to speak. Ernestine seemed asleep.

Gretchen sat down beside the Staatsrätin and gratefully pressed her offered hand.

Thus they sat for an hour, motionless, and then Ernestine had a fresh access of delirium. Her whole illness seemed to be only a vain effort of nature to banish the evil, unnatural ideas nestling in her brain like destructive parasites. At last Johannes induced his mother and Willmers to take a little rest while he and Gretchen watched. He suffered so much at the sight of Ernestine's sufferings that it was a relief to him to know that his mother was not in the room,--his mother, in whose presence his affection forced him to exercise such difficult self-control.

Gretchen was a faithful assistant, although the poor child's heart was well-nigh broken at the constant reference to her father that filled Ernestine's ravings. Fragments of the past were brought to light, detached scenes rehearsed incoherently, but running through all the unfortunate daughter could perceive the dark crimson thread of her father's guilt.

The hot tears coursed down her cheeks. Johannes never noticed them. He had eyes and ears only for Ernestine. The poor orphaned child felt alone indeed. But no! How could she entertain such a thought? Had she not a friend and protector near? And had she not promised to bestow a kindly glance now and then upon the faithful sentinel? How could she forget him for one moment? While Johannes stood by Ernestine, she softly opened the door and looked out. There he sat, his eyes full of expectation, and a bright smile broke over his face at the sight of Gretchen. He started up and tore a leaf, upon which he had been writing, out of his note-book.

"Gretchen," he whispered, "here is something for you. Take it, as it is meant,--kindly. You are having a hard night. I can imagine all you are suffering. Do not forget that there is one sitting here thinking of and for you."

Gretchen held out her hand, and he put the paper into it.

"I thank you, even before I know what it contains," she whispered in reply. "It must be something kind, since it comes from you." And she re-entered the sickroom and seated herself by the table upon which the night-lamp stood. She shivered, for Ernestine's words were all full of horror. But she held a talisman in her hand, and Hilsborn's handwriting banished all haunting sorrow. She unfolded the paper and read:

"Weep, poor heart, and yet again  
Breathe those gentle songs of sadness,  
Not for thee are notes of gladness,  
Softly fall thy tears like rain.  
Look to heaven when woes thus move thee,  
From the eternal stars above thee  
Comfort seek in earthly pain.

"Weep, poor heart, when all in vain  
Thou hast hoped for rest from sadness,  
When the stars rain down no gladness.  
Yet despair not! once again  
Lift thine eyes when sorrow moves thee,  
In the eyes of one who loves thee,  
Comfort seek in earthly pain."

Gretchen sat with hands folded, looking at these words, that arched a new heaven above her and revealed a new earth around her. Large as her young heart was, it seemed all too narrow for the flood of tenderness that filled it now. She arose once more, and glided from the room. To Johannes, who gazed after her absently, it seemed as if her airy figure actually diffused a light around it.

In the next room she approached Hilsborn, silently, her eyes suffused with tears, and held out her hand. He looked up at her with imploring entreaty, saw how she was agitated, and that her heart was beating almost to suffocation. He gently drew her nearer and nearer to him, until, like

ripened wheat awaiting the reaper's scythe, she sank into his arms, and burst into tears. But her tears were like the glittering drops that the breeze shakes from the trees after a summer rain.

"In the eyes of one who loves thee,  
Comfort seek in earthly pain,"

echoed in the hearts of the lovers.

Then Ernestine's voice came ringing through the open door. "What is the end? Eternal night, eternal silence, and eternal solitude!"

"Oh, not eternal bliss!" Gretchen breathed softly to herself.

## **CHAPTER IX.**

### **IT IS MORNING AGAIN.**

A call from Möllner to Gretchen separated the young people before they found words to express what they felt. Ernestine grew so much worse in the course of the night that Gretchen did not leave her again. When at last the rays of the rising sun shone through the heavy curtains of the room, the Staatsrätin released the poor child from her painful watch, and she was free to hasten to her lover. He drew her with him to Ernestine's study. Everything was just as it had been left on the day when Ernestine was taken ill,--nothing had been touched here. The ashes of the burnt fairy-book were still lying on the hearth, the Æolian harp breathed forth sad melody to the rude autumn wind, the roses were fled, and only the thorn-covered bushes remained. The chests were still standing about, all packed for the voyage,--speaking plainly of what had been the plans of the proud spirit now so prostrated by disease. A forgotten pen lay upon the desk, and dust was everywhere. No one had thought of arranging this room,--care for Ernestine had given abundant occupation to the entire household. The pause in the life of the invalid was mirrored in this apartment, where everything seemed awaiting the moment when a busy hand should sweep, dust, and put all in order, and the glad news be heard--"Ernestine is better!" But this moment was still in the dim future. Hither the young couple came, ignorant of the struggles these walls had witnessed, the pain and anguish that had been suffered here.

"Our life lasts seventy--perhaps eighty--years, and the delight of it is labour and trouble." These words, carved on the table, were the first visible sign to these youthful hearts of the struggles, sufferings, and sacrifices of the woman by whose feverish bed they had truly found each other. And Gretchen stayed her steps by the table, and read the words thoughtfully. "She is right," she said to herself. "And if she chose to impose upon herself this severe law, can I choose any other motto--I? What right have I to desire any other delight in life but labour and trouble and penance? Ah, Ernestine, now first I see how noble you are, and what wrong my father did you."

"Gretchen," asked Hilsborn, "what are you thinking?"

"It seems to me as if an invisible hand here inscribed, 'Hold!' for my eyes alone. How could I for one moment resign myself to the thought of a happiness that could turn me aside from my first and most sacred duty?"

"Gretchen, how am I to understand you?"

She clasped her hands, and, with eyes fixed reverentially upon the carved motto, said, "All my hopes and dreams must be sacrificed for her whose motto this is. Until she is happy, how can I wish to be so?"

"I see what you have resolved, my dearest. You intend to obtain forgiveness for your father, to blot out his sin by your devotion. But you think only of her against whom your father sinned most heavily? There is another to whom you owe some reparation on his account, and that is myself!"

"What?"

He drew her towards him, and went on with all a lover's sophistry. "Yes, dearest, your father wronged mine. He robbed him of a valuable scientific discovery."

"Heaven help me! is this so?" cried the girl, greatly distressed.

"And do you not see that it will be no infringement of the duty that you impose upon yourself,

if you grant me the reparation that I ask of you, even although I should ask for nothing less than yourself,--your entire life, Gretchen,--would you think me too bold? would you think the compensation for what your father deprived me of too great?"

"No, oh, no! much too small," whispered Gretchen, with glistening eyes.

"Not too small. I know it is too great. But love, Gretchen, will not weigh deserts. Everything is in your hands, dearest. Your father injured my father, but he gives me his child."

The girl put her hands to her throbbing brow. "Can this be so?--can so great a blessing spring from a curse? I do not deserve such joy. Can it be no wrong, but a duty, to love you, whom I would have renounced for duty's sake? I longed to labour and suffer for my father's crime, and is this my penance--to give myself to him whom I love? It is too much,--I cannot believe it. But what shall I do? How shall I reconcile my duty to Ernestine and to you? Help me, advise me, that I may not neglect one duty for the sake of the other,--there can be no true happiness without a clear conscience. Help me, then, to be really happy."

"My darling," said Hilsborn, "I understand you now, just as I have always understood you, and I will help you to satisfy your conscience. If I could, I would shower every precious gift upon you,--how then could I deprive you of that priceless possession--peace of mind? True love brings true peace in its train, and this peace shall be yours. Therefore do for Ernestine all that your heart dictates, as long as you can be of service to her. I shall be near you, and we can at least exchange a word now and then. True love is easily content, it prizes even the smallest token. I will not claim one moment that you think belongs to Ernestine,--that would trouble you. We will tell no one as yet of our betrothal but my faithful foster-father Heim, without whose blessing I can take no step in life. The knowledge of our happiness might grate upon poor Möllner, who has so much to endure. But when, Gretchen, Ernestine has entirely recovered, it will be ours to enjoy our bliss without a pang. And if,--which I can scarcely believe,--she should still refuse to share Möllner's lot, then, I swear to you, I will aid you truly in all that you do for her. She shall live with us and be to me as a sister. Is not this all that you desire, my dearest one?"

"Yes, yes, you read my very soul, for I could never consent to be your--wife, until I knew that Ernestine was well and content. And I have hardly thought myself grown up--I am hardly fit to be a wife. How can I accustom myself to the thought?"

"I will do all I can to teach you, dear little wife,--the lesson will not, I hope, be hard to learn," said Hilsborn gaily.

"Perhaps not," Gretchen replied, and for the first time there was an arch sparkle in the melancholy brown eyes.

Thus these two hearts were united, speedily, in childlike faith, after the manner of youth, and without a struggle. But above in the sick-room two hearts were wrestling in mortal pain. Love, for poor Ernestine, must attain the light only through the dark night of error and illusion that was around her,--that light in which Gretchen and Hilsborn innocently basked, driven from their Eden by no angel with the flaming sword. Such strong natures as Möllner's and Ernestine's could not unite without a struggle. Each had framed a world for itself, and one of these worlds must be shattered before they could become one world. The farther apart they were, the more powerful the attraction between them, the more certainly would the weaker crumble to pieces in contact with the stronger. It is the mysterious condition under which gifted natures receive their talents from God, that they must strive and labour for a happiness that often falls unsought into the lap of weaker natures. Thus Eternal Wisdom maintains the balance of its gifts,--the weak and the simple receive without asking what the strong must earn. And these two gifted creatures were earning hardly their portion of life's joy, that they might fulfil the law prescribed by God for creatures so constituted. His laws are inscribed not upon the heavens, but in the human heart, and all our striving for perfection is, in fact, only an endeavour to read these laws correctly. And how often do we read them falsely, in spite of all our honest pains!

How much more was this the case with one like Ernestine, who had never been taught to heed the still small voice in her heart as the voice of God! All her errors and sufferings were the result, as are those of most men, of a misconception of the Divine will. If she had known that she was destined to purchase happiness by self-sacrifice, she would have paid for it voluntarily, and would not have wrestled with her destiny to the last, until she almost succumbed in the conflict. Her life had well-nigh been ruined by the want of true Christian culture; she was ready to make every sacrifice, except that which is alone well pleasing in God's sight--the sacrifice of self.

And Johannes, true and without guile as he was, endured a terrible trial in Ernestine's sufferings. From hour to hour he became more thoroughly convinced that he had been the means of prostrating Ernestine upon a sick-bed,--that he had burdened her beyond her strength by his reckless description of the danger that threatened her,--and he was a prey to remorse. He reproached himself bitterly, and tormented himself with devising a thousand ways in which he could have managed matters more wisely. "It is presumptuous to attempt to play the part of Providence to another, for the best intentions are no warrant for the consequences," he said to his mother, just when Gretchen and Hilsborn were weaving their rosy future.

"Results are always in God's hand," replied Frau Möllner.

"Amen!" said Johannes solemnly, from the depths of his tortured heart.

Thus the pilot, seeing looming before him the dangerous rock, past which his skill has not availed to guide the vessel intrusted to his care, says, "I have done what I could, now Providence takes the helm." And here too Providence was guiding the vessel, but slowly,--so slowly that the lookers-on were agonized.

Day after day and week after week passed, without any visible improvement. Ernestine's consciousness did not return. Heim shook his head. He said to Johannes one morning, "I wish your brother-in-law were at home, Johannes. I should very much like to hear his opinion of the case."

And he made no other reply to Johannes' inquiries.

Moritz Kern and his wife had been employing the vacation in a pleasure-trip, and were shortly to return home.

It looked as if Heim were coming to a conclusion, and did not wish to pronounce an opinion without consulting a third authority.

Johannes was consumed by anxiety. For four weeks he never left Ernestine's bedside, only sleeping when she was quiet, and then with his weary head supported against the back of his chair. He would have no help, except from his mother and Gretchen. Even Willmers was not allowed to do all that she wished to do. Only one stranger was now and then admitted to the sick-room,--a venerable, aged form, that sat there motionless, disturbing no one. It was old Leonhardt. Every third day his son conducted him to the castle, and no one had the heart to refuse to allow him to take his place at the foot of Ernestine's bed, where he listened to her gloomy ravings and Möllner's deep-drawn sighs, and only now and then sadly shook his gray head.

"If she would only come to herself sufficiently," he said one day, "to let us relieve her mind of this anxiety about dying, that seems at the root of her delirium, she would soon be better."

"True, Father Leonhardt, true," replied Johannes. "But she has not one sane instant. It drives me to despair!"

"Courage, courage, dear friend," said Leonhardt, "and, remember, you only did your duty. That thought must comfort you."

"I am afraid it will not comfort me long," was Johannes' gloomy reply.

While they were speaking, Heim's carriage drove up. This time he was not alone,--Moritz was with him. Leonhardt retired to the library, where Walter always awaited him, and Heim and Moritz entered the antechamber. Gretchen and Hilsborn were standing whispering together by the window. The former hastily left the room, embarrassed by the entrance of the stranger with Heim.

"Who the deuce is your pretty companion?" asked Moritz in surprise.

"It is my ward, Gleissert's unfortunate daughter," Hilsborn explained with some reserve. "I brought her hither from Hamburg."

"Oh, I know, I know,--heard all about it. Guardian, then, are you? Very delightful position, with such a charming ward," laughed Moritz. "Here's a fellow! looks as if he couldn't say 'boh' to a goose, and brings home such a pretty girl the first journey he takes! Yes, yes,--'still waters!'"

"Do not jest," Hilsborn begged. "It is too serious a matter for jesting."

"Nay, never mind what I say," said Moritz. "I must pay some respect to your new dignity. Hardly out of leading-strings yourself, and appointed guardian to young unprotected females! Ha! ha!"

"Be quiet, Johannes will hear you," grumbled Heim. "Reserve your jests for more congenial society."

"But, my good friend, you cannot expect me to hang my head for the sake of that fool of a woman, whom I have always wished at the deuce. Who could see, without getting angry, that fellow Johannes wasting his best powers upon such an ungrateful creature? If we were compelled to stand by and look on while some one spent time and trouble in trying to make a common brier produce tea-roses, should we not long to root out the senseless weed, rather than witness such a foolish undertaking?"

"Your comparison does not hold good, my friend. The Hartwich has her thorns, but with care and patience she will blossom into a beautiful flower."

"Are you never coming in?" asked Johannes, opening the door of the sick-room and looking out impatiently. "What keeps you so long?"

"Yes, we are coming," said Heim, "but, Johannes, I would rather see Ernestine alone with

Moritz."

"As you please, but pray make haste," said Johannes, coming fully into the room. "Good-day, Moritz. How are you? Did you not bring Angelika with you?"

"She wanted to come with me, but I would not let her."

"And why not?" asked Johannes in a tone of disappointment.

"Because women are always in the way at such times."

"But had you any right to refuse to allow your wife to see her mother and brother after a separation of four weeks?"

"I have the right, as her husband, to allow and forbid whatever I choose. If you wished it otherwise, you should have had it so said in the marriage contract," Moritz replied sharply. "Angelika never wishes for anything that I do not choose she should have, and whoever does not train his wife in the same way is a fool, my dear brother-in-law. Come, don't be vexed--you know what a prickly fellow I am."

"I am not in the mood to mind your insinuations," said Johannes wearily. "You war with an unarmed foe. Go in, and bring me some good news if you can."

Moritz repented his hasty words when he saw how troubled Johannes really was, and immediately entered the sick-room with Heim.

Johannes sank into the chair by the window and leaned his heavy head against the panes. Such terrible thoughts and fears had lately assailed him! He would not heed them. But if the two physicians should share them also? His heart beat louder and louder with every moment's delay. He could hardly breathe. Hilsborn stood beside him, and, without speaking, pressed his hand. They heard Moritz speak to Ernestine, and her wild, confused replies. Then the murmur of Heim's and Moritz's voices was alone audible.

At last the door opened. Even Moritz looked very grave.

"Well?" asked Johannes.

"Yes," said Moritz with a shrug, "I agree with Heim, the fever is a secondary consideration now. It is subdued--there is something worse than death to be dreaded."

"Ah! I feared it!" Johannes said with a low suppressed cry. "Be brief,--I am upon the rack--you fear--good God I you fear for her mind?"

He could say no more.

Moritz and Heim exchanged glances. "Be calm, Johannes. Remember, this is only conjecture. We are mortal, and cannot be certain. Only it cannot be denied that it looks now more like an affection of the brain than anything else."

"It is a well-known fact," Helm continued, "that patients affected in this manner are often slightly deranged in mind for some time after the fever is subdued, but such cases are most frequent among the aged, and the derangement is not of as long duration as with Ernestine. Her continual harping upon the same idea troubled me from the beginning,--it was like monomania,--always her death and a terrible eternity ensuing upon it. She must have pondered upon it far too much lately,--it has grown to be a fixed idea. If there are not shortly signs of returning reason, I am afraid she will be----"

"Insane!" Johannes completed the sentence--"oh!--insane!" He buried his face in his hands, in an agony that convulsed his whole frame.

Moritz laid his hand upon his shoulder. "Johannes," he said, "be strong. For years we have looked to you, in joy and sorrow, as the very ideal of manly self-control and firm determination. Your example has shown as the true dignity of manhood,--and shall pain upon a woman's account have power to move you thus? No indeed! she is not worth it. Ten of these fools are not worth one throb of agony in such a man!"

"Do not speak to me. Leave me, I pray you, to myself," cried Johannes.

"We had better go," said Heim. "He will soon come to himself."

"Good-by, Johannes," Moritz said, pressing his hand. "And listen--open the shutters in Ernestine's room. Speak to her, call to her. It is not good for her to be in that gloomy twilight. It is a case where you must try to awaken reason--not let it smoulder away with too much care and nursing. Some convalescents would never leave their beds if they were not driven from them, because they are too weak to exert themselves. And it is just so with a diseased brain. The mind must be helped upon its feet, especially with women, who are only too ready to let themselves go."

"Moritz is right," said Heim. "I agree with him. Today is the ninth that she has been without fever. We may risk something. Farewell, Johannes. I will come again this evening."

The gentlemen motioned to Hilsborn to accompany them, and left the room.

Johannes clasped his hands, and there burst from his heart such a prayer as comes from the soul only in moments of deepest anguish. "O God, who knowest my heart and its thoughts and desires, canst Thou enter into judgment with me so heavily? Must I be the ruin of her whom I would have saved? Shall I be the cause of worse than death to her whom I would have rescued from death? Can I bear this and still retain my own reason? Have I destroyed the treasure, the hope of my existence? Have I shattered the glorious image to whose perfection I would have lent an aiding hand? And yet I meant to fulfil my duty. O God, if I have erred, mine be the punishment, mine,--not hers through me. No burden can be laid upon me that I will not gladly bear, save this alone!"

He entered the sick-room, and stood looking at Ernestine, who was lying as if half asleep, muttering disconnected, unintelligible words. Should he arouse her from this apparent repose? No, he had not the heart to do it. He drew aside the curtain, and the broad light of day fell full upon the ghost-like face. She moved, as if the light pained her, and turned aside. Willmers, who sat by the bedside, knitting, motioned him away. Johannes let the curtain fall again.

Suddenly the door was flung open, and Gretchen rushed in, her chest heaving, her eyes full of horror and despair. Hilsborn followed, attempting in vain to restrain her.

"Do not keep me!" the girl wailed out. "There is no comfort, no hope for me in this world! It is my father's work--and I have sworn to repair the injury done by him. How can I repair this wrong? How recall the glorious mind that he has destroyed?" And, almost frantic, she threw herself upon the bed beside Ernestine, and, seizing her hands, "Ernestine, wake up!--you must not lose your reason! Ernestine, listen--hear--Ernestine, Ernestine!" she cried, in the tone in which she had bidden her father farewell.

And Ernestine trembled at the call. She started up, and stared with a wild expression at the strange figure clad in black. She closed her eyes, then opened them again, only to close them wearily once more, as if she had not had sufficient sleep. Then she asked, "Who is this?"

Johannes and Hilsborn stood in breathless expectation. They pressed each other's hands with a look that said more than any words could have done, and Johannes made a sign to Willmers.

"It is your young nurse, Fräulein Ernestine," Willmers replied.

"Oh, indeed!" said Ernestine slowly. Again she closed her eyes, but remained sitting upright. Hilsborn went to the window, and admitted a little more light.

Then she rubbed her eyes and looked around. Gretchen had sunk upon her knees, and did not venture to stir. Johannes stood concealed by the head of the bed.

"What o'clock is it?" asked Ernestine.

"Half-past eleven," said Willmers.

Again there was silence for awhile. Hilsborn drew the curtains still more aside. Just then the Staatsrätthin in the other room, ignorant of what was going on, approached the half-open door. Fortunately, Johannes saw her, and motioned her away: she withdrew instantly, but the door creaked a little.

"Who was coming in?" asked Ernestine.

"The maid," Willmers replied, with ready presence of mind.

Then there was a long pause, during which the throbbing of the three hearts, agitated by alternate fear and hope, was almost audible.

"Willmers," said Ernestine.

"Fräulein?"

"Have I been dreaming--or did I really burn the book?"

"What book, dear Fräulein Ernestine?"

"The fairy-book,--the old fairy-book. Ah, I burned it. How sorry I am!"

"Another can easily be procured. Do not fret about that, dear," said Willmers, suddenly remembering that there had been a fire in Ernestine's library on the day when she was taken ill.

"Oh, no, it will not be the same,--not the same," said Ernestine sadly, and was silent again for some time.



"Willmers!"

"Fräulein?"

"I thought I was wakened by a terrible shriek. I was so frightened I trembled all over. See how vivid our dreams can be!"

"No one shrieked," said Willmers.

"Where is my uncle?"

"Gone to America."

"Gone!--and left me here?"

"You were ill."

"How long have I been in bed, then?"

"Oh, a couple of weeks."

"Ah! Who has been attending me?"

"Herr Geheimrath Heim and Herr Professor Möllner."

"Indeed!---Möllner!"

She was silent, and then passed into a quiet half slumber, but she smiled in her sleep.

Hilsborn and Johannes went out of the room on tiptoe. Without, they clasped each other's hands in mutual congratulations.

"What do you think now?" asked Johannes.

"I think she is safe," said Hilsborn.

Gretchen slipped out and joined them. "Oh, you should see her lying there now, so calm and quiet--she does not even murmur in her sleep as she did."

"Gretchen," said Johannes, "it is your doing. God bless you for it!"

Gretchen looked up at Hilsborn, who could not resist the temptation to put his arm around her and draw her towards him. Johannes smiled, for the first time for weeks, and said, "I saw it coming. Would that such happiness were mine!"

"But," said Gretchen timidly, "remember, it is a great deal harder to win such a creature as Ernestine than such a poor little thing as I. And only think what she will be when won!"

The Staatsrätin interrupted the conversation. She saw with delight the hope in her son's eyes, and thanked God.

They sat together in the antechamber for half an hour, until they heard Ernestine waken.

Johannes then beckoned to Willmers, and said to her, "Prepare Ernestine as cautiously as you can for seeing us."

"Willmers!" called Ernestine.

"Here I am, Fräulein Ernestine."

"I feel so well now,--so rested! I must have been very ill, for my head is still confused, and it is hard to think. Tell me, my dear Willmers, am I not very poor?"

"No one is very poor, Fräulein, who is as rich in mind and heart as you are."

"Do not evade my question. I begin to remember it exactly. My uncle deceived me. And Möllner,--yes, that was the evening when he told me I must die--and the skull fell down and struck my poor head just here,--and she put up her hand to the scar that had remained since her childhood from her terrible fall,--"just here. It was very painful, but I hardly felt it, in my hurry to read all that there was in the book about diseases of the heart. And then those terrible thoughts of eternal night and eternal silence--and then--then--I remember nothing more. Oh, Willmers, pray draw aside the curtains, and let me enjoy the light as long as I may."

Willmers opened the curtains of both the windows. The bright rays of the autumn sun streamed into the room. Ernestine stretched out her arms towards them, and said, "Oh, glorious light! How long shall I look upon you? How soon will your warm rays kiss the flowers upon my grave? Shall the blest look upon the face of God? This beautiful smiling world is His face, and blessed indeed are they who may still look upon it and recognize God. Ah, Willmers, life is such a gift! It is truly valued by those who stand looking down into their open graves, as I do, and I think

I was never so worthy to live as now when it is too late."

She clasped her hands over her eyes and burst into tears. "If I could only hope to go to eternal peace upon a Father's loving, forgiving heart, I would gladly die, I long for His love. All feel His presence, and look to Him. But I dare not approach Him. I should be thrust out."

"Dear Fräulein Ernestine," said Willmers, "you are still ill, and that is the cause of these gloomy thoughts. If you would only talk with Professor Möllner, he would know better how to answer you than such a simple old woman as I."

"When is Dr. Möllner coming again?"

"He is here with his mother. They came here to stay, that they might take care of you, and the Frau Staatsrätin has done all that she could to help her son. Oh, how anxious and unhappy they have been about you! The Herr Professor would not stir from your bedside, and he looks quite ill with constant watching."

Ernestine cast down her eyes with emotion.

"May I not ask him to come in now?" asked Willmers.

"Pray do so."

Willmers did not have to go far to call him. He was already at the door.

"Ernestine, how are you?" he said, doing his best to appear composed.

"Well, dear friend." And she smiled, and held out her hand to him. "What have you not done for me! How can a dying woman thank you for such self-sacrifice?"

"Ernestine," cried Johannes, pressing her hand to his lips, "you are in error. I myself led you into it, and severely has God punished me for my imprudence. Everything that I told you of your physical condition was founded upon mistaken suppositions. What I thought a symptom of chronic disease was nothing but the approach of an acute attack of illness. Two physicians, Heim and Moritz Kern, pronounce your heart sound, and you are now out of danger. Oh, Ernestine, you cannot dream what my sufferings have been! I saw you writhing in mortal agony. All your fancies betrayed the terror into which I had plunged you. I would have rescued you from it, but you could not hear nor understand me. I offered you the truth that would save you from destruction, and you could not open your lips to receive it. It was too much, too much!"

"Then I need not die?" asked Ernestine with a long breath, as if awaking from an oppressive dream.

"On my honour, Ernestine, you are quite out of danger."

She could not speak. She could only look fondly and gratefully at the blue heavens outside the window. Then she silently pressed Möllner's hand to her breast, and the large tears gathered in her eyes.

The Staatsrätin then entered. "May I come in?" she asked. "May I say good-morning to the invalid?"

Ernestine drew the old lady towards her, put her arm around her, and whispered, "You have so much to forgive, but you granted me your forgiveness before I could ask you for it. I feel so humiliated in comparison with you, I will not conceal the shame this confession causes me. It is your only reward for all that you have done for me."

"How she has been purified in the terrible furnace that she has passed through!" the Staatsrätin said to Johannes, who was looking down enraptured upon the pale, beautiful features, once more informed by the clear light of reason.

"I thank you all, and you, too, dear Willmers. Every breath that I draw of this new gift of life shall be full of gratitude to you and"--she looked timidly upwards--"to God. In that dark, dark night of horror, I felt that His hand prostrated me, and now His hand lifts me up again. Oh, yes, He is a merciful God!"

"Then, Ernestine," said Johannes, "a blessing has come even from the terror that I caused you,--the blessing of faith."

"Yes, dear friend, you were right when you said, 'To some God comes in fear.' You were right in everything, and I am only a woman!" Her head drooped. She was exhausted.

Johannes and his mother looked significantly at each other, joy in their eyes. It seemed to them that Ernestine was born again.

The blessed relief that followed this brief conversation kept the invalid sunk in profound sleep all the rest of the day.

When Heim came, towards evening, he would not even see her, lest he should disturb the repose which was, he said, the best medicine for a convalescent.

At nightfall she opened her eyes and saw Johannes sitting beside her.

"Are you still with me?" she asked.

"I am always with you, Ernestine. I shall never leave you," he said with fervour.

Her eyelids closed, and she was silent, but her breath came quickly. He saw that his words had excited her, and he resolved carefully to avoid in future every syllable that could possibly disturb the perfect repose of her mind.

He left the room, that she might become composed. Willmers persuaded her to take some nourishment, and she fell asleep again without a word.

She was so much refreshed the next morning that Johannes breakfasted with his mother for the first time for many days, and assured her that he confidently hoped now for Ernestine's speedy recovery.

"Thank God!" ejaculated the Staatsrätthin fervently. "Since yesterday I have seen how dear she may become to me. I acknowledge now that you, my son, understood this rare creature better than I did. But where are Gretchen and Hilsborn? Why do they not come to breakfast?"

"They are taking a turn together in the garden. How happy they are!"

"God willing, we shall soon have a double wedding in N----."

"Ah, mother, yours are bold dreams!" cried Johannes.

"But why not? Be sure, my son, she will soon be well again. Her constitution, both mental and physical, is strong. In two weeks your holidays will be at an end, and then we will carry her back to town with us, and when her trousseau, that I shall provide, is complete, where will there be any need of delay?"

"Why, mother, you yourself have just said that her mind is vigorous as well as her body. I shall never believe she can be mine until she is actually my affianced bride."

"Ah, Moritz and Angelika!" cried the Staatsrätthin, rising to meet them as they entered.

Angelika kissed her mother and brother. She was, if possible, plumper and rosier than ever.

"Aha!" laughed Moritz, "we frightened you for nothing yesterday. I know--I know all about it from Heim. Your coy damsel has come to her senses--congratulate you! If she can be cured of the rest of her brain-sickness, why, Heaven speed the wooing! There'll be no getting any good out of you until you are married."

Angelika put her plump, dimpled little hand over his mouth. "Can you not let poor Johannes have some peace?"

Moritz kissed the soft, warm fether placed upon his lips and freed himself from it.

"'Poor' Johannes! Why poor? He's sure of her now. She hasn't a groschen. Let her thank Heaven that there is a comfortable home ready for her, and she will,--no one can accuse her of stupidity," said Moritz.

Johannes and his mother looked grave, but did not speak, and he went on. "I can't conceive how she withstood you so long. You're the very hero for a novel,--too sentimental for my taste, but that's just what women like, and if I were a woman I'd have you on the spot."

"Thank you kindly, Moritz," said Johannes gaily, "but make your mind easy,--I certainly would not have you."

"Oh, do stop! you do nothing but quarrel and fight when you are together," said Angelika merrily. "You are both good and true, each after his own fashion, and I love you both dearly. What more do you want?"

"All right," said Moritz, contemplating the fair little figure with immense satisfaction. "If you love us, I am entirely content. It is only your discontented brother who is not satisfied."

"Angelika knows well enough," said Johannes, "what she is to me!"

Here Willmers appeared. "Herr Professor, Fräulein Ernestine is awake, and is asking for her 'pretty young nurse,' as she calls her. Shall I go for Fräulein Gretchen?"

"Yes," said Johannes, "but I must tell her who Gretchen is,--you will excuse me?"

"Yes, yes, go, for Heaven's sake! don't wait an instant!" Moritz called after him.

"Ernestine," said Johannes, after he had exchanged morning greetings with the invalid, whose improvement was evidently steady and sure,--"Ernestine, you wish to see the young girl who was here yesterday, and I must first tell you who she is. Do you still cherish any affection for your uncle?"

Ernestine shook her head. "He is dead to me."

"I have something to tell you of him that may agitate you, and I scarcely dare to do it."

"What can agitate me, after all the terrors that my own fancy has conjured up?" Ernestine asked composedly.

"Well, then, the girl who has helped to nurse you with touching fidelity for the last four weeks is Leuthold's daughter, and--an orphan!"

"Good God!" she exclaimed. "Poor child! Is Leuthold dead?"

"Yes, he inflicted upon himself the punishment of his crimes. This world is past for him."

Ernestine looked up gravely. "I cannot mourn him. He was my evil genius, and shamefully abused my confidence. But I will not visit it upon his daughter,--poor, innocent child. I pray you bring her to me,--she is the only creature in this world who is linked to me by the tie of kindred!"

Johannes went to the window and beckoned to Gretchen, who was approaching the house with Hilsborn.

She came instantly, and a minute later was upon her knees at Ernestine's bedside. Ernestine would have drawn her towards her, but she sobbed, "Let me kneel at your feet,--only so should the daughter of one who greatly wronged you dare to approach you."

"Gretchen, poor, innocent orphan," cried Ernestine, "come to my heart!" Then, regarding her with emotion, she declared, "Indeed, if anything could lighten his errors, it would be his affection for such a child. For the sake of that pure human love, I forgive him. If I were rich, I would share all with you as with a sister. If I had anything to give, I would give it to you. But I have nothing for you, except sympathy and affection."

And the two girls were clasped in each other's arms.

## **CHAPTER X.**

### **RETURN.**

With reawakening strength, entirely novel feelings of affection and interest penetrated Ernestine's nature,--genuine human sympathies, such as her life hitherto had afforded no room for. In a few days the closest intimacy was established between herself and Gretchen. There was a simplicity about Ernestine that no one had believed her to possess. It was as if she now began to live for the first time, as if during the long period of her unconsciousness she had forgotten her former experience of the outward world, and she was as delighted as a child with all that unfolded itself before her eyes. She was as charmed as if she had never seen it before with the sight of the clear autumn sky. She would gaze long and thoughtfully upon the flowers that were laid upon her bed. She eagerly turned over, with Gretchen, the books of rare prints that Johannes brought for her amusement. Hitherto she had known Art only by name, and had not had an idea of its significance. Her uncle had never supplied food for her imagination, lest she should be turned aside from the pursuit of her graver studies. Her weary soul now bathed in the waters of fancy which Johannes unlocked for her refreshment. He brought her photographs of pictures and statues by famous masters, and ideas of the beautiful were awakened within her, filling her with glad inspiration. And Gretchen met her with ready sympathy,--she was in advance of her, indeed, and could point out to her many beauties that else might have escaped her unpractised eyes. At such times Ernestine would regard Gretchen with admiration and surprise. It was a pleasure to see the two girls throwing their whole souls into these new enjoyments together. Even Hilsborn, who since Ernestine's convalescence had naturally been defrauded of many a delightful moment, could not grudge them so pure and true a happiness. Sometimes from morning until night the two lovely heads would be bent together over books and prints, and sometimes they had a companion,--Father Leonhardt, who would come "on purpose," as he expressed it, "to see the new books." But his delight was in listening to Ernestine while she described the pictures minutely, oftentimes with so much truth and spirit that the old man would clasp his hands and cry, "How beautiful that must be!"

"Do you see it, Father Leonhardt?" she would ask in her zeal, and the old man would reply delightedly, "Yes, I see it!"

And when anything pleased him particularly, he would ask, "Show me that picture again!" and Ernestine was unwearied in her descriptions and explanations.

Johannes and his mother were enchanted with this rejuvenation, as it might be called.

She avoided with secret dislike any return to her former world of thought,--it was too harsh a contrast to her present delight,--she seemed actually disgusted with the anatomical pursuits which had led her to dissect so curiously what now gave her so much pleasure. She would not again descend into those gloomy depths whence she had drawn nothing but despair, and all that she now looked upon was as novel and strange as if she had spent the last ten years immured in a tower, from which she had only looked out upon God's fair world from a far-off height.

Her recovery advanced so rapidly that eight days after her first awaking to consciousness she was able to be carried by Johannes and Gretchen into the library, once more restored to order and comfort by the faithful care of Willmers. She was placed in an arm-chair, and, as the Staatsrätthin covered her with a warm, soft coverlet, she said in a weak voice, "Now let us begin where we left off ten years ago!"

The Staatsrätthin stooped, and, kissing her brow, whispered softly, "It is a pity so much time has been lost!"

"Oh, no,--not a pity," replied Ernestine,--"no time spent in searching for truth is lost; but the measure of my strength is exhausted. I must give up."

And, with a melancholy smile, she leaned back her head and was silent

The days passed on, and the time approached very nearly when Möllner must return to his duties in town. Ernestine grew more silent and thoughtful. No one could understand the change in her mood, for her physical condition improved daily, while she fell into a state of depression such as had not befallen her since she began to recover. At last Heim decreed that she must have fresh air, and one warm noon she drove out for the first time. She had begged that Gretchen alone might accompany her, and the Möllners had, although unwillingly, acceded to her request, Johannes carefully lifting her into the carriage.

"Gretchen," said Ernestine, as they drove along, "Dr. Möllner has twice alluded to the fact that in two or three days he, with his mother, must move back to town, as his lectures at the University will begin again. You heard how they took it for granted that we should accompany them. I made only evasive answers, but now I must resolve what to do. Gretchen, you have often told me that your peace of mind depended upon your helping to support me as long as I needed you." She looked searchingly at the girl. "What if I were to take you at your word?"

"I should keep it, for I gave it not only to you, but to God Almighty," said Gretchen. "Tell me, Ernestine, what I can do for you."

"Everything!" cried Ernestine. "You can save me from living upon charity."

"How so?"

"Can you not imagine, Gretchen, what it must be to me to accept further benefits from people whom I long to repay in kind, whom I would like to reward a thousandfold for all that they have done for me? I do not know whether you understand me when I tell you that I would far rather earn my living by the work of my hands than depend upon the kindness of those whom I once treated so arrogantly, and who have already heaped more coals of fire upon my head than I can bear. You shake your head. Your father, Gretchen, would have understood me,--his words upon this subject, the evening before he left me, are ineffaceably impressed upon my mind."

"Forgive me, Ernestine, it does not become me to depreciate my father still further in your eyes, but I cannot be silent! I have arrived at the melancholy conviction that my father never advised you well. He was wrong here too. He did not know Dr. Möllner,--he could not conceive of the depth and truth of his affection for you. Will you reward the man who has done so much for you by making him wretched? You certainly will do so if you refuse to go with him. No, Ernestine, I do not understand how you can break a man's heart just for the sake of your pride!"

Ernestine did not speak for a few moments, and then she said, "Gretchen, you are a child,--I cannot explain to you that there is a principle of honour to which one must sacrifice the happiness of a life, should circumstances demand it. You know, perhaps, that when I was wealthy and independent, Möllner offered me his hand, and that I refused it, because I could not fulfil the conditions that he proposed. Since that time his conduct has failed to assure me that he still loves me, for a nature as noble as his, is perfectly capable of sacrificing all that he has for me, from pure sympathy and mere compassion. And, even if he still loved me, could he value a heart open to the suspicion of surrendering itself to him under the pressure of necessity, not from free choice? No, Gretchen, there can be no firm structure of happiness erected upon such a foundation. This is not the time when I could withdraw my refusal to be his wife! No, no! such a course at this point would fix the blush of shame upon my forehead forever. Perhaps I may still

succeed in obtaining an independence by my own exertions,--an independence that will again make me his equal. Then it would be different,--then he would know that I gave myself to him from free choice, not upon compulsion. If he should woo me then,--oh, Gretchen, it would be happiness that I scarcely dare to think of!"

Gretchen kissed a tear from Ernestine's pale cheek, and said gently, "You are not like any one else, but always true and noble. I have no right to judge you. If you say, 'Thus shall it be,' I will submit. My only desire is to obey you."

"You shall not obey me, Gretchen, but you shall be my guide in a world where I am a stranger,--you shall lend me your arm to support me until I can stand alone. Will you not?"

"Yes," was the low reply. The girl was thinking of Hilsborn and his sorrow at the postponement of his hopes and of her own hopes also, and she tried to take heart and tell her cousin that she loved and was loved in return, and that she would be able to offer her an asylum. But Gretchen paused, and bethought herself. Ernestine would never accept from Hilsborn what she refused to receive from Möllner. She could not make such an offer without offending Ernestine, and, if Ernestine learned how matters stood with Gretchen, she would assuredly refuse all assistance or service from her that could delay her happiness with Hilsborn. For Ernestine's proud nature never could endure the thought of being a burden to any one Gretchen had felt all this from the first, and therefore had insisted that her betrothal should be kept secret from Ernestine. And could she tell her of it now? She controlled herself, and was silent.

"I will tell you my plan," Ernestine began. "Of course I have given up the idea of going to America. I could never do what would be required of me there, without assistance, and, even if I could, I would not leave home and all that I love for the sake of mere fame. I will try to find a position as a teacher of natural science in some institution, or, failing that, I will go out as a private governess. But I know how ignorant I am of everything that is looked for from a woman in such a position. I know nothing of feminine occupations myself, and, of course, am quite unfit to have the entire charge of children. I understand no art,--I am deficient in all practical knowledge,--the knowledge that I possess is seldom needed in life. This I have learned since I have seen something of the world. You, Gretchen, are my only hope. You will teach me everything,--you are a proficient in all that a woman should know. I must leave this place. I must get away from this part of the country. Until I am out of Möllner's reach, there will be no peace either for him or for me. He would always be thinking that he ought to take me from my position, and there would be endless struggles. So I think it would be best that we two should retire to some small town, as far off as my means will permit, and then, if you would sacrifice to me a few months of your young, hopeful life, until I should be sufficiently far advanced to procure a situation."----She got so far with difficulty, and then, breaking off, asked humbly, "Is this asking too much of you? The world is open to you, Gretchen. Every one would welcome you back from your seclusion. Möllner's house will always be a home for you, where you may be tenderly cared for. Will you sacrifice all this to me, for a little while?"

"With all my heart," said Gretchen. "But, dearest Ernestine, have we the means to carry out this plan? All that I possess is three gold pieces that I found in the pocket of the dress that my mother gave me. Look, here they are--I always carry them about me. My mother had written upon the paper in which they were wrapped, 'To be used in case of necessity.' I meant to spend them for you, for you are all the 'necessity' that I have. Take them,--they are all that I have, but I am afraid they will not go far."

"Thank you, you dear faithful little sister!" cried Ernestine. "We are not so poor as you think. Dr. Möllner has succeeded in saving all my furniture from your father's creditors. The sale of it will bring us in a sum sufficient to support us until I shall find a situation."

"The question is, then, how long that will be," said Gretchen, thoughtfully.

"Only a few months at the longest, I should suppose."

Gretchen was startled, but she only said gently, "Then we had better select a place where I too can earn something, that there may be no danger of our suffering from want."

"That shall be as you think best," replied Ernestine. "I put myself entirely in your hands,--only take me away secretly, so that no one may seek to detain us."

"Must no one know anything of it? Must I tell nobody?"

"Do you suppose we should be allowed to go, Gretchen, if our intention was suspected? If you are afraid that you cannot keep our departure secret, tell me so frankly, and I will go alone, without your knowledge."

"Oh, no, Ernestine, I will not let you go out into the world alone. What are all my resolutions and protestations worth, if I fail you at the outset? But there is one person, Ernestine, to whom I owe a certain obedience, my guardian! I am not of age, as you are. I cannot do just as I please. I must ask him whether I may go with you--but I will answer for his secrecy. He shall promise me, before I confide in him, that he will not betray my confidence,--and he always keeps his promises."

Ernestine considered for a moment. "Yes, I see this cannot be avoided. I rely upon you. Johannes and his mother are going to drive into town together in a few days to prepare a room for us in their house. When they return in the evening, they must not find us here."

"I cannot help feeling," said Gretchen, "as if I were guilty of treachery towards all these kind people. I never deceived any one in my life before; I feel like a criminal."

"We will not deceive them, only spare them a parting scene that would be painful to us all,--we will not impose upon them the necessity of preventing what in their hearts they may think best for us. When we are once away, I will write and explain to them what we have done, and they will understand me."

"Ernestine, I will pray God to give you more love and less pride. My only hope is that you will not long be able to live without the faithful friend who loves you so devotedly."

Ernestine looked out of the carriage-window without a word. The fields were bare and deserted, but the spiders' webs, that lay like nets upon the stubble, glistened in the sunlight. Here and there the peasants were burning underbrush, and the red flames darted with a merry crackle through the thick white smoke that the autumn breeze kept lying low upon the ground. The cattle were gleaning a scanty meal from the shorn pastures,--they raised their heads to look after the carriage as it passed, or to rub their necks against some dried old stump of a tree. In the distance, a sportsman was making his toilsome way through the deep furrows of a ploughed field, while his dog busied himself among the hedges until he started a covey of birds, and the fatal crack of the gun was heard. A wagon, laden high with full wine-casks, passed along the road,--the boy that was driving had a bunch of withered asters in his hat, and cracked his whip gaily at sight of Gretchen's lovely face, while the little dog perched on the top of the load barked angrily. "Every one is making ready for winter," said Gretchen. "How much labour meat and drink cost!"

The carriage turned towards the village, and Ernestine called to the coachman to stop at the school-house,--"I must see the Leonhardts once more." As they reached the low-roofed house, one of the windows was opened, and Frau Brigitta looked out. "Good-morning, Frau Leonhardt," cried Ernestine from the carriage.

"My dear Fräulein Ernestine, I can hardly trust my eyes!" And out she came to the carriage-door. "Come in, come in, both of you,--I will bring Bernhard--he is with Käthchen in the garden. But Walter is in the house. He is so happy with the things you have sent him! He studies night and day!" Thus the old woman ran on, as she assisted her guests to alight.

"I think," said Ernestine, "that I should like to go into the garden to Father Leonhardt."

"Just as you please. He is sitting round the corner, in the sun."

"Go into the house, then, Gretchen," said Ernestine. "I will come in one moment."

And she went round the house as quickly as her strength would permit, and approached the old man, who was teaching Käthchen her lesson. The child would have run to meet her, but Ernestine motioned to her not to speak, and knelt silently down by Leonhardt.

"Who is this?" he asked.

Ernestine made no reply, but imprinted a kiss upon his hand. He smiled. "Oh, it is my daughter Ernestine!"

"Yes, father, it is I," she said. "I come to you the first time that I have driven out. There is much within me that is still dark. I come to you for light."

"You bring me light, and do you ask me to give you light? But I know what you mean, and I will give you all that I have. Heaven may make me, poor blind old man, its instrument in comforting and assisting you. Tell me, then, Ernestine, why does the sunshine that now floods your life fail to penetrate your heart?"

"Send the child away, father."

"Go, Käthi dear," Leonhardt said.

"To Walter?" the little girl asked, delighted.

"Yes, if he is not busy,--see that you do not trouble him."

Käthchen still lingered, with a look of inquiry at Ernestine, who perceived it, and held out her hand. "My good little Käthchen, do you remember me? I would like to give you a kiss, but you might fear my touch would harm you again."

"Oh, no. That cannot be," said Käthchen. "I am not at all afraid of you."

"Then come here, my sweet child." And she took her upon her lap, and kissed her kindly. It was the first time that she had ever had a child in her arms, and the pleasure that it gave her was

new and strange.

"Oh, Father Leonhardt," she said, "how many different kinds of love there are! Strange that they all seem so new and delightful to me!"

"You are like the man with the heart of stone, in Hauff's story. Your uncle put a marble heart in your breast, and Möllner has given you a warm, living heart instead."

Ernestine blushed at these words. She was glad that Leonhardt could not see her, yet he did see her.

"He brings a blessing wherever he comes," the old man continued. "He has done everything for this child. Did he tell you? The Countess Worronska sent the forty thousand roubles, as she promised, and Dr. Möllner succeeded at last in persuading the Kellers to send Käthchen to a good school. She will leave now in about a week."

"I knew nothing of it," said Ernestine.

"It is not his custom to speak of the good he does," said Leonhardt, "but indeed he is a benefactor to all."

"A benefactor to all," Ernestine repeated thoughtfully. "All the less should any one individual boast of his kindness,--a kindness shown to all, without respect of persons."

Leonhardt involuntarily turned his darkened eyes towards her as she spoke thus. "Go, Käthchen," he said, "Fräulein Ernestine will come by-and-by."

Käthchen went into the house, and, not finding Walter in the sitting-room, mounted to his study, in the upper story, just under the roof. She nestled up to his side and said, with an air of great mystery, "Only think! the lady of the castle has kissed me again!"

"Not possible!" laughed Walter. "And do you feel nothing queer?"

"Of course not," Käthchen cried in some confusion. "She can't bewitch me."

"I wouldn't like to try her," said Walter with an involuntary sigh. "I think, if I had been in your place, I should have felt the enchantment instantly."

"Why, you told me yourself there was no such thing," said Käthchen.

"Well, Käthi," said the young man, "it would be as well, perhaps, for the sake of precaution, that I should kiss off her kisses. Where was it?--here?"

"Yes, and here on my forehead, and on my shoulder."

"There, we will put an end to all that," cried Walter, as he kissed the child. "And now go downstairs. I must work."

"Oh, you always have to work," Käthchen complained.

"Yes, you school-children have the best time, with nothing to do but laugh and play, while I have all the studying. Go now, and when the Fräulein comes in from the garden, come and call me."

"Yes, I'll call you. Good-by. But promise me that you won't tell that the Fräulein kissed me. They would all scold and laugh at me."

"Oh, no,--not for the world. Where's the use of telling everything? But you mustn't love the Fräulein better than you do me, or I must tell your mother."

"Oh, no. I love you best of all the world!" cried Käthchen, shutting the door behind her with emphasis. She had been but a few moments with Gretchen and Frau Brigitta when Ernestine entered with Leonhardt. Both looked agitated, and Ernestine's eyes showed traces of tears.

Käthchen would have gone to call Walter, as she had been told to do.

"Stay, Käthchen," said Ernestine, "I will go up to Herr Leonhardt myself and see what he is doing."

And she took Father Leonhardt's arm, and with him ascended the narrow staircase.

Walter sprang up, with flushed cheeks, when Ernestine and his father entered his room.

"Have you come all the way up here?" he exclaimed, "you, before whom I stand humbly as a mere pupil,--revering you almost as the very personification of Science?"

"Do not speak thus, Walter,--you do not know what you are saying. I have, through much pain, obtained the victory over self, and will content myself with my lot as a woman, but I am weak, and such speeches might easily arouse again within me the demon of ambition. You mean it



kindly, but, now that I stand on the borders of the realm I have forsaken, I must not listen to any voice recalling me to that dear old home. I have come to take leave of you. Your father will tell you wherefore and whither I am going."

"Oh, Fräulein Ernestine, are you going away? and are you going to give up your studies too?"

"I must resign them, Walter, or at least all scientific pursuits. My knowledge must be to me now a means of support, and in these days it can serve me only in the position of a governess. I must content myself with teaching in a girls' school. Men do not want women for professors, and no man wants a professor for a wife. The world is not what I dreamed,--there is no place in it for a woman's efforts, and I am too weak to create one for myself."

"What a shame it is," said Walter, "that such a woman should need to create a place for herself! she should be placed upon a pedestal and worshipped, if only for the sake of such a mind in such a body."

Leonhardt laid his hand in warning upon the boy's arm.

"Father, I must speak," he went on. "I must give some relief to the indignation that fills me at the idea of such a nature's being condemned to contend in the world for the bare means of subsistence."

Ernestine hid her face in her hands, and sighed heavily.

Leonhardt shook his head disapprovingly at his son. "It is not kind, Walter, to make the sacrifice harder than it need be. Ernestine is and always must be noble, and never was she nobler than in her present resolution. We cannot change the world, Walter, and Ernestine is a woman,--she must submit."

"Yes, submit!" she repeated, and there was a keener pain in her accents.

"Fräulein Ernestine," Walter implored her, "forgive me if I have revived buried griefs. I meant well,--I cannot tell you what pain it gives me to see you giving up what is so dear to you, and for me your going is like the departure of his muse to the poet,--the vanishing of his saint to the rapt devotee."

"Walter," Ernestine said gravely, "your words tempt me sorely, but, I hope, for the last time. I will resist them, and when you are older you will know why I do so. You are very young, Walter. It is not long, scarcely six weeks, since I was so too. In this short time I have grown older by six years, and the world and mankind are changed in my eyes,--I must struggle now for the simple means of subsistence."

She went to the bookshelves, on which the bright rays of the sun were just falling. "Yes, dear old Darwin, your famous name still shines brightly upon me. I now begin to understand you and to appreciate the sublime import of your teachings."

She held out her hand to Walter, with tears in her eyes. "Thank you for the opportunity of trying my strength for one moment. It has been a melancholy satisfaction. A bright future is before you; if I have contributed in a degree to the realization of your hopes in life, I will descend cheerfully from the heights I dreamed of,--I have not lived in vain. I must go."

She looked around the room. Wherever her glance fell, it rested upon some of her books or instruments. "Keep all these things for me, Walter,--perhaps I may reclaim them at some future day." Again tears filled her eyes. She knew she was never again to possess, what had been so long the sole joy of her life, the companions of her labours. "No, let them go. I release from my service the spirits prisoned in these instruments that have brought the stars near to me and revealed the hidden mysteries of the earth to my asking eyes. They can serve me no longer,--I must return to the every-day world,--the spell is broken,--knowledge and sight are mine no longer."

She left the room noiselessly, and her old friend followed her.

A quarter of an hour later, the carriage rolled away from the school-house towards the castle, and the Leonhardts, father and son, stood on the threshold, the one gazing after the distant carriage, the other listening intently to the last sound of its wheels.

Ernestine, sunk in thought, was leaning back in the vehicle, when she suddenly called to the coachman to stop. They were just passing the church.

"Stay here and wait for me," she said to Gretchen. "I must go in here for a moment."

She got out, and went to the door, which stood ajar. Her hand lingered on the latch. What impelled her thus irresistibly to enter this poor little village church?--Memory! Like a painted curtain, all the events, thoughts, experiences, of the last ten years were hung around the low portal. Again she stood before the church-door of her northern home, a trembling, longing, doubting, despairing child. "Enter, and learn to kneel," the same voice within that spoke then was speaking now. And she entered, softly and timidly. It was empty and quiet,--the people were all at

their work. The floor between the benches was strewn with green box twigs from the last holiday, and the atmosphere was filled with the odour of incense. Through the painted window the sun threw many-coloured rays upon a picture of the Virgin. A swallow, scared from his summer's nest in the dome, flew circling above Ernestine's head, like the dove of the Holy Spirit. Ernestine slowly passed the quiet confessionals, where so many sorrow-laden hearts had unburdened themselves of their weight of woe and received forgiveness in the name of the Lord. She thought with compassion of the cumbrous formalities that separated these wandering souls from their hope and trust. "Straight to Him," breathed the voice within, and she passed with quickened steps over the soft, leaf-strewn floor, directly to the altar. Was it the same at which she had knelt and wept ten years before? Whether it were or not. He was the same Divine One whose image looked down from the cross, touching her heart now as it had touched it then. She knew now that she had but completed a circle, and had come back to the point at which she had been ten years before.

And she extended her arms and fell upon her knees. "Father," she cried, "I have come back,--receive me! ah, receive me!"

## **CHAPTER XI.**

### **"GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD."**

"What a hard winter we are having!" said Ernestine to herself, looking thoughtfully out through the dim panes of the little window by which she was sitting, upon the roofs of the houses that bounded her prospect. They were covered with snow, that lay thick also on the outside window-sill. She sat with her hands wrapped in her cotton apron. "Well, I wanted to know everything,--why not poverty, and hunger, and cold,--the mighty foes with which humanity is always contending? I could philosophize excellently well upon abstinence in a warm room, by a well-spread table, and am I to shrink now? No, no! no living soul shall ever hear me ask for help."

She stood up, and walked firmly to and fro.

The room was a gloomy garret, a kind of kitchen,--at all events, there was a cooking-stove in it, and a cupboard containing articles of crockery. The floor was paved with stone.

Ernestine's feet were bitter cold. "I wonder what o'clock it is," she thought. "The postman ought to be here soon. It is terrible to have nothing to mark the time."

She listened to catch the striking of a church-clock--going to the window and letting her eyes wander over the white roofs in search of a distant tower. There was no sun visible through the snowy air. It was a genuine winter's day.

At a window just opposite, a little boy breathed upon the frosty pane and made two round peep-holes, through which a pair of blue eyes beamed at her. She nodded to them--she knew the pretty child well. The little head behind the peep-holes nodded in its turn. She thought of Little Kay and her northern winter. Then the snow before the window rose like white clouds hiding the prospect, and, gradually taking a human shape clothed in wide flowing robes, that began to sparkle and glitter as if strewn with diamonds, and a veil of frozen gossamer fluttered in the air. And beneath the veil there looked at her through the window a white face, with fixed transparent eyes like crystal, and upon the beautiful brow was a diadem of icicles made of the tears of all who had perished in the ice and snow since the world was made, and of all who starve and freeze in winter-time,--a diadem richer in pearls than that of any earthly monarch. The mighty form had on one arm a shield,--but it was a plate of the ice upon which had been wrecked the ships that sought to penetrate the inhospitable kingdom of the Snow-queen around the north pole. With the other hand she was leading away the little boy from over the way,--she longed for some coral to adorn her colourless robes, for a few drops of warm human blood. It was the Snow-queen of the fairy-dreams of Ernestine's childhood. But she was more majestic and gloomy than formerly, and she spoke other words to her now:

"I know you,--you never feared me as you do now that you have no warm roof, no firm walls, to protect you from my icy breath. But I will not harm you,--you belong to those who believe in the future of my dominion, who know that in thousands and thousands of years it must spread over the whole world, when all this swarming life will have passed to other spheres. Then my time will come,--there will be quiet, eternal icy quiet, here below,--and I will laugh at the old extinguished sun, glimmering like a burnt-out coal and envying me my diamond palace which he can no longer melt away."

Thus spoke the Snow-queen to the dreaming woman of science, and there was a cold pain at her heart,--sorrow for the end of Being here below, sorrow at "the judgment-day of an eternal

glacial period," as Du Bois has it.

The Snow-queen had vanished, and Little Kay with her,--a thick snow-storm hid from view the path that she had taken.

Slowly and weakly, as if the clock were frozen and could thaw only by degrees, twelve o'clock struck from the church-tower.

Ernestine did not hear it. She sat with her head leaning against the window. The voice of the Snow-queen sounded in her ears, "Open your eyes, and see!"

And she opened her eyes, and saw across billions of years. The sun, its fires only dimly burning, hung, a bloody disk in the skies, heavy brooding clouds were tinged with dull red, and twilight rested over the cold earth. Upon its hardened surface only a few wretched imbruted creatures crawled, seeking to sustain life upon the scanty remains of a decaying vegetation.

Sadly Ernestine closed her eyes upon the painful picture.

But she was again commanded to look abroad. Centuries swept on, and all grew darker and colder. The red disk faded, and all colour with it. Ernestine marked it all vanish in a dull gray. Weary with fruitless struggle, the last remains of organic life lay down in eternal rest.

It was night at last. Still the earthly sphere performed its appointed circuit around the charred mass that was once its sun. But the mighty firmament was clear and cloudless,--the lifeless earth exhaled no mists to obscure the light of the distant stars, which revealed to Ernestine immeasurable depths and immense heights of frozen seas and oceans amid eternal repose,--the world was only a gigantic memorial of things that were.

"But where, and in what guise, are the transformed forces of this spent world now lingering?" asked Ernestine. "Nothing in the great Universe is lost."

"Ah! good heavens I here you are sitting dreaming in this cold kitchen!" suddenly said a clear, bright voice. "No fire on the hearth,--no dinner made; or, let me see,--yes,--but how? Burnt to a cinder. My dear Ernestine, what have you been doing?"

Ernestine had sprang up, and was staring at the speaker as if she had come from another world.

Gretchen, for she it was, laid aside a couple of schoolbooks that she had under her arm, threw off her cloak and hood, and busied herself with the neglected soup. "I understand,--first you kindled a huge fire, and then never thought of it again. The soup is not skimmed, and the beef is burned, and yet half raw. You cannot have looked at it for at least an hour."

"It is such a pity that we had to sell my watch," Ernestine excused herself. "I never know now how the time goes."

"Nonsense!" said Gretchen, "you can surely tell without a watch whether the soup boils and the fire burns or not. Only try, and all will go right. You have often proved that you can really cook quite well if you will only take pains. But I cannot trust you with soup and beef again,--you forget everything when once you begin to dream."

"Gretchen, don't be angry," pleaded Ernestine.

"But here is all the food spoiled that was so hardly earned, and we have not a single groschen in the house, and shall not have, until my money is paid me to-morrow." And tears of vexation came into Gretchen's eyes. "I care more about you than about myself. I am strong, and do not need meat; but you,--indeed you ought to think of yourself, if not of me!"

Ernestine, in her confusion, looked from the saucepan to Gretchen, and from Gretchen to the saucepan, in dismay. "You are right," she said,--"it is unpardonable not to take care that you, poor child, should have something hot and good when you come home wearied from your work. Indeed I am a useless creature!"

Gretchen was instantly appeased. She laughed, and threw her arms around Ernestine. "Ah! my beautiful, grand, intellectual sister, it is too bad to scold you! Just hear my queenly Ernestine sue for pardon, like some poor Cinderella, and all for a piece of burnt meat! Don't mind it, dear. You can't think how touching your humility is. Why, I could kneel at your feet, if you would let me." She kissed her sister's lips. "Oh, what a poor distressed face! Don't you know, dearest Ernestine, that the sight of that face is more to me than all the dinners in the world?" And she laughed as merrily as a child.

Ernestine returned her embrace. "There, you forgive me," she said tenderly.

"Oh, no, I beg your pardon," said Gretchen, "I will educate you. But enough of this. We must proceed to business at once. I must go back to school at two o'clock, and we cannot starve. We must give up the meat for to-day. There is no help for it. We must indulge ourselves in the luxury of an omelet."

"Let me make it," Ernestine begged. "Sit down and rest yourself, you are tired."

"What! let you make it?" asked Gretchen. "That would be wise indeed. Suppose you spoiled it, what should we do then?" And she took out a basket containing eggs. "We have just eggs enough for one omelet, and no more."

'Entränn' er jetzo kraftlos meinen Händen,  
Ich habe keinen zweiten zu versenden,'

as Schiller makes Tell say when he had no second string to his bow."

"Indeed, Gretchen," pleaded Ernestine, "I will not spoil it. I should be so glad to recover your good opinion,--only let me try."

"Dearest, darling Ernestine," said Gretchen, "trust me, we cannot indulge in experiments any longer. While we had a little money, it did not make much difference if we had a spoiled dish now and then, but now we must save every groschen.--there is no help for it." And she began to beat the eggs, while Ernestine put more wood in the stove.

"Never mind that!" cried Gretchen. "If you want to do something, dress the salad. But make haste, the omelet will be ready in an instant."

Ernestine made all the haste she could,--she was so anxious to do something.

Suddenly Gretchen, who was busy at the fire, heard a low exclamation, and, turning, she saw Ernestine standing with a face of despair before, the salad-bowl, with the oil-bottle in her hand. "What have you done?" cried Gretchen, hastening to her side. "Not got hold of the wrong bottle, I hope?" But one sniff at the salad was enough. "Bless me! she has put petroleum into it! Now we must sit in the dark this evening,--our week's supply is exhausted. Such nice salad and such good petroleum, each so valuable by itself and so worthless mixed! Now, dear Ernestine, you cannot ask me to permit you to stay in the kitchen a moment longer. This is one of your unlucky days." And, with a comical air of pathos, she untied and took off her sister's apron. "Herewith I solemnly depose you from your responsible office. You have to-day shown yourself entirely unworthy to wear this ornament. Now go into the next room, and wait quietly until I bring the omelet in to you." And she opened the door and led Ernestine from the room.

When she went to her, shortly afterwards, she found her sitting sewing, her eyes red with weeping. "Darling," she said to her, "I do believe you are crying about that trifle! I must be a little strict with you, you see, or you will never learn to economize and take care of things. Ernestine dear, you are not vexed with me for scolding you? I was only in jest."

"How could I be vexed with you? I am crying because I am of no earthly use in the world! If it were not for you, you angel, what would become of me? There is no child eight years old more clumsy and awkward than I. Who would bear with me as you do? Do you think I am not humiliated by these thoughts? For these last two months, ever since my money was exhausted, you have supported me by your hard work at that school, and I could do nothing for you but prepare our frugal noonday meal while you are away, and now I cannot even do that! It is shameful! Have I made the most complicated chemical combinations, and yet can I not make decent soup? Have I overcome the greatest difficulties, and yet are these simple tasks beyond me? This cannot go on. I promise you I will take myself in hand, and you shall not have to fast again when you come from school."

"My dear Ernestine, I do not believe you can ever learn these things. They are too far beneath you."

"My superiority is truly deplorable," replied Ernestine. "It does not help me to discharge the smallest duty. Difficulties always incite me, and, now that I see how difficult these trifles are, I am determined to master them."

Gretchen handed her a piece of the omelet. "Now put away your work, or your dinner will be quite cold."

Ernestine laid aside the skirt upon which she was working. "I shall never get it together again. I wish I had not ripped it apart!"

"Why, you could never have worn it, with the front breadth so scorched. But I will help you this evening. It is my fault that you scorched it,--I should not have let you make the fire,--so it is no more than reasonable that I should help you to repair the injury. But, Ernestine dear, you do not eat."

"I have had enough. If you would have allowed me, I could have made two omelets out of those eggs."

Gretchen laughed merrily. "Hear her say how much better she could have made it! Well, only wait, day after to-morrow is Sunday, and I shall be at home, and then you may cook as much as you please, under my direction. That will be a real holiday for you."

"Ah, Gretchen, how often I think of the Staatsrätin, when she wanted to teach me to prepare the beans for cooking, and I felt it an occupation so far beneath my dignity! I did not understand her then, but I have learned to do so now." She sat lost in sad reflections.

Gretchen looked at Ernestine's plate, and shook her head. "What shall I get for you that you can eat? If you would only let me accept something now and then from my guardian. He would be so glad to assist us."

"Gretchen, I have nothing to do with what he gives you," said Ernestine gravely, "but no morsel that he might send us should pass my lips, any more than I would accept one of the two dresses he sent to you. I know I am severe, for I force you to starve with me, but, God willing,"--and she uttered the name of God with more reverence than is usually shown by those who have it constantly on their lips,--"it will not last much longer. I must surely obtain a situation soon, and then you, you dear, faithful child, will be free to return to the Möllners, or whithersoever you choose, and begin to enjoy your young life. I will confess to you, Gretchen, that I wrote again, the day before yesterday, to the agent in Frankfort, begging him to do all that he could for me. There must be a place for me somewhere in this wide world."

She threaded her needle with difficulty, and began to sew again. Two large tears fell upon her work, but she brushed them hastily away, that Gretchen might not see them.

"Dear Ernestine," Gretchen said, when she had carried away the plates, "I must go now, for half-past one has struck. Do not sew too long, and pray forget your sad thoughts. Some place for you is sure to offer. It would, to be sure, have been better if we could have lived in Frankfort, instead of coming out here to Rothenheim. Then you would have been able to see the people yourself. But the living there was really too expensive, and I was certain of employment here. Oh, if people only knew you, they would seize upon you instantly. If I could only induce my good directress to see you, she never could withstand you! Now good-by, dearest and best,--all good spirits protect you in the dark,--you know we have no light this evening!"

"Never mind that, Gretchen. I will think of father Leonhardt, who is always in the dark, while for us the sun will surely rise again."

"Yes indeed, Ernestine, always remember that,--'The sun will surely rise for us,' Gretchen called back into the room from the doorway.

"In that sense? Who can tell?" Ernestine thought sadly.

She looked for a moment irresolutely at the little spider-legged table that served as dining- and writing-table. She would so like to write to Walter. It was now over a week since she had heard from him, and her scientific correspondence with this young friend was her sole self-indulgence,--the only tie that still connected her with her former pursuits. In all his letters he told her of his progress, asked her opinion upon many points, and glowed with enthusiasm for her genius. She could scarcely withstand the temptation to devote the time while it was yet light to writing. Her heart was still full of the wonderful dreams of the morning.

But she looked down at the skirt upon which she was working, and which she really stood in need of, and thought, "No, I was thoughtless this morning, and dreamed away the time, instead of cooking. I will be conscientious this afternoon, and work."

She seated herself, sighing heavily, at the window, and sewed on diligently. "Practice makes perfect," she had said in the essay that was to procure her admission to the lecture-room of the University. She never dreamed then how she was one day to prove the truth of the proverb. If she only had that essay now, she thought! She had forgotten to ask Dr. Möllner for it, and he had it still. What had he done with it? Should she reclaim it? No, assuredly not! He had written to her but once since her flight from Hochstetten, and had afterwards sent her the proceeds of the sale of her furniture, without one friendly word,--only transacting her business for her as formally as for a stranger. And what a letter that was after her flight! She took it out to read it once more, although she had read it already again and again:

"I understand you, Ernestine. I expected this. It would have been unjust to our future to put force upon your feelings. God will one day guide me out of this dilemma. Until then, live in peace, and gratify a pride that I am now convinced nothing can break. Perhaps in time it may consume itself, and perhaps love may overcome it. I will endure, as I have learned to do since I first knew you. There is a strength in you such as I never believed a woman could possess, and with which I know not how to contend. I do not grudge you the triumph that this confession affords you. It is a poor delight in comparison with that which love would yield you, if you did not scorn it. Ah, Ernestine, could I have snatched you from your poverty to my heart and home, my joy would have been beyond that of mortals. A grateful smile from you would have been more than worlds to me. But you do not choose, since you would sacrifice nothing for me, to accept any sacrifice from me. You choose to be your husband's equal in all respects,--to owe nothing to any human being. I forgive you your pride in this respect, for it presupposes an exaggerated self-depreciation. As you think so lightly of yourself,--as you do not dream of your wealth of charms, of the power that you possess to bless and enrich,--you cannot believe that you can bestow a treasure to the worth of which the wealth of the world is nothing. Perhaps this is partly my fault. In my desire to deal truthfully with you, I have neglected to impress this fact upon you. But, Ernestine, it seems to me

a true woman does not ask, 'How much do I receive, and what can I give in return?' She accepts in love what is offered in love, and is glad to owe everything to him to whom she is everything. She gives him all that she can, and never stints him of the dearest delight that he can have,--that of labouring and toiling for one so dear to him. She willingly wears the fetters of dependence, regarding them only as ties binding her more closely to the loved one. You cannot feel so, Ernestine. It would be unjust to require it of you, and you were wrong if you feared I should seek to detain you by force. I only used force to preserve you from a menacing peril. Now you are safe. The world into which you are going will be only a school for you, and you have need of this school. Therefore, choose your own path, and prove the independence, your right to which you insist upon asserting. I would not exact what would be a blessing only as a free gift. There was no need of your leaving us as you did, without even a farewell to my mother, who had grown so fond of you and nursed you so tenderly. It pained her that you should do so.

"I will not speak of what I suffered upon finding you gone upon my return from town, leaving only those few lines of farewell. You are bent upon maintaining the dignity of your sex, and, in such an important undertaking, it is scarcely worth while to consider the wrecked happiness of one human life.

"Farewell, and, if I can serve you in anything, command me.

JOHANNES."

When she first received this letter, she had sunk fainting into Gretchen's arms. Since then Möllner's name had never passed her lips, and almost five months had gone by. She had not allowed a thought of him to enter her mind, except when, as now, some other subject had brought him vividly before her, and then she punished herself by quickly thinking of other things. Whence came the tears that now trickled down her cheeks? Her cold, benumbed hands trembled as she wiped them away. She bravely choked them down, and thought--poor child!--that she was not crying, when she swallowed down the bitter drops that welled up from her heart. Such weeping is the bitterest of all.

The shades of night fell fast, and she could no longer see to sew. There was an end of a candle on the shelf, and she lighted it, but it scarcely burned half an hour before it died out and she was left in darkness. She began to arrange and open the narrow beds that stood against the wall of the room, and, as she did so, thought of her good Willmers. How kind it was of the Frau Staatsrätthin to take the faithful soul into her service! Fie! thinking of him again! What weakness! The little room grew darker and darker. The panes began to be covered with frost, and the light from the neighbour's room opposite glittered in prismatic colours upon the ice-flowers and trees. They were wealthier over there than Ernestine, for they could afford a light. They had not poured their petroleum on the salad, to be sure, but then they had not been visited by the Snow-queen! Ernestine sat down wearily by her bed, and rested her head on the pillow. She felt better when her body was in entire repose, she thought.

How wearily she had lain upon her soft bed six months ago in Hochstetten! And how anxious she had been to live! Would it have been so terrible to lose such a life as this? Then it seemed as if a strong, tender hand clasped hers, and she felt a quick, anxious breath upon her brow. She knew it well, and the gentle questioning that was sure to follow,--knew that firm, quiet pressure upon her heart to count its pulsations. And if she had only clasped it fast,--that strong, tender hand,--she would not now be sitting here alone in the dark! "Oh, Johannes!" she gasped, and extended her arms. Then there was a noise of some one stumbling upstairs,--that could not be Gretchen. There was a knock at the door. "Who is there?" cried Ernestine, frightened.

"Postman," a rough voice answered from without.

"Oh, a letter from the agent," thought Ernestine, opening the door.

"Four kreutzers," said the man, handing her a letter.

Ernestine stood aghast. "Is it not prepaid? I--I have not a single kreutzer in the world--we shall have no money until to-morrow."

"No kreutzers, and no light? Hm--hm! Such a beautiful lady, with no money in her pocket? Well, well, you can pay me to-morrow. I'll trust you until then."

"Thank you, you are very kind," Ernestine stammered, greatly ashamed. She was obliged to run in debt to the postman.

"Have you no light, to show me the way down-stairs? I shall break my legs or my neck upon these steep, narrow steps."

"I will lead you down. I know the way, and I must go down to read my letter by a street-lamp."

"Good God! what poverty! Go down to the people on the lower floor--they will give you a candle-end."

"No, I will not. They are not respectable people, and I will have nothing to do with them. The poorer one is, the prouder one must be--so as not to sink too low. You are a good man, Herr

Bittner. Tell no one how poor we are."

"No, if you say so, but something ought to be done for you. I have seen what a hard time you have had of it ever since you came here. It's none of my business. I can only hope that there may be something good in the letter that I brought you,--and I do hope so, with all my heart. Good-evening."

"God grant it!" said Ernestine, going into the street to read her letter by the gas-lamp there. A fine snow was falling again, and the passers-by looked at her in amazement. The colour mounted to her forehead, but she could not wait until morning to read this letter, which she felt sure contained her fate. It was from the Frankfort agent who was to procure a situation for her, and was short and to the point:

"FRÄULEIN VON HARTWICH:

"You wish me to tell you frankly how it is that I have as yet procured no situation for you. I will do so,--for I see from your note that you accuse me in your thoughts of a negligence that I should be sorry to be guilty of towards any one,--least of all towards yourself.

"You yourself, unfortunately, Fräulein von Hartwich, furnish the reason why I have hitherto been unable to procure a situation for you. No agent in the world would be able to find a position as governess in a respectable family for a lady bearing such a reputation as yours. For their children's sake, people are unwilling to receive into their houses a person who has written as you have done against religion and in favour of the emancipation of woman. You assure me, I know, that you have altered your opinions, and that you yourself now condemn these writings. But no one will believe in such a forced conversion. Besides, in your advertisement in the papers you referred to the Prorector of the University at N----, without giving any name. I can only conclude that you must have been mistaken in the person of the Prorector, for the present holder of the office is a Professor Herbert, who gives the strongest possible testimony against you, and has already destroyed your prospects in three separate instances, by referring people to your books,--after reading which, no one would listen to a word in your behalf."

Ernestine's arms dropped by her sides. From delicacy, she had suppressed Möllner's name in the papers, entirely forgetting that at this time the office of Prorector was held but for a year by one person. She remembered how she had mortally offended Herbert on the only occasion when she had met him, and she knew that this man's mortified vanity had made him her implacable foe. But that was a secondary matter. The blameless need fear no foe. It was her own fault that Herbert had the power to destroy her prospects. He had not maligned her, he had simply referred to the books which she had written. She had herself whetted the knife that he had used against her. She had only herself to blame.

Never had the phantom of the past loomed so monstrously before her as now. There she stood,--she, who had thought herself able to defy the world,--starving and freezing in the cold, reading by the light of a street-lamp the anathema that society hurls at the woman who offends it. The iron wheels of conventionality, in the path of which she had so boldly thrown herself, had passed over her prostrate form. She was only a helpless, desolate woman.

She was scarcely capable of reading any further. She held the sheet in her trembling hands, caring not to decipher the few words of condolence with which the agent closed his communication. The snow-flakes wetted the paper, so that the letters ran together, and in the wintry wind it fluttered to and fro in her hand.

Her feet were stiff with cold as she turned into the house again and groped her way up the dark staircase. Gretchen's return was unusually delayed, and Ernestine longed so for her sympathy and advice.

What should she do? She could not permit her sister to sacrifice the best years of her life to her support. She could no longer be dependent upon the kindness of such a child. What should she attempt? Must she beg from door to door? How could she earn her own living, when she had been taught none of the arts by which to earn it? In these last few months Gretchen had taught her something of what was indispensable in such great need. She had never dreamed how difficult the things were that she had accounted so unimportant. She had come to the point where self-respect is imperilled in the struggle for mere subsistence. She wrung her hands, and called out into the darkness, "O God, take pity on me, and guide me through this valley of the shadow of death!"

And the bitter doubt whether He would listen to her cry would arise within her heart. She reviewed in her mind the miserable superficial essays that she had written denying Him, and felt that she was justly punished. How little had she thought, when exulting in the attention that they had excited, that she should ever feel herself disgraced by their authorship! As yet, she had uttered no reproach against her uncle. He had expiated by his death his theft of her property, but his crime against her mind and soul he could never expiate,--this it was that now branded him with infamy in her memory. What a happy woman she might now have been, if he had not

misdirected her ambition! What friends might have been hers, had he not made a misanthrope of her! and now, when starvation stared her in the face, the demon of his teaching snatched from her lips the bread that she might have earned.

When Gretchen at last returned, she found Ernestine crouching upon the hearth, gazing into the fire that she had kindled to warm her wet feet and to cook the evening meal.

"What are you doing, Ernestine dear?" she asked anxiously.

"I am praying for daily bread," she replied in a monotone.

Poor Gretchen listened sorrowfully to all that Ernestine had to tell her. She knew that for such a nature as Ernestine's this state of dependence and inactivity was worse than death, and that no love or devotion on her part could reconcile her proud sister to such a lot. She could advise nothing. The only thing that Ernestine could do for her own support was, perhaps, copying. But who in the little town would have anything to copy? And they could hardly live unless Ernestine was able to earn something. Gretchen's modest salary would hardly suffice to keep them from starvation. She did not mind any amount of deprivation for herself,--but could she see Ernestine pine and sicken for want of nourishing food? And she had promised solemnly to accept no help from Möllner or Hilsborn. What was to be done?

After a long, sleepless night, she arose at dawn, and, while Ernestine was still sleeping, sat down and wrote to Hilsborn. She wrote hurriedly, and the long letter was wet with tears that Ernestine would have been grieved to see. She finished it before Ernestine awoke, and her eyes began to sparkle again, as if they trusted that this letter would change the whole aspect of affairs.

"Gretchen," said Ernestine, as Gretchen leaned over her to give her a morning kiss, "how gay you look! Do you not feel the heavy burden that I have laid upon your shoulders?"

"Oh, Ernestine," her sister replied, "as long as I have you I will be thankful for you, however dark matters may look outside."

Ernestine looked at her thoughtfully. "Gretchen, there is a greatness in your fidelity and self-sacrifice that I never before conceived of. Now first I know what Dr. Möllner meant by true womanliness. This womanliness your father took from me,--you, his child, have restored it to me. It is the greatest gift you have given me, and it atones for his depriving me of it."

Gretchen breathed a sigh of relief. "When you say so, I seem to hear the angels tell me that mercy will be shown to my poor father. Indeed, dear Ernestine, you are in alliance with beings of a better world, or you could not know how to console and inspire me thus. Indeed, when you look at me so tenderly I must believe there is redemption for the soul of my father. What can I do to repay you for such consolation?"

## **CHAPTER XII.**

### **THE THIRD POWER.**

"What the law of force fails to accomplish, the intellect will effect,--where the intellect fails, love succeeds!" That was what he said," said Ernestine. Again her thoughts were involuntarily occupied with Johannes. "I wish I could write the sermons for his reverence, instead of copying them,--that would be such an excellent text." Thus she broke forth one day while seated with Gretchen at the table, where the latter was busy finishing the new dress that Hilsborn had sent her.

"Have you proposed it to Herr Pastor?" asked Gretchen with a smile.

"If he were not so conceited, I certainly would do so. But I suppose he would be offended."

"I rather suppose so too," laughed Gretchen.

"There is a Nemesis in it," said Ernestine, as she sat making a pen. "Here am I, who have hardly ever listened to a sermon in my life, obliged to copy sermons for my bread. Well," she added gravely, "it is just."

And again her pen flew quickly over the paper. After some time she sat up, with a long breath. "I have learnt to deny myself and to pray, but I have yet to learn the hardest task of all,--patience."



"It must be a terrible drudgery to such a mind as yours merely to write down the thoughts of another," said Gretchen.

"If there only were thoughts here, but these are nothing but empty words. And I must not even correct them,--it is mental death!" She wrote on for awhile, then suddenly raised her head and broke out, "At least they might let women have something to do with religion, if they deny our right to meddle with science or politics. Religion is so much a matter of feeling, and feeling is a woman's prerogative. Humility, self-sacrifice, and submission are native to woman, and a woman's lips could discourse far more eloquently than a man's of these Christian qualities. Why should a woman not be found worthy to declare the word of God? Why?" She suppressed a sigh. "Ah, the old indignation is getting possession of me! I will not yield to it,--such independence of thought does not become a mere copyist." She tried to go on with her writing, but her cheeks were flushed, and the tears stood in her eyes. "Oh, Gretchen, I shall never live it down,--this pity for our poor sex. It will always be the same,--any allusion to our wrongs cuts me to the very quick."

Gretchen laid her hand upon her shoulder. "Dear Ernestine, we will speak of this some other time. Now remember that you have promised that your copy shall be ready by four o'clock."

"You are right I will finish it instantly," said Ernestine, dipping the pen in the ink. "No, I cannot let such nonsense stand as it is!" she exclaimed after a pause. "The man is going to have the sermons printed,--he will thank me for correcting the worst faults."

"Ernestine, take care,--he may be offended," said Gretchen.

"Oh, no, surely I may change a couple of words. Whatever goes through my hands shall be as free from errors as possible."

Gretchen shook her head.

Ernestine completed her copy in about half an hour, and prepared to carry it to the pastor.

The days were beginning to grow longer. Although it was past four o'clock, the winter sun was looking brightly into the room, and upon the roofs below their windows the snow was melting into little rills.

"Shall you be back soon?" Gretchen called after Ernestine as she went out.

"In a very little while," was the answer, as the speaker left the room with her bundle of papers under her arm.

Gretchen was left alone in the room.

Another half-hour passed. A firm step was heard ascending the stairs. Gretchen listened intently. Her heart beat fast with joyous expectancy. Who was it that was intruding upon their seclusion?

She had not long to wait, there was a loud knock at the door. Gretchen's "Come in" was instantly followed by a "Thank God, 'tis he!" for Möllner stood upon the threshold.

"I knew you would come,--I was sure my letter to Herr Hilsborn would bring you,--I am delighted!" cried the girl, drawing him into the room. He said nothing in reply to her welcome, but let her take his hat and coat, and then, with a glance around the wretched apartment, exclaimed, in a tone of horror-stricken compassion, "Good God!"

Gretchen understood him, and gave him time to recover himself.

At last he asked, "Where is she?"

"She has gone to carry home some copying that the pastor gave her to do. She will be here very soon. Do not be startled at seeing her look so badly. We have lived wretchedly of late."

Johannes took her hand. "Gretchen, can't you hide me somewhere? I am not sufficiently composed to see her at present,--I must collect myself."

"Yes, come into our kitchen. I had better prepare Ernestine, too, for seeing you,--she is weak, and must be treated with great caution."

She conducted him into the little, cold, dark room that she called a kitchen. "Look! the poor girl has cooked our wretched dinners in this place for the last five months, and shed many a tear when she spoiled anything. Oh, if you could have seen, as I have, our proud Ernestine work and struggle and starve, you would not have refrained so long from putting an end to our misery."

"It is well that I could not see it. I should have been unnerved, and spoiled all by precipitation."

"Forgive me, but indeed you are hard. Hilsborn would not have left me here one instant longer than he could have helped."

"And he would have been right, Gretchen. But Ernestine and you are very different characters. She needed, and would have, this struggle for life,--even now I tremble lest she should refuse to let me put an end to it."

"Oh, no! when you see Ernestine, you will acknowledge that it was high time to hasten to her. Since all her efforts to obtain a situation have failed, her spirit seems well-nigh broken. I think in a little while she would have been hopelessly embittered, and her health would have given way entirely."

Johannes threw himself into the wooden chair by the window, where, in the midst of the hard prose of her life, Ernestine had been visited by such wondrous dreams. "Here is a letter to you, my dear Gretchen, from Hilsborn. He would have been only too glad to come with me, but every moment of his time is in demand."

"He is good and true," said Gretchen, "and I know how he trusts in me, but I cannot leave Ernestine until her future is assured."

"You are a noble child, Gretchen! If Ernestine had the least suspicion of what you are renouncing for her sake, she would never permit----" He paused, a flush mounted to his brow, his lips trembled, as he whispered, "There she is! I hear her coming! For God's sake, Gretchen, give me time to collect myself."

"I will go and meet her, that she may not come in here," said Gretchen.

Johannes handed her a book. "Here, lay this upon her table. It is a copy of the same edition of Andersen's Fairy Tales that I once gave her, and that was burnt. It may prepare her for seeing me."

"Yes, yes!" Gretchen hurried into the next room, and laid the book in Ernestine's work-basket. She started at the haggard appearance of Ernestine who entered with eyes flashing, and an expression of sullen indignation upon every feature.

"What is the matter, Ernestine?" she asked.

Ernestine threw off her hat and cloak, wrung her hands, and walked hurriedly to and fro. "That has gone too!"

"What, Ernestine?--what?"

"The pastor has refused to give me any more sermons to copy, because I ventured to correct his errors."

"Oh, is that all?" cried Gretchen, very much relieved.

"Is that all?" Ernestine repeated bitterly. "You say that, because, faithful and true as you are, you see no hardship in the prospect of supporting me again, without any help on my part, by your own unwearied exertions. You can say, 'Is that all?' but I, who fancied myself the first and proudest of my sex, am a beggar, dependent upon charity, fit for nothing but the duties of a common maid-servant, and not able to perform even these decently. I have lost all confidence, all hope, in myself. That is all!"

Gretchen caressed her lovingly, and smiled,--how could she smile at this moment? "Ah, Ernestine, how could you reject Dr. Möllner when he first wooed you? I should have thought you would have given your heart to him upon the spot. I only hope you may never know what you threw away."

"Gretchen," said Ernestine gravely, "it is long since I have learned what I then rejected. The pride with which I turned away from him, refusing to sacrifice my foolish ambition to make myself a name, has been severely punished. As in our dreams we are sometimes borne aloft as upon wings into immeasurable space, until our balance is lost and we fall headlong, awaking with the shock, so my ambition carried me to heights where I could not sustain myself. I fell, but strong and tender arms were held out to receive me, and I awoke to find myself embraced by them instead of prostrate in a frightful abyss. Then, in the confusion of my waking, I thought those sustaining arms were fetters. I thrust them from me, and now I lie crushed and broken on the ground." She crossed her arms upon the table, and bowed her head on them.

Gently Gretchen took the book from the basket, and, opening it where she saw that Johannes had put a mark, she silently pushed it towards Ernestine, who raised her head at the touch, and at first looked absently at the pages before her, then gazed and gazed as if utterly unable to comprehend what she saw. It was her dear old book,--there was the swan that she had burned. "Heavens!" she cried, between laughter and tears, "can this be real? My swan! My swan! Who brought me this? Oh, dreams of my childhood, who has restored you to me?"

And she knelt beside the table, and laid her cheek upon the book. Before her closed eyes it was night again. Before her upon the table burned the dim night-lamp, and her father lay asleep close at hand. She read the story of the Ugly Duckling, and above her softly rustled the snowy plumage of the swan, and among her curls trembled the leaves of the oak whence the handsome

boy had snatched her from mortal peril. And then her father awoke, and sent her up to her uncle. There stood the telescope, through which she was again gazing, thirsting for a peace which her young heart presaged without the power to grasp,--filled with longing to be borne up--up to those starry worlds gliding so silently through space. She knew now what she had so desired,--Love! But she searched for it among those worlds in vain. Suddenly she was standing upon the hill in the garden of her castle, and above her hovered the faithful little mermaid, in the shape of a sunset cloud, while a deep, tender voice whispered, "Poor swan!" Here, here was what she sought.

"Poor swan!" The words sounded distinctly now in her ears, not in her dreaming fancy only. She opened her eyes, and started up with a low cry, and would have fled,--fled to the uttermost ends of the earth,--but she could not stir from the spot. She tottered and would have fallen, but two strong arms upheld her, and for a moment she lost all consciousness. This was rest indeed.

"Shall I get some water?" asked Gretchen.

"Oh, no. Do not grudge me one moment," said Johannes, clasping the lifeless form to his heart "She will recoil from me as soon as she comes to herself."

"You should not have spoken to her so suddenly," said Gretchen.

Ernestine opened her eyes, looked up and around for a moment in bewilderment, and then extricated herself instantly from the arms in which she had found such rest.

"Did I not know her well?" Johannes said, by a glance, to Gretchen.

"You came so unexpectedly,--I was weak. I am ashamed of myself," she said, struggling for composure.

"You might be ashamed, if you could be what you call strong at this moment," he replied. At a sign from him, Gretchen withdrew.

Johannes gazed for a moment with intense devotion into Ernestine's eyes. "Dear heart, let me speak one fervent, last word to you. I know that I just now held another Ernestine in my arms than she who fled from me almost half a year ago. I felt it in the throbbing of your heart. But fear nothing, I am not come to take advantage of your helpless condition,--to wring from you a decision which might be stigmatized, in your present circumstances, as extorted from you by necessity. I understand you now. Yours is a nature never to yield to pressure from without,--it must take form and direction from within. It would be as useless to attempt controlling such a nature by force as to endeavour to make a rose bloom by tearing open the bud. We might destroy, but we could not unfold it. I have done all that I could to restore to you what is as necessary to you as light and air,--your independence. You once accused me of selfishness and interested motives. You shall be convinced that you did me injustice in this respect." He drew a paper from his breast-pocket. "I have succeeded through my friend Brenter, in St. Petersburg, in procuring you the offer of a position as Teacher of Natural Science in the famous Normal School established there. The place is a capital one, and has hitherto been occupied by men only. You will be entire mistress of your time, with the exception of the few hours daily spent in instruction. You can easily pursue your studies, and I can procure you admission to the scientific society of St. Petersburg. Your life there will be what your former ambition craved. You can earn your livelihood honourably, and sooner or later you will have an opportunity of attaining the goal of your desires,--a degree, for the Russian universities are not so strict as the German in the matter of admitting women to a share in their honours. Here is Brenter's letter. You see it makes you independent of all aid, even of mine. And now I venture again to ask you to make a sacrifice for me,--a great sacrifice. You cannot fear, if you now grant my suit, that any suspicion can be cast upon the freedom of your choice, or that you can be accused of being driven by necessity into my arms. If you yield now, you renounce brilliant prospects for my sake. I will urge nothing in my own behalf. Leave me, and there is a great future before you. Be mine, and my heart and home stand wide open to receive you. I will only say, 'Choose, Ernestine.'"

"And have you done this,--this for me?" said Ernestine, trembling with emotion. "How truly have you understood and respected my pride! How firm and yet how tender you are with me! How can I thank you, how repay you?"

"How, Ernestine? Let your own heart answer."

"I cannot listen to my heart alone. I must do whatever will make me worthiest of such devoted love. What shall,--what should I decide?"

"Let me tell you, if you do not know, for the last time, that true pride will teach you that you can give me nothing half so precious as yourself. The value of this gift no worldly wealth or honours could enhance. True humility will teach you to yield your fate unquestioningly to the man who gives you his very life. Go from me, and you may be great, but you cannot be womanly, and what is such greatness, attained at the cost of a heart? Give up the false pride that would seek fame beyond the bounds of a woman's sphere, and confess that you can do nothing greater than to enrich and bless, as you will when you are what God intended you should be--a true, loving woman." He broke off. "But, I repeat, the choice is yours."

"The choice? Is there any choice left for me?" cried Ernestine with sparkling eyes. "Shall I dissemble now, and try to conceal what I have scarcely been able for a long time to control! What are learning and fame, what the pride of position that you have offered me, compared with the happiness of this moment? Away with them all, and with my false pride! My choice is made, Johannes." And she sank upon his breast.

He clasped her as in a dream. Their lips met in a first long kiss, in which the lover breathed forth his long-pent-up tenderness.

She trembled like a scarce-opened flower in the first wind of summer, and yet all was as well with her as when she had, as a child, measured herself against the Titanic force of the elements in commotion around her. She knew now that love was no weakness, but a mighty power, and that it was divine to put forth this power. She raised her head at last, and looked at him with tears in her eyes. "Johannes,--dearest, best,--forgive--forgive my faults and failings--I repented them so long ago!"

He leaned over her, and whispered, "Ernestine, only love, do you now confess the third power of which I once told you?"

"Yes, yes, I confess and bow before it." She folded her hands, and her face seemed for a moment transfigured. "Oh, Spirit of Love, dwell in my heart, and teach me to be worthy of him who is so dear to me."

\* \* \* \* \*

There was a double wedding such as the town of N---- had never seen before! Möllner and Ernestine, Hilsborn and Gretchen, were married on the same day. There was a great crowd before the quiet house where Professor Möllner lived, to witness the arrival of the numerous guests who were to escort the bridal parties to church.

"That is one of the bridesmaids, but an old one," was whispered among the people as Elsa and her brother alighted from their carriage.

"And that is another, but a very little one," was added, as a stalwart young man lifted a charming brown-eyed child out of the carriage. She was dressed in white with pink ribbons, and had a huge bouquet in her hand.

"But, oh, she has only one arm!" was uttered in a tone of compassion as she passed into the house, accompanied by her companion bridesmaid, and disappeared beneath the garlands and among the flowering shrubs with which the hall was decorated.

Within, the large drawing-room was crowded with the science and respectability of N----. There had been great astonishment among the inhabitants of the place when Johannes' actual engagement to the Hartwich was announced, but all agreed that Professor Möllner always knew what he was about; and those who were invited to the wedding declared themselves delighted with the match.

Even Elsa was appeased by Möllner's request that she would act as bridesmaid. "I am glad to be his bridesmaid," she said to her sister-in-law in the morning. "It will break my heart, but I will not repine! I shall fade away like a blossom that zephyrs waft from the tree before it can become fruit. Oh, no, I do not repine,--I only share the fate of thousands of my sisters. The blossom dying the death of innocence in its virgin purity is not to be pitied--no, let pity be for him who could crush it beneath his tread in his onward path without ever dreaming of the delight that it might have given him." She did not foresee that the poetic death that she anticipated would be very long delayed, and that she would be a welcome guest in Möllner's house in future years, as "Aunt Elsa" to a throng of attentive little listeners whom she would delight with many a tale about the elves, gnomes, and wild flowers of her youth. She was dressed in character on the present occasion, in sea-green, with a wreath of cherry-blossoms in her hair; a long narrow scarf of white satin fluttered about her slender figure. "Many might be more richly clad," she thought, "but none so romantically and poetically."

Her brother was in a sad state of mind as he this morning put on the dress-coat in which he had made his first appearance a year before in the Countess Worronska's boudoir. He had just heard that the beautiful countess had been killed in a race at St. Petersburg, and his grief at the death of the woman whom he still loved was increased by the necessity of concealing it.

In spite of the number of guests, there was a solemn silence reigning in the large apartment. For all were awaiting the entrance of the two brides.

Who has not been conscious of a slight shudder at the first appearance of a bride, a young girl, about to take the most important step of her life? All eyes were turned towards the door of the antechamber.

Johannes, with his mother, and Hilsborn, with Heim, placed themselves opposite it, the guests withdrew from around them, and a space through the centre of the room was left free.

Slowly, and enveloped in her floating veil as in a white cloud, her head bowed beneath the

myrtle-wreath, Ernestine entered the room. Her dark eyelashes were drooping, and upon her broad brow true womanhood was enthroned. She paused, bewildered and confused by the presence of so many people, among whom the whisper ran, "How lovely the bride looks!" In defiance of all rule, Johannes hastened to her, and clasped her hands in his.

"My swan," he whispered, "now you have unfolded your plumage!"

Ernestine bent her head lower still, and a tear fell on his hand.

"Johannes," she said softly, "let me confess,--I have loved you ever since you made known to me, eleven years ago, the promise of the swan, but I could not know that it was only through you that the promise was to be fulfilled!"

"You loved me then, and could reject and torment me! Oh, Ernestine, what penalty is there for such cruelty?"

"Only one, dearest, but a severe one,--grief for time wasted."

"Amen, my daughter," said the Staatsrätthin gravely.

The second bride, Gretchen, now entered, with blushing cheeks and a radiant smile. Hilsborn, with his foster-father, went to her, and Heim gave her his paternal benediction. Then came Angelika, and the faithful Willmers, who had discharged the office of dressing-maid to the pair.

From a corner of the room, Johannes led forward a bowed, aged form, the friend whom Ernestine had chosen to give her away,--old Leonhardt.

"Father," she said, gently taking his hand in one of hers, while she held out the other to the Staatsrätthin,--"father, mother in spirit and in truth, I thank you both."

"Ernestine," said Leonhardt, "only one day in my life,--the day of my own marriage,--equals this in happiness. God bless you!" The old man was happy indeed, for the day before Walter had handed him a parchment roll with the announcement "It is my diploma."

"Are we never going to start?" suddenly exclaimed Moritz. "These lovers are not in any hurry, apparently. They have had sufficient time to make up their minds,--pray Heaven they are not regretting their decision. To church, then, in God's name."

"In God's name," Ernestine whispered, and the words were spoken with her whole soul.

## **A YEAR LATER.**

"Who would have thought that Ernestine would ever have turned out such a woman?" said Moritz Kern in a suppressed tone to his wife.

The pair were walking to and fro in Möllner's study, which was furnished precisely like Ernestine's former library, and they were evidently awaiting some event with anxiety.

Half hidden by the heavy folds of the blue curtains, Hilsborn and Gretchen were standing at the window. They did not speak, their hearts were too full. Gretchen's hands were folded, as though she were breathing a silent prayer, and Hilsborn stood grave and anxious beside her. Even Moritz stopped now and then and looked towards the door of the adjoining room, as if expecting it to open, but he evidently wished to conceal all emotion, and talked on gaily. "Yes, who would have thought it? Johannes must have been puzzled indeed to know how to train that scatterbrain."

"I always told you that Johannes could do whatever he chose, and Ernestine was always sweet and good in reality, only she had been so warped by her education," said Angelika. "I liked her from the first moment that I saw her after she was grown up, and you know I always defended her from your attacks. And now all is just as I said it would be."

"Oh, of course! I really should like to hear of anything that you women did not know all about beforehand," laughed Moritz. "You are always so much sharper than we. If Ernestine had made her husband as unhappy as she makes him happy, we should hear the same thing,--'Oh, I told you so, I saw how it would be from the first, I never liked her.' I know you well!"

"Are you not ashamed," pouted Angelika, "to go on with your silly jests when we are all so anxious? If Johannes should lose his wife, what would become of him?"

"Ah, bah! he is not going to lose her. Don't be foolish," said Moritz.

Hilsborn came towards them. "Don't make yourself out worse than you are, Moritz," said he. "I never saw you look more troubled than you do just at this moment. You know well enough what Ernestine is to us all."

"Deuce take it, of course I know it!" cried Moritz,--"she's as much to me as to any of you,--but I hate to hear people cry before they are hurt. God keep her, she's a jewel of a woman!"

"Yes," said Gretchen, joining in the conversation, "such women are rare indeed. How she fulfils every duty, even those that she once considered so dull and commonplace!"

"Yes, yes," chimed in Angelika, "my mother is never weary of sounding her praises."

"This is the most wonderful thing she has accomplished yet," said Moritz. "Only hear these two notable housewives, Hilsborn, joining in a chorus of praise of a third! Did you ever hear anything like it? I never did."

"She deserves it all," answered Hilsborn. "And then she is invaluable to Johannes as a scientific companion and assistant. He could as ill spare her at his desk or in his laboratory as at the head of his household--or----"

"Hush!" interrupted Angelika, "did you not hear some one at the door?" And silence reigned in the room again for awhile.

"I hope it will be a boy,--Ernestine longs for a boy," sighed Angelika.

"Past two o'clock," said Hilsborn. "I wish they would send us some one to say how she is."

Suddenly the door was flung open, and old Heim's deep voice cried, "It is over."

"Thank God!" they all exclaimed as with one breath.

"Is it a boy?" asked Angelika.

"No, a girl!"

"A girl!" said Moritz. "Well, 'tis not pretty, but sin is uglier,' as the Suabian said."

"Do be quiet! What would Ernestine say if she heard you, you mocker?" said Angelika. "May we not go to her, Uncle Heim?"

"No, stay where you are," said the old man, closing the door.

Within Ernestine's apartment all was quiet and repose. Johannes was standing, mute with happiness, by Ernestine's side, supporting her head, when he was called to look at his little daughter, a bundle of snowy wrappings in her grandmother's arms.

He took the little creature from her and laid it by his wife's side. "Mother," was all he said, leaning over her enraptured for awhile, gazing into the pure delight mirrored in her eyes. At last he raised his head, and said, laughingly, "But, Ernestine, 'it is only a girl.'"

"Be it so. I do not question what God has sent me. I am a mother. I envy no man now, and our daughter shall never do so. We will cherish and train our child to be what a true woman should be, and some day she may say to one whom she loves, as I do to you, my dearest, 'Thank God that I am a woman, and that I am yours.'"

"Ernestine," said Johannes, "those are the dearest words you could utter. Happy the daughter of such a mother! Father Heim, mother dear, did you hear Ernestine's confession? She is reconciled at last to the destiny of her sex."

Ernestine gazed at the atom of being by her side, as if it were a miracle. She quite agreed with the Staatsrätthin that it was a wonderfully pretty child for a new-born baby, and, as she laid her hand upon its little heart and felt its regular beating, she smiled amid her tears, and would gladly have clasped it in her arms, only it seemed so frail and slight she was afraid of breaking it.

"Uncle Heim," she said, "I once thought that it would have been better if you had left me to die when my father gave me that almost fatal blow, but since then I have been often grateful to you for preserving my life, although never so grateful as at this moment."

"Ah, bah!" said the old man, "I was only the physician of your body. Reserve your gratitude for this fellow," he laid his hand upon Johannes' shoulder,--"he was the physician for your soul, and so judicious was his treatment, that now you can have some comfort of your life."

Ernestine looked up gratefully at her husband. "Yes, faithful physician of my soul,--your medicines were very bitter, but they were my salvation."

## FOOTNOTE:

[Footnote 1](#): See Du Bois Reymond: *Voltaire, in Relation to Natural Sciences*. Berlin, 1868.

## THE END

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