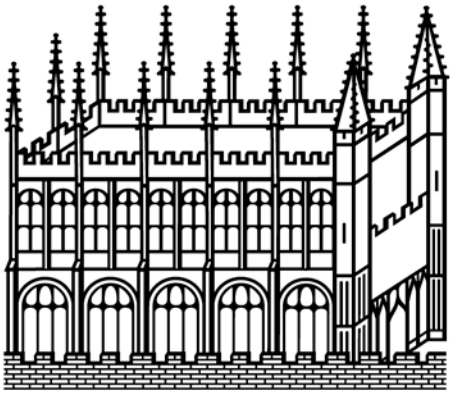

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IN THE COUNSELLOR'S HOUSE

MARLITT

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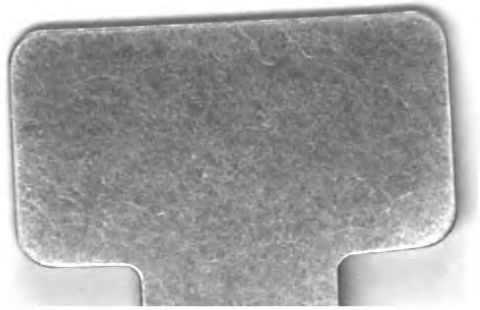

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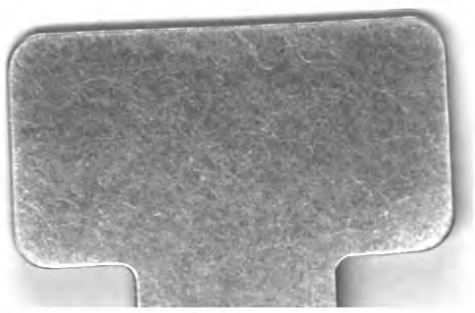

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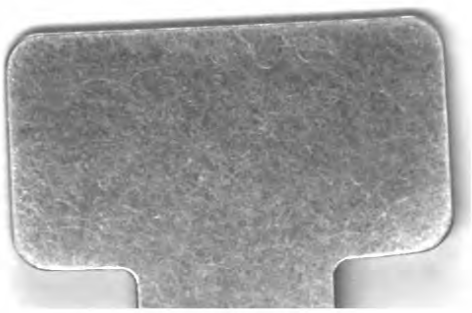

IN THE COUNSELLOR'S HOUSE.

BY

E. MARLITT,

AUTHOR OF "THE SECOND WIFE," ETC.

FROM THE GERMAN, BY ANNIE WOOD.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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IN THE COUNSELLOR'S HOUSE.

CHAPTER I.

SINCE the memorable evening of Kathe's début as a pianist, a week had come and gone; "a week of terrible fatigue," old Madame Urach remarked with a sigh as she rang for her maid and began finding fault with a dress she was to wear in the evening. The train was too short, the lace not wide enough, the sleeves too full, etc. Several grand evening parties had been given by some of their friends high in office, and what with after-

noon coffee drinkings, one or two dinners, and an entertainment at the Palace, in which Flora was to recite some verses of her own illustrative of a tableau-vivant, "they had hardly time to breathe."

Henriette was too weak and too ill to join in the gaiety, and Kathe remained at home with her, refusing every entreaty to go out, though often warmly invited and strongly urged by Madame Urach to do so.

The two young girls drank tea together in the cosy music-room, and Kathe exerted all her powers to try and amuse the invalid, and distract her thoughts from the festivities her soul longed for.

"I love society, Kathe," she would say plaintively, when the carriage had rolled away with Madame and Flora, and the two were left alone. "I feel wretched without it, and I think it hard sometimes that I am ill and misshapen. Grandmamma has

taught me to like excitement and the pomp and show of rank and wealth; it is hard, Kathe, very hard, that I am debarred from enjoying it just now, though I hate and despise the humbug and falseness of society more than I can tell you." Then her mood would change and she would say coaxingly, "Go and play for me, Kathe dear; your music makes me feel happier, and I am a wretch to grumble at my hard lot, when you are so kind and good to me."

And Kathe would go to the piano, and play everything she could think of to amuse and interest her suffering invalid sister, and remove from her mind the depressing effects of the contrast between her own weak state and plain appearance, and Flora's brilliant beauty.

One morning, a few days after the Counsellor's departure for Berlin on business, a superb bouquet of hot-house flowers arrived

for each of the sisters. When the lid of the box was opened, and the contents distributed according to the name attached to each nosegay, old Madame Urach frowned ominously. For Henriette and Flora the Counsellor had chosen beautiful camellias and fresh sweet-smelling violets, but for Kathe a daintily-arranged mixture of orange-flowers and myrtle.*

At first the old lady gave no heed to the peculiar distinction of flowers between Kathe's bouquet and those of her sisters but when Flora, who was present when the box arrived, laughingly pointed out the significance of the gift to the youngest, then it was that Madame Urach frowned ominously and looked very displeased.

"Really, grandmamma, you surely cannot imagine that after the huge sums of

* In Germany myrtle is significant of love and marriage.

money Moriz has spent to be ennobled, he would remain a widower, and let his name die out?" cried Flora with aggravating coolness. "He is comparatively young, is handsome, rich, and—noble! Kathe won't refuse him, that I know for certain."

In the meantime Kathe had carried off her bouquet, untied the wire around the flowers, sprinkled them with fresh water, and placed them on the work-table in her room, without being in the least conscious of their significant import, and innocent of any other sentiment about them but pure pleasure at the kind thoughtfulness of her absent guardian in sending to her, and each of her sisters, so pretty a present. But old Madame Urach was very miserable. A phantom had arisen to haunt the Villa, whose presence she would have banished if she could, but it seemed to follow her

everywhere, to wander through the costly furnished rooms, to creep into the shadows of the massive bronze ornaments, to glide over the rare porcelain cups and vases, each of which had been bought with rolls of bank-notes, and was the envy of all her friends; even to hover around the back of her favourite seat in the winter garden and embitter the pleasure of all she cared for in life. What was to be done? The old lady considered the question as if she were forty instead of seventy, and had half a life-time before her. The Counsellor had no *right* to marry again, she would forbid it, and he would have to obey. Did he not owe everything he possessed to her? It was through her that he had risen in the world, through her influence and by her connections that he had obtained his present enviable position in society. Had she not superintended the furnishing of the Villa,

and by her exquisite taste so arranged everything that the place had been converted into so well appointed a residence that even the Court circle visited there with pleasure? Besides, had it not been a great sacrifice on her part when she consented to head his establishment, and give tone and refinement to his somewhat plebeian household? And now that she had succeeded to her heart's content in all that she had undertaken to do, was she to be ruthlessly displaced from the head of his household by a young second wife who would consider all these magnificent apartments as belonging to her, perhaps even apportion to "grandmamma" the use of one or two rooms as a great favour? No, no, it should not be; not even Flora, the haughty daughter of her only child, would she willingly see placed in the position she herself had held so many years; how

much less then the granddaughter of the old miller, Flora's step-sister! The girl should go back to Dresden as soon as possible: that would be the first and wisest step to take to avoid such a calamity befalling her, and then the old lady told herself "all would be well again."

The next opportunity Madame Urach had of a little conversation with Kathe, she drew the girl on to speak of her home in Dresden, expressed great admiration at her beautiful playing, and lamented in strong terms the harm so many weeks' idleness would do just now at her age. She even hinted that for the sake of not losing time she herself would accompany Kathe back to Dresden shortly, and arrange for extra lessons from some celebrated foreign professor, who had just arrived in that town.

Kathe made no answer to this sudden show of interest in her music from the old

lady. She determined to remain on at the Villa till Dr. Bruck had given his consent to Henriette returning home with her. As yet he had said nothing, perhaps because his patient seemed daily to grow more weak and excitable. Every morning he called to see her at the same hour. Each of the girls had a small sitting-room to herself adjoining one the other, with a communicating door between, and Kathe could hear him talking brightly to Henriette, sometimes breaking forth into a hearty merry laugh that was catching in its influence, and made the young girl long to go in and join in the merriment. Dr. Bruck in Henriette's sitting-room was quite a different man to the grave thoughtful personage he appeared to be in the drawing-room in the evening.

It pleased and delighted Kathe always to hear him laugh, but she rarely

spoke to him herself, never joined in the conversation through her open door, though she could see him walking up and down the room as she sat at her table, working or reading. She had remarked more than once that Henriette always retired to her own sitting-room as the hour drew near for the daily medical visit, and that it seemed to vex and irritate her if she were followed.

The person Kathe chiefly conversed with at this time was Doctor Bruck's aunt, the curate's widow, whom she constantly met in Susanne's room when she went to pay the old housekeeper her evening visit. From her, Kathe learned that she had taken charge of her sister's orphan boy from the time he was eight years old; and that ever since, he had been as dear to her as a child, and the sun and joy of her life.

Kathe made it a rule always to accom-

pany the old lady to her home—guiding her steps carefully along the river-side, till they reached the rustic bridge, where the light burning in the old-fashioned porch shone broad and clear, and made the few yards to the house, however dark it was around, clear and safe for the most timid walker. Kathe used to wait and watch the widow go up the path and enter the porch, and sometimes she would linger on the bridge till she heard the Doctor's manly voice call out from his room, as he sprang forward to meet her—"Is that you, aunt?" Then she would speed away out of the lamp-light, and rush along the avenue so quickly, that she would have to stop and grow cool and regain her breath before entering the Villa, with the unconcerned manner and bearing befitting her appearance after a visit to old Susanne at the Mill-house.

The Counsellor had been gone a week or ten days, when the news came that he had sold his factory. It had been communicated by letter to Madame Urach, who was so overpowered with joy that she put aside her dignity and went straight to Henriette's room in her dressing-gown, where she knew the three girls would most likely be together. Sitting down in the nearest arm-chair, she said—

"Thank God, my dears, Moriz has got rid of that factory! and on such brilliant terms too, that he says he is quite astonished at his own good fortune;" and she laid her still beautiful hand on the table, and looked around with a very contented smile hovering over her lips. "He has by this means put an end to his business affairs, and of course can now turn his back on those horrid men he was obliged to associate with in business. Good gracious! when I

think of the people we have had to dinner sometimes, it would have been more becoming if they had dined in the kitchen ; ah, my dears, what agony I have gone through with them !—but it is all over now, all over, and I am very thankful."

Kathe was standing at the window from whence the factory could be seen, with its huge yard and over-lapping chimney.

"Look here, Madame !" the girl suddenly exclaimed ; "the yard is full of men and women, and even children—what can they mean ?" and she pointed to the distant factory, in front of which numbers of men and women were assembled, talking and gesticulating in the wildest manner.

"They have heard the news, that is what it is," replied the old lady, smiling and drawing towards the window. "The coachman informed me when he came up just now, that there is great excitement down

there—the hands are furious, because the establishment has been bought by a company of Jews; the workmen will reap now what they have sown. Moriz closed with this offer very suddenly, though he had an affection for the factory that I never could understand; still, as he has lately had bothers with the men, he has consented to throw it up entirely, and quite right too."

"I don't agree with you, grandmamma; it will look as if he feared for his own power over the men," remarked Flora, with curling lip; "if I had been he, I would not have sold the place just now for millions. The fellows should have been made to understand that their grumblings and demands were useless. My blood boils as I think that it will now be said, that those threatening letters to me were the cause of this sale."

"Don't distress yourself, Flora! No one

will impute the sale to your influence—they all know the courage, the soldier's courage and confidence you possess; one can see it flashing in your face a hundred yards off!" said Henriette mockingly.

Flora took no notice of this malicious remark; she rarely allowed herself to be annoyed with anything Henriette said lately. She smiled now as she repressed a yawn, and moved towards the door. Madame Urach also rose to dress for the early dinner, but turned when she reached the threshold of the door, to say, "Doctor Bruck thinks a little fresh air will do you good to-day, Kathe—he says you must go out."

"Yes, I know, and I am going as far as the forest, to smell the fresh rosin from the fir trees—I long to breathe the pure forest air."

"Then I will invite myself to go with

you," said Flora. "I also want air—air, to enable me to bear the burden of adverse circumstances——"

She offered her arm to her grandmother with a queenly air, to help her upstairs, and both ladies left the room.

Henriette stamped her foot with rage as the door closed, and refrained from a fit of tears with the greatest difficulty at being thus forced into having her beautiful sister as a walking companion.

"I don't want her," she muttered to Kathe; "she will deck herself out and look lovelier than ever and will spoil our walk —and—and—I wish she wouldn't come."

"Never mind, we will try and enjoy it all the same, darling," was Kathe's soothing reply.

It was a lovely April day. The sun was shining clear and bright in the blue cloudless heavens; the air was soft and

warm and sweet with the perfume of wild violets along the road leading to the forest, and in the forest itself the sun gleamed so joyously through every branch and twig, and streamed in such broad glittering rays from between the knotty trunks on the green sward under the trees, that it almost seemed as if some giant hand had lifted the dark canopy from overhead and left the usually sombre paths and walks exposed to the beautiful shining sunlight. Thousands of tiny pale green shoots were sprouting out from the twigs and branches of the weather-beaten trees, and underneath in damp mossy nooks the lovely little blue-bell raised its delicate head.

Kathe loved the little flower, and while Flora and Henriette sauntered on towards the fir-valley, she lingered behind to pluck a handful of the blossoms.

Usually the forest was still and desolate,

and one might wander for hours under its shade without meeting a soul or encountering a living thing. But this happened to be one of the days when the poor of the neighbourhood were allowed to congregate together for the purpose of gathering as much of the dried and decayed wood as they could carry to their homes.

As Kathe hunted about for her favourite flower she heard voices in the distance, and she had only just remembered the fact that this was the "poor people's day," as it was called, when raising her head she saw close before her a woman in the act of breaking off a fine strong branch from one of the trees. Was it because she was caught with a green branch in her hand, or because the sudden appearance of the young girl startled her in her dishonest act, that she cast a lowering angry glance on Kathe, and muttered some imprecation as she pushed

back the linen kerchief from her untidy head ?

The look surprised but did not frighten Kathe. She stooped again to gather a group of anemones at her feet, when a weak but shrill cry for help fell on her ear, succeeded by an indistinct tumult of many voices.

The woman listened for a moment, then flung down the branch and darted through the brushwood towards the place from whence the noise came. Again Kathe heard the shrill trembling cry, and recognized Henriette's voice. Quick as an arrow she rushed after the woman, tearing her dress as she made her way through the brushwood, and getting many a knock from the on-bounding branches the woman's powerful arms struck aside, but she reached the spot at last.

The first thing she saw as she emerged

from the thicket was a group of women and ragged boys standing under a pine tree talking and gesticulating in the wildest manner. The next glance showed her Flora's white felt hat with its drooping blue feather, forming a striking centre to the dirty kerchiefs and straggling hair of the women around her.

"Let the dwarf alone, Friz!" screamed one of the women.

"But she is screaming like mad," replied a boy's voice.

"Let her yell—none can hear her," insisted the woman, who had a repulsive face with small luring eyes and a tall gaunt frame.

Then Flora spoke, but Kathe could not hear what she said.

An insolent derisive laugh answered her.

"Get out o' your way!" shouted the big woman. "D'ye think we'll do it, may be?

This place is free for all to come and go in. The poorest beggar as well as such as you, Fräulein, and I'll see who'll dare keep me away. Look here, good people, we only see her face when she be sitting in her carriage with the horses a-tearing along, and we be glad to clear out of her way. A beautiful woman you be, Fräulein—even yer enemies'll say that—and all's real too, no paint nor nothing; yer skin's like velvet —I shouldn't mind biting it——" and she stooped her head, and pushed her face under the white hat.

The woman whom Kathe had followed pushed her way into the midst of the crowd, and pointing to the young girl behind called out in a coarse tone—

"There be another!"

All turned to look at Kathe, thus giving the latter an opportunity of seeing Flora leaning against a tree, her cheeks and lips

white as snow, and her whole figure trembling.

"She be nothing to us," cried a boy, and turned his back on the young girl; the women followed his example, closing in again round Flora.

"Kathe!" called Henriette from behind this crowd of women, but a rough hand was placed across her mouth to prevent her speaking.

In a moment two or three of the boys were pushed half over, and before the women had time to resist the force of her strong young arms, Kathe had elbowed her way to her sister's side.

"What do you all want?" she asked in a loud firm voice, facing the dirty women boldly.

For a moment the angry women were awed and startled—but only for a moment—the next, they saw it was only a young

bright-looking girl, and a loud laugh greeted her question.

"Just hear how short and sharp she asks, as if she were the judge his-self," screamed the giantess.

"And looks as proud as if she had descended from the three Holy Kings," broke in the woman whom Kathe had first seen. "Why, your own grandmother came out of my village, and never had shoe or stocking to her feet when a little un— and your grandpa, too, used to carry hods o' mortar for old——"

"Do you think I don't know it, or that I am ashamed of it?" interrupted Kathe quietly and calmly, though her earnest face was pale and her lips trembled.

"No one ought better. Has his money done you any good, all his heaps o' money?" cried another of the women, pushing herself close to Kathe. Seizing her silk dress, and

rubbing it between her dirty fingers, she went on : "Ah, a lovely dress, a dress for town on Sundays, and you a-wearing it in the middle of the week in the forest, to be torn by the branches. All very well for you—the money's there in plenty—baskets full of it was found when the old un died. But how did he get it ? You'd better not ask, Fräulein. How should it matter to you that your grandpa bought up all the corn away from the poor and stored it up in his granaries, and then he said that the price of grain must go up, up, far too high for us, before he would sell one bit, though the people were starving——"

"It's false!" broke in Kathe, "quite false."

"Ha! false, is it? Is it false, too, that we are being thrown into the clutches of those who will grudge us our last potato? Trouble will come o' this, I can tell ye.

My girl says she will drown herself sooner nor work for usurers."

"And my brother says he will shoot them over the hemp first time they appear," shouted out a small ill-grown lad.

"Aye, aye, as he did the pigeons belonging to the pale little dwarf there," remarked another, pointing to Henriette, who was clinging to Kathe, exhausted with fright and fatigue.

The loud barking of a dog close by silenced the shouts for a while. Flora sprang up from her crouching position on the ground, the haughty expression usual to her returning to her face.

"What have I to do with the sale of the factory?" she asked contemptuously. "Settle that with your late master the Counsellor—he will know how to answer your insolence; and now out of my way! Your shameful behaviour will be

punished severely — of that you may be sure."

She stretched out her hand to wave the women off, but the tall gaunt woman seized it, and heartily shook the lily-white hand as if it had been held forth in sign of friendship, while an evil smile flitted round her ugly mouth.

"Ha! ha! Fräulein," she exclaimed, with a coarse chuckle; "we've got back our courage and proud manner because a dog barked over there!" she pointed over her shoulder. "That's old Sonneman's terrier, I know his voice well enough. The old man is stone-deaf, and his dog won't leave him. They're a-going to the village up yonder, as they do every day. Be quiet, they won't come this way. So it doesn't matter to you, a beautiful young woman, that the factory is sold, eh? Who would think it or believe it? One has only to

look at you to see the whole thing. You and the old Madame rule and command and make the Counsellor obey you both; and now he is rich enough, you think the poor people who have earned him his money are to be chucked over just like chaff from wheat. No, no; we can't alter it, of course, but we'll be revenged on you, my beauty;" and as the woman stooped her tall frame to peer into Flora's face, her eyes glittered with the cruelty of a cat's.

Flora covered her face with her hands.

"Good God! they mean to murder us!" she murmured between her trembling lips.

The women who heard her laughed out loud.

"No such thing, Fräulein!" said the tall one; "we are not so stupid, we should gain nothing by it but that," and she made an expressive gesture round her brawny

throat. "You shall only have a small punishment."

Uncovering her face and nervously dragging at her pocket Flora drew forth her purse, opened it, and cast the contents, silver and gold, on the ground. The women did not move, but one or two of the nearest boys sprang forward to pick up the shining pieces.

"Let it alone!" exclaimed the big woman, planting her tall person over the scattered money. "There is time for that later on — *later on*, Fräulein," and she turned with grim politeness to Flora. "First your punishment."

"Touch us if you dare!" said Kathe, standing her ground firmly, though both sisters were trying to shelter themselves behind her.

"You? what do you meddle for? and why shouldn't I dare? I shall only get a

week or two, they don't give more for a box on the ears—or a few scratches on the face—and those you shall have, Fräulein, as sure as I'm alive," she added, addressing Flora. "I'll so spoil that lovely skin o' yourn that you'll never forget me; you'll get a face as nicely marked as a tiger in a menagerie."

Quick as lightning, she raised her hand to scratch Flora's face with her dirty nails; but, quick as she was, Kathe frustrated her intention by pushing her away with such force that she lost her balance and stumbled up against two or three of the others standing by.

"Help! help!" screamed Henriette, with excited strength, while Flora flung herself down by the tree, and hid her face among its gnarled roots.

"Help!" shouted Henriette again, with all her remaining force, as the women

seized hold of Kathe, tore off the cape from her shoulders, and trod her hat under foot.

One of them had just grasped a long plait of hair which hung down her back, when the lad who had again covered Henriette's mouth with his hand, suddenly drew it away, exclaiming—

"Look! look at her! What's the matter?" and, dashing through the crowd, escaped into the forest.

Blood was streaming from the poor girl's mouth. That last effort at calling for help had been too much for her; she had ruptured a blood-vessel with the cry.

For two or three seconds the crowd of angry, infuriated women stared, horrified at the sight of the suffering girl, whose pale face, with the life-blood oozing from her lips, looked deathly in its ashen hue;

then, with one accord, they silently retreated into the shadow of the dense forest, and left the three girls alone.

Putting her arms round the fainting girl, Kathe gently let herself glide to the ground, and supported the helpless head on her bosom. In this position the blood ceased to flow.

"Fetch help as fast as you can!" sobbed Kathe. "She will die! Oh, be quick! be quick!"

"Are you mad?" said Flora, in a smothered tone, with her hands clasped across her breast, and gazing, terror-struck, at the pair at her feet. "Would you have me throw myself into the hands of those wretches? They are still there;" and she shuddered as she glanced uneasily towards the thicket, from which one or two boys' heads appeared, looking eagerly at the gold lying on the ground. "I will not

stir from this place *alone.* We must try and get Henriette away ourselves."

Kathe did not answer. She saw it was useless to battle against such heartless selfishness; so, pointing to Flora to help her move the fainting girl, she struggled to her feet, and succeeded in lifting the small, slight form in her arms, rested the head on her shoulder, and carried her slowly out of the forest. Fearful of giving her the slightest shake that might cause a return of the distressing hemorrhage, Kathe carefully wended her way over the smoothest path, standing still every now and again to watch if the movement was painful for her burden.

"Oh, don't stop! don't stop till we are within call for aid—till we are out of the reach of those murderous wretches, unless you wish me to die of fright!" entreated Flora, as she walked along by Kathe's side

with her usual proud bearing, but stealthily watching every bush and tree, so as to take flight at the first approach of one of the "wretches."

"What has become of her boasted courage, of the 'soldier's courage and self-confidence' Henriette was taunting her with this morning?" thought Kathe, her arms aching under the weight of the burden she carried. "It's all very well to write about woman's strength of intellect being equal to man's; she should show, by womanly acts and self-forgetfulness, that she is capable of something better than——"

The thought was not finished, for a slight movement of Henriette's attracted her attention, and made her hasten her steps to reach home.

CHAPTER II.

AT last they stood outside the forest, in the open, sunny field. The danger of pursuit was over, the town was visible before them, peasants were working on the meadows within sound of a call for help, and the road leading to the park and Villa was close at hand.

But Kathe's eyes were riveted on a spot which Flora did not notice—the low, sloping roof, with its high chimney-pots and gilded weather-cock, visible through the apple orchard belonging to the house

on the forest-side. She saw the garden-gate leading up to the hall-door was wide open. It was much nearer than the park-gate, and thither Kathe wended her steps, after a short rest under a wide-spreading oak-tree.

"Where are you going?" demanded Flora, who was hastening towards the Villa.

"To Dr. Bruck's house," was the quiet reply. "It is nearer than the Villa. I shall be able to lay Henriette on a bed, and most likely the Doctor himself is at home to attend to her."

Flora knit her brows, and looked angry; but whether or not she feared the revengeful woman's re-appearance, or shrank from walking through the park up to the house alone, with her bare head and disordered toilette, she made no resistance, but silently turned and followed her half-sister.

The field was passed in silence. The sun shone hot and scorching on Kathe's burning temples. Her strength was beginning to fail; the way was rough, and the fainting girl in her arms seemed to grow heavier and heavier. She looked longingly towards the house, and gathered up all her remaining force to accomplish the fifty yards or so that still had to be traversed ere reaching a place of rest. She looked again, and saw a man in his shirt-sleeves making a small arbour under the shadow of one of the trees; the widow standing near him, a white cap on her head, a broad linen apron half covering her black dress, in her hand a plate of black bread-and-butter, that was evidently intended for the workman's four o'clock meal. She did not turn her head towards the road, or she would have seen Kathe struggling to reach the orchard

with Henriette's lifeless form in her arms.

But ere Kathe had time to attract her attention, the Doctor appeared at the corner of the house.

"Bruck!" rang out Flora's clear, musical voice.

He stood still and stared for a second at the advancing group, as if he could not believe the evidence of his eyes; the next he bounded forward, and, with a few long strides, was close upon them.

"What has happened?" he said breathlessly.

"I have been mobbed by angry women," replied Flora, with a bitter smile, but with her usual cold indifferent manner. "The vagabonds were in earnest when they threatened me—I was in great danger from their violence, and the poor child there," pointing to Henriette, "ruptured

a blood-vessel from fright and excitement."

He merely glanced at her, to see if she was unhurt—then stretched out his arms, and tenderly lifted the burden from Kathe's shoulder.

"You have exerted yourself beyond your strength," he said gently, as he looked into the girl's heated face; she was trembling from head to foot, and biting her lip to keep back the tears as she clung to the Doctor's arm to prevent herself from falling to the ground, while Flora stood looking fresh and cool, with only a slight colour tinging her delicate cheeks.

"You ought not to have allowed her to carry Henriette all alone," the Doctor remarked to his betrothed as he hastened back to the house with Henriette in his arms.

"You don't surely expect me to carry

her? Besides *you* have no right to find fault," answered Flora sharply; "I know my duty, I hope, and I should have helped to carry the poor child, only I knew that it would have been utter madness. I am not strong, and it could not hurt Kathe's extra robust peasant-like strength to do it."

He did not reply, but called to his aunt to run indoors and prepare a bed immediately for the lifeless girl in his arms.

The widow gave a quick shocked glance at the advancing figures, and without a word obeyed her nephew's behest, so quickly, that by the time he stepped into the hall she had spread a clean sweet-smelling sheet on the bed in the spare room, and silently motioned to him to lay the girl down.

The apartment was large and pleasantly lighted by two immense windows—the uncarpeted floor was as white and shining

as scrubbing and bees-wax could make it, but the paper on the walls was faded and dim, and in the corner opposite the door stood an old-fashioned stove of black Dutch tiles. On one side was an antiquated folding-screen covered with queer Chinese figures, on the other was a small round table of dark wood matching the frames of two or three amateur drawings which hung on the faded walls. The only article of luxury in the room was the bright, rosy chintz curtain hanging at each window, but a sweet fresh perfume of lavender pervaded the whole air.

Across the Doctor's brow lay an anxious look as he bent over his patient, and with a skilful gentle hand bathed her chin and throat to clear away the ghastly effects of the hemorrhage. At last she opened her eyes and recognized him, but she was too weak to speak or move.

A messenger had been sent to the Villa to acquaint old Madame Urach with the misfortune that had befallen her granddaughter, and till she arrived not a word was spoken in the sick-room. Flora stood motionless at the window, Kathe sat in a corner by the bedside, and the widow glided noiselessly about waiting on her nephew, and bringing him the things he needed to restore Henriette to consciousness.

The old lady appeared much distressed when she entered the room, especially when she saw Henriette's deathly-pale face and closed eyelids.

"For God's sake tell me how it all happened!" she asked, her voice sounding excited and shrill, breaking in upon the silence of the last half-hour.

Henriette shivered and moaned, but did not open her eyes.

Flora was the only one who attempted to explain to her grandmother what had happened. According to her she had been attacked by a crowd of furies, each one more anxious than the others to do her some personal harm, and Kathe could scarcely refrain from a smile as she went on to describe how, for a time, she had kept them at bay by her own courage and presence of mind, till the accident happened which frightened them away, and left her and Kathe free to leave the forest.

Madame Urach walked up and down the room during this recital, not heeding, in her agitation, the torture she was inflicting on the poor invalid's nerves by the monotonous rustling of her silk skirts on the deal boards.

"What does our philanthropist say to this?" she asked sharply, suddenly stand-

ing still, and eyeing the Doctor with anything but a friendly look.

He did not answer: he was holding Henriette's hand in his, and apparently intent on counting the feeble pulse under his fingers; but a sorrowful smile passed over his handsome young face, and a pitying look crept into his eyes, which no one noticed but Kathe.

Presently the old lady moved up to the bedside, and stooping her head as she gazed at the pale shrunken face lying on the pillow, said pointedly—

"She looks very ill, Herr Doctor. What do you say to sending at once for my old friend and physician, Dr. von Bär, and having a consultation with him? You surely won't object?"

"Of course not, Madame," releasing the patient's hand. "It is only my duty to do anything that will ease your anxiety;"

and he left the room to send a message to the great physician's residence in town.

He had no sooner closed the door than Madame Urach exclaimed in a subdued voice—

"A nice mess you have put me in, by bringing Henriette here. Whatever made you do it?"

"It was Kathe's fault, not mine—*that* you might guess, grandmamma," replied Flora bitterly. "You ought to reproach her and not me for obliging us to remain in this hole, for who knows how long, perhaps for weeks," and her eyes flashed angrily across at Kathe.

"How thoughtless to lay the poor child in that direction. Each time she opens her eyes she must look at that hideous black stone! And those daubs on the walls, too, how fearful!" Then, turning towards the bed again, she added, "The bed itself

seems not so bad, at all events the sheets are fine and white, but I must send over a silk eider-down cover for her instead of that cotton thing, also a good easy-chair for my old friend when he comes, and above all another basin—this one is odious;" she went on removing it from the washstand with a clatter that made the invalid moan again. "How can people live with such coarse things about them? I don't believe they even notice them! What is it, my angel, do you want anything?"

Henriette half-raised her head, glanced sharply at her grandmother for a moment, then closed her eyes again, and with the first sign of returning strength pushed aside the hand that lay on hers.

"As wilful as ever!" sighed her grandmother, and sank on to a chair by the bedside.

They had not to wait long for the

Court physician. When the message reached him, begging him to come at once to the house by the river, he could hardly believe his ears when the men added that "Madame Urach" was there. Curiosity and surprise hastened his departure, and in a very short while his elegant carriage conveyed him to the rustic bridge in front of the old house. He was a handsome old gentleman, neat and spruce from head to foot, and with pleasing cordial manners. He was the favourite physician of the reigning Duke, had been rewarded for his services with the high-sounding title of "Medicinalrath" and the right to add to his name the coveted noble prefix of *von*, besides having received many decorations and several costly snuff-boxes mounted with precious stones.

"A pity, a very great pity this has happened," he said, approaching the bed on

which Henriette was lying. After regarding her pale face with an anxious look for a moment or two, he began sounding her chest—lightly and carefully as he did it, the girl moaned with pain more than once. Dr. Bruck stood by, silently watching the great man's proceedings, wondering why he should torture the poor girl with sounding her lungs, when in her present state such an act was not necessary. When she moaned a second time the young man frowned and said decisively, to put an end to the examination—

"Shall I tell you the result of my observations, Herr von Bär?"

The older man understood the purport of the question, and a bitter rancorous glance flashed from his eyes ere he replied—

"Certainly, when I have finished my investigation;" and he continued

sounding and tapping for some moments longer.

Then he rose, moved away from the bed, and with a stiff inclination of his head, remarked—

"Now, sir, I am at your disposition."

Not many minutes after the two doctors had quitted the room to consult in private over the case, Henriette opened her eyes and began inquiring with a flushed face for her "own doctor," Dr. Bruck.

"Where is he? I want him. Tell him to come."

Her excited manner startled Madame Urach, who immediately rose to fulfil her request, muttering to herself the while a protest against such a "peculiar, very peculiar caprice."

Short as their absence had been, the consultation between the doctors was evidently over, for as the old lady entered the sitting-

room the Court physician was about to write a prescription. Dr. Bruck returned to the sick-chamber, and Madame Urach was left alone with her old friend.

To her question of what he thought of the "dear girl's" case, he gave a short, pointed reply, intimated in plain language that the case had been mishandled from the beginning, and growled out something about its being too late to send for him when hope was over, and reproached the old lady for yielding to Henriette's whim in the choice of her medical attendant, instead of obliging her to submit to be treated by the one who had known and studied her constitution from a child.

"However, the first thing to be done now is to have the poor child removed as soon as possible to her own comfortable and well-furnished room," he added, more pleasantly. "She will feel better there; besides, I shall

then be sure that my orders will be carried out, whereas they will not be so here, I know very well."

He touched the nib of his pen with his thumb-nail, and was dipping it in the ink, when his eye fell on an open velvet case lying near some books on the table, which apparently were only just unpacked.

Never had Madame Urach seen the face of her "old friend" look so utterly blank with dismay and astonishment as it did now when the pen fell out of his hand, and he exclaimed—

"Good heavens, here is the Grand Cross of Darmstadt!"

He touched it with the tip of his finger.

"How could it have got here, I wonder, in such an out-of-the-way place as this poor house?"

"Astonishing!" observed Madame Urach, while a flush of annoyance and

surprise passed over her face as she bent forward to examine the case with her eye-glass in her hand. "I don't know the decoration myself, or its meaning."

"I dare say not, Madame; it is so very rarely bestowed on any one," interrupted the Court physician.

"Otherwise I might imagine the decoration was conferred on him during the war," continued Madame Urach, unmoved.

"Nothing of the kind, nothing of the kind!" growled the old doctor in a voice which showed how much the discovery of the case and its brilliant order had disturbed his equanimity. "In the first place, no one obtains this decoration except for some personal service done to or for a member of the royal family; and next, I should like to see the man who, possessing such a distinction, would keep it secret for years. I wonder what he

did to obtain it—*why* it was bestowed on him," he went on thoughtfully, more to himself than his companion, as he slowly passed his hand over his forehead, and absently regarded the brilliant diamond rings on his fingers, which had been given to him by his own royal Duke. But what were they in comparison with the contents of that glittering case on the table? "This is the most coveted decoration of all," he continued; "men of the highest rank vie with each other for its possession, and yet here it lies unheeded and apparently unvalued by a fellow who, from sheer ignorance in his profession, has deservedly got himself into trouble. Pardon me, Madame, but it slipped out," he checked himself to say as he noticed the heightened colour of the proud old lady at this slighting mention of her intended grandson-in-law. "But really it is too bad not to know *why* he had that thing

thrown round his neck. I can't even make a conjecture about it."

"I don't suppose the honour was conferred on him for any *professional* service," remarked Madame Urach, with a smile, as she watched the impatient strides of her old friend up and down the room, adding, after a moment, "But how came he at the Court at all to win the distinction?"

The Court physician stood and laughed aloud.

"My dear Madame, you ask a question that it would never have entered my head to ask, simply because the thing itself is an impossibility, unless the world were turned upside down and truth and honour were trampled under foot. No, no; he must have been on some mission. I wonder of what kind?" the old man continued, tapping with his fingers an impatient tattoo against the window-sill. Then, in a low

tone, he added, over his shoulder: "He was away for a week or ten days, and no one knew where he went? H'm, that's bad! Sneaks who never mention anything about their doings are sure to have good reasons for keeping them dark: there are things done in the medical profession which no honourable man would lend his hand to. However, I am silent; it has never been my habit to tear away the veil of another man's secret; everything must take its course as He above wills." He pointed with such a devout and reverential air towards the ceiling that any one who did not know him so well as Madame Urach might have been deceived. He sat down at the table and scribbled off the prescription so quickly that it seemed as if the presence of the velvet case had put quicksilver into his fingers. "One thing I shall leave to you, my honoured

friend; you have so much tact and diplomatic wisdom, that, of course, I need not remind you to be cautious, but try and find out a little about this," and he pointed to the order. "I would like to know something of its origin before Bruck begins boasting of this dubious honour, and we can ignore it now."

The old lady did not answer at once. She had been watching him quietly while he wrote his prescription, and noticed for the first time that his face had very much altered lately; the cheeks were as florid and blooming as usual, but there was a worried anxious expression about his mouth and eyes that seemed to denote some hidden trouble, and the lines around the nose and brow were deeper, as if he had suffered from want of sleep. And she remembered then that he had lately thrown out several hints about royal personages

and bad temper. What if she were about to lose him? not by death, that did not enter her thoughts, but if he lost his post as Court physician what would become of him? and she would thus lose her principal link with the Court. But no, such a thing was not going to happen. The good old man was too fond of the table, he was getting indigestion, and becoming gouty saw things in a contrary light.

"But, my dear Herr von Bär, how do you know that this belongs to the Doctor himself?" she asked with all the confidence of a woman of the world. "I don't think so, and, what is more, I shall *not* believe it till I know the reason for its being here. Besides, no matter how he got it if it is his, it won't be of any use or service to him in this part of the world, for the whole town have completely and for ever tabooed him from the position he held. I

will do as you wish, however, willingly, and find out the meaning of its presence in this house, solely for *your* sake——"

She checked herself, for just at that moment a door-handle turned, and the mistress of the house entered the room to fetch some linen from the press.

The Court physician rose, handed the prescription to Madame Urach, and both were leaving the apartment when they saw the widow pause by the table, and close down the lid of the case in dispute. But much as the old courtier longed to ask two or three questions about the decoration, he had not the courage to confront the calm, proud-looking lady with his curiosity, and he felt obliged to leave the room with his longing unsatisfied.

In the meanwhile matters were progressing favourably in the sick-chamber. Henriette seemed to have recovered from

her excessive exhaustion, and was partly raised in bed supported by pillows at her back. Her eyes were open, and she was staring about her in a wild manner; fever had set in, but anything was better than the unconscious state of complete prostration.

Dr. Bruck had fetched the globe of gold-fish from his aunt's sitting-room, and when Madame Urach and his old friend entered, he was trying to make the tiny fountain work, in order to moisten the air of the room. A large basin of fresh water stood on a table by the bedside, from which he constantly replenished a small bouquet pocket-fountain for the same purpose. And no one watching the young man, in his earnest endeavours to relieve the suffering of his patient, could have associated his handsome open countenance and untroubled bearing with any conscious act of

meanness or dishonour. Even the Court physician was obliged to acknowledge this to himself, while he ground his teeth with rage at the possibility of the young man's possessing the rare and highly-coveted honour. And for what ?

Madame Urach found Henriette was far too ill to be moved, so she gave orders that the girl's maid should be sent over to sit up with her during the night, as also several articles of furniture to make the room comfortable. Kathe begged to be allowed to take the maid's place, and nurse her sister through the night, but Dr. Bruck so sternly forbad any such thing, saying he would have no one but the old lady's-maid by his patient who had nursed Henriette before, that even Madame Urach and the Court physician were surprised into confessing he was right. The tears rose to Kathe's eyes at the cold, almost rough

manner in which he had replied to her request, and she turned away.

Before Madame Urach left the house, she and Flora had a short conversation, in which it was agreed that the latter, with Kathe, should remain by Henriette till ten o'clock. It would never do when the whole affair was blazed abroad in town, the next day, for it to be hinted that the proud girl had deserted her sisterly post by Henriette's bedside to the care of her young half-sister Kathe, and for this reason, and no other, she consented to remain under Dr. Bruck's roof till Nanni came to fetch them both at ten o'clock.

CHAPTER III.

SOON after Madame Urach's departure, several men-servants appeared laden with articles of furniture and "comforts" for the sick-room. When put in their appointed places, the apartment looked incongruous and wanting in taste. The elegant screen made the black chipped stone look out of place—the gold-bordered porcelain washing basin and appurtenances, the rich satin easy-chair and inlaid table by the bedside, together with a variegated Turkey rug, formed a ridiculous contrast to the faded

red walls, simple chintz curtains, and old-fashioned bedstead of the room.

Softly, and without noise, the widow called her maid, and helped her remove the simple plain articles that were no longer needed. Not once did she look across at her nephew, who was standing by the window silently regarding the change in the room; perhaps she feared to see the angry flush on his brow, and the indignant curl of his lip; and she would not have felt more comfortable if she had caught his eye, so she studiously avoided glancing towards him.

Flora superintended the arrangements; with her own fair hands, she spread a green silk coverlet over Henriette's bed, and contemptuously cast off a light eider-down, covered with fine clean dimity, to make room for it. After sprinkling a bottle of eau-de-cologne over the boards, she bade

one of the servants lay a smaller Turkey rug in one of the bow windows, and place a fauteuil on it, in which she sank down and crossed her pretty feet on an elegant little stool close by. Seeing through the small mirror with a brown wooden frame that her hair was out of order, she took a small lace scarf from off her shoulders, and daintily fastened it on her head to hide its rough appearance. The white soft fabric was so becoming to her lovely face, and looked so like a halo of glory as she leaned her head in a graceful attitude against the back of the chair, that the widow gazed at her in genuine admiration, and thought to herself, that she could partly understand *now* why her nephew had loved so madly this proud girl who scarcely spoke to him, and seemed to think of no one but herself and her own ease.

The afternoon wore on, and the setting

sun began to fill the room with beautiful purple and crimson rays. No one spoke. Henriette objected to the blinds being lowered, and begged in her feeble voice that "they would not walk about on tip-toe;" it made her suppose they thought her worse than she was.

The Doctor left the room to fetch a book; when he returned, he was accompanied by his aunt carrying a tray, on which stood two cups of deliciously perfumed tea. The cloth which covered the tray was of the very finest damask; the cups were of rare and costly china, the spoons of old-fashioned pattern and size, but of pure silver; and a plate of tempting sweet cakes stood by a sugar-basin and cream-jug of the same pattern and silver as the spoons.

The grand noble-looking lady in her white linen apron stepped forward, and courteously invited her beautiful guest

to partake of the tempting refreshment.

"You baked the cakes yourself!" said Flora, half-rising from her lounge. "Ah! I smelt the batter from here when you opened the kitchen door—how nice!" and she clasped her hands together with naïve astonishment. "A poor ignorant thing in household affairs, like me, has no idea how such dainties are made; but what an amount of patience, and how much time they must take to do!"

"Oh, no, not if one manages properly; besides, it is done quickly when one is accustomed to it," said the widow, laughing; "and I can't be slow over anything. I have a great deal of time on my hands, as I am not always strong enough for domestic duties. Last winter I set myself the task of reading the Bible through, from beginning to end——"

"As a religious duty?" asked Flora.

"No, I didn't need that; I think I know by heart all the parts relating to our daily life, and how one ought to behave, but while this political and religious struggle is going on, I think it behoves every one to have their weapons well in order, that they may be ready, if called upon, to fight. The question touches women as well as men, so I thought I would study all the parts, and convince myself if what is being said is truth."

Flora looked up in astonishment—that any one should read the Bible from beginning to end, for the simple purpose of being convinced of the truth of any statement, was to her incomprehensible; but that this widow should think fit to prepare her weapons to join in the struggle going on in the world, was really almost absurd. What had she and the world to do with

each other? Ah! now she understood the secret of Doctor Bruck's ridiculous remarks about his ideal of a woman, that she ought to be "domestic," that is a good cook and a help-meet!

While Flora was turning over these thoughts in her mind, Kathe rose from her seat and took the tea-tray from the old lady's hand, and being able to read the signs of a coming storm in her beautiful half-sister's face, she urged her to drink a cup of tea.

"No, thanks, I feel too upset to take anything," she said irritably; but a few minutes later, Kathe saw her take from her pocket an elegant bonbonnière, and covertly eat several chocolate drops, while the others were enjoying the fragrant beverage.

The sun was sending forth his last rays of golden glory; and those in the sick-room were watching the crimson light playing

caressingly as it were on Flora's bent head in the window recess, when Henriette moaned and whispered anxiously as if in fear, "Take it away! there is arsenic in green—take it away!" and tried with her feeble strength to push the silk coverlet from the bed.

Kathe removed the obnoxious covering at once, and laid over the suffering girl the cool linen one which had been there when they first entered the room.

"That's nice," went on Henriette, her eyes half open and rolling eagerly around. "Don't let her come here again if she puts that green thing on me! Grandmamma is false, false like all her drawing-room clique, she and that old horror her great authority. If he touches me again I'll scream," she hissed; then raising herself she seized Kathe's hand and said solemnly to Dr. Bruck: "Take care he does you no

harm or grandmamma either! As to her," and her tones became very excited, "you know who I mean—well, she smokes and drives the wild ponies simply because you asked her not to do it—she is false, falser than all."

"Very interesting, I must say!" whispered Flora ensconcing herself more comfortably in her seat, while Kathe glanced across at Dr. Bruck who was quietly leaning against the screen.

"You remember how things used to be, Doctor?" went on Henriette. "How she sent you letters half-a-dozen times a day, no matter what the weather was? How she used to fidget if you didn't come to the exact moment, and directly you arrived, how she would put both arms round your neck and cling to you as if she never meant to part from you? You hear me, Doctor, don't you?"

Flora sprang up, her face scarlet, her silk skirts rustling noisily on the deal boards. "Give her some morphine!" she exclaimed; "she is delirious, make her sleep. Such ravings are not to be endured. Do as I say at once!"

But he only smiled and looked at her with compassion, as the red flush which his patient's words had started to his cheek died away, and left him strangely pale. He did not move or make any reply.

Flora flung herself back in her seat, and turned her face towards the window.

"Did you ever dream all that would change, Dr. Bruck—that she would ever tell you it was all a mistake?" asked the sick girl excitedly, seizing hold of Kathe's hand and holding it fast, as she tried to raise herself from her recumbent position.

Kathe's heart beat fast. She dared not look at the young man now, after that

strange searching question. Bending over the half-delirious girl, she laid her cool hand on her forehead, hoping to change the current of her wild thoughts.

"Ah—how nice!" said the invalid in a quieter tone. Then, after a moment she added feverishly, "Flora always took his hand away when he laid it on my forehead —she was jealous of even me — terribly jealous."

A low mocking laugh came from the window recess, but Henriette took no notice of it, apparently she did not even hear it.

"I can't sleep for thinking of all the misery that is coming to you," she moaned out as if in pain. "You will shun our house and never mention our name, and be a miserable man, for she means to break her engagement at every cost——"

In her distress and agony at hearing

these true revelations, Kathe laid her finger on the poor excited girl's mouth, but the action seemed to excite her more.

"How dare you touch my lips like that horrid fellow in the forest?"

Flora sprang from her seat a second time, hurried over to the bed, pushed Kathe almost rudely aside, and standing in her place cried out beseechingly—

"Don't stop her—let her say what she likes!"

"Yes, what she likes," repeated Henriette, beginning to stammer from exhaustion, but pleased as a child to have her own way. "Who will tell you the truth, Doctor, if I don't? Who else will warn you? Be on your guard, or she will fly away from you like the doves from a tree. She means to be *free*, I can tell you!"

"Whatever else she says, there is truth in *that*," interrupted Flora firmly, drawing

a step nearer the young man. "She is quite right; I cannot keep my promise to you, Leo. Will you give me up, let me be free?" she added clasping her hands and speaking in a sweet earnest tone that startled Kathe, it was so musical and soft.

The young man's face was white as death as he silently and sternly looked at the beautiful suppliant. He seemed as if it was impossible for him to speak just now. He stretched out his hand to wave her away, but she took it in both hers and repeated:

"You will give me back my freedom, Leo?"

"This is not the place for the separation you seek."

"But the right moment. Another has said the words I have been longing for months past to utter—only I hadn't the courage——"

"Because it would be a notorious violation of faith on your part."

She bit her lip.

"Your remark is hard and scarcely to the point—our engagement was not quite of such a serious nature. No one has taken your place in my heart. Don't smile so sarcastically, Leo. Indeed I mean it," she added passionately; "I am not thinking of any other husband. But I'll even run the risk of that reproach," she said after a moment more composedly, "if you will consent to my prayer, and keep us from making each other miserable."

"Don't bring my happiness or unhappiness into the discussion. You can't possibly know what I understand by either; but I think you will have to acknowledge to yourself even that neither one nor the other will have any influence over the way a man should act in defending his honour

and self-esteem. And now I must beg you to be silent on the subject, so as not to excite your sister."

He turned away and walked over to the window. Flora followed him.

"Henriette is not listening," she said.

The poor little invalid had fallen back on her pillows and lay quite still.

Lowering her voice and leaning towards him, Flora continued in a beseeching tone—

"I *must* and will have a clear and distinct understanding between us. Why put off what can be done just as well now?" and she played nervously with the third finger of her left hand. "Answer me!"

"What are you exchanging life by my side for?" he asked suddenly, facing round upon her so brusquely that she drew back.

"Is it necessary to tell you that?" she exclaimed with a sigh of relief, pushing

back her hair. "Can't you see how my whole soul longs to be entirely devoted to literature? How can I give myself up to the inspiration of my talent if I undertake wifely duties? No! never, never! It must not, *cannot* be!"

"It's very strange that this enthusiasm for literary pursuits has only lately taken possession of you. It is scarcely a month since you——"

"You mean to say that I have lived nine and twenty years without any wish for fame," she interrupted with a glowing face. "Explain that as you will, put it down to the woman's nature who fluctuates between this and that, tries one thing and the other till she finds the right."

"But are you sure you are right now in wishing to devote your life to literature?"

"As sure as that the needle points to the pole."

He did not reply. His face assumed a very grave expression, and his brow contracted as if with pain. Yet, in spite of the gravity of his countenance, his dark grey eyes gazed down on the woman at his side with a loving pity and tenderness shining in them, that one would have thought must have moved the heart of a stone. Then he slowly turned away and crossed the room. He took up the medicine bottle and spoon, and went near the bed.

Henriette had fallen asleep, still holding Kathe's hand. Several times Kathe had tried to draw her hand away, in order to leave the room; but each movement of hers seemed to disturb the invalid, who moaned and opened her eyes for a second, and held the fingers in a closer clasp; thus the young girl was forced, against her will, to be a witness to the painful scene between the lovers.

When the Doctor approached the bed he did not appear to notice Kathe's presence; he seemed to be doing his duty mechanically, as if hardly conscious of what he was about. For a moment he looked earnestly at the sleeping girl, then attempted to feel her pulse. In doing so he accidentally touched Kathe's hand, which made him start so violently and change colour so rapidly, that she in her turn started, and drew her hand from Henriette's clasp, wondering why he should be so nervous that a touch of her fingers had such an effect on him. Was he suffering from the shock of Flora's bitter words? She stole a shy glance at him, and heard him heave a deep sigh, as he put the bottle and spoon back on the table.

Flora seemed to be getting more angry and impatient each moment. She paced the room once or twice, then suddenly hesitated and followed the Doctor to the

table. His silence and attention to his duties where the invalid was concerned, in the middle of a discussion that was to influence the future of both their lives, irritated her beyond measure.

With trembling lips and flashing eyes, she said—

"It was very foolish of me to speak so openly of my feelings just now. You hate and despise talented women, and many of your sex have a horror of a woman being independent and standing on her own rights——"

"If it is *not* possible for her to do so, certainly."

For the space of one moment she wildly clenched her hands, and stared at him in speechless dismay; recovering herself the next, she replied sharply—

"What do you mean by saying that?"

A flush passed over his face, and his

brows contracted as if he shrank from the sharp, metallic ring of her voice. His was a sensitive nature, and this war of words with his promised wife was evidently very distasteful to his inclinations.

After a slight hesitation, he answered, calmly but wearily—

"I mean that this 'standing on her own rights,' which is quite legitimate for a woman who does not neglect home duties or home ties, requires more strength and tenacity of will, a more complete abnegation of womanly vanity, and more real sterling talent than you are aware of."

"And you dispute my talents?"

"I have read your recent article on woman's rights and the labour question," and his voice trembled with the slightest accent of irony.

Flora started back as if she had been struck.

"How do you know that the article you read was mine?" she asked, hesitatingly while she looked him straight in the eyes with feverish excitement. "I write under a cypher."

"But your cypher has been whispered from one to the other amongst your large circle of friends, till it was tolerably well known ere it appeared in print."

For a moment she drooped her eyes with shame.

"Well, you have read it," she said, presently; "but what am I to think of your silence on the subject—of your not once having expressed your disapproval?"

"Would you have ceased writing if I had?"

"No—a thousand times no!"

"That I knew. Hence I determined to be silent till we were married; for I am sure that a sensible wife will conform to

her husband's wishes, and not isolate herself from his side to strive after impossibilities; but prove she has talents by being his companion and——"

"But then, according to you, I have no talents," she broke in, impetuously.

"Nay, Flora, that I didn't say. You are clever and quick witted, but not—a genius," he answered, shaking his head, with a smile peeping forth from under his heavy moustache.

For a moment or two she seemed paralyzed at his audacity; then, stretching out her hands in a fury, her face flushing, her eyes like burning coals, she exclaimed—

"Thank God the last link is snapped! You dare to suggest my becoming a slave—a poor, submissive wife, with every spark of poetic inspiration crushed out of me—in order to convert me into a—a nonentity?"

Her raised voice awoke her suffering sister, who started up and stared wildly around her.

Dr. Bruck hastened to the bedside, laid his cool hand on her forehead, spoke a few soothing words to quiet her agitation, and succeeded in persuading her to lie down and close her eyes in sleep.

"I must entreat you not to disturb your sister again; I cannot answer for the consequences if you do," he said, turning his head towards Flora, but not moving his hand from Henriette's brow.

"I have nothing more to say," replied Flora, with a wilful misunderstanding of meaning, as she drew her gloves from her pocket. "Our engagement is at an end, as your last speech implies, and—I am free——"

"Because I deny you are a genius, as you fancy?" he asked, in a subdued tone.

Then, turning from the bedside, he strode over to where she stood. All the soft tenderness had gone from his eyes—he was a changed man. His tall, broad-shouldered figure towered far above her head, passion and anger seemed to have taken possession of him, as he said, in a voice trembling with emotion and suppressed passion—

"Which of the two did I woo and win, the writer or the woman? Answer me. You know it was you, and you as a simple woman only. As such you put your hand in mine, and promised to be my wife, knowing full well that I disliked publicity for a woman where it could be avoided; that I had chosen you for yourself alone, to be the stay and glory of my fire-side, *not* that you might shine before the world as an author. You knew all this quite well, and at that time it pleased you

to suppress any wishes to the contrary you might have had. I am very much astonished that you yourself have altered; that you have strayed into the path I would rather you had avoided. You have brains and tact, and ought to have understood that I sought you to be my companion, and the pride and joy of my home——"

He heaved a deep sigh as he checked himself for a moment, but he still gazed sternly on the beautiful face of the woman who stood meekly before him, listening to his words with an air of innocence and unconsciousness of wrong-doing about her that seemed to irritate him, as he went on—

"I have watched with close earnestness the change in you, from the first cloud on your beautiful brow to your entreaty for freedom from our engagement just now. Your very weaknesses, Flora, you are

not strong enough to resist; pride, ambition, vanity, even capriciousness of temper, are all there, and yet you aspire to strong-mindedness, wish to play the rôle of a leader in the woman's-right question, and claim the privileges of equality with man. What I think of this strange caprice, if it pains or pleases me, if I shall be happy or miserably unhappy in the future, is not the question now. We have solemnly and freely engaged ourselves for life, and so it shall remain. You have been reproached often enough with cruelly playing with men's hearts, and then boasting of your conquest, but you shall not do the same by *me*, of that I warn you. You are *not* free; I do not release you from your engagement, my beautiful mistress. You may commit perjury on your side or not, it is all the same—*I* mean to keep my word."

"For shame!" she cried out passionately. "Will you force me to stand with you at the altar when I swear that—that I don't love you, that—here, now I tell you—that I hate you, it's long since I loved you—do you hear? and that it is only by a strong effort over myself that I refrain from saying that I hate you, Leo, with the bitterest hatred a woman can feel."

Kathe could bear this scene no longer, with a white face and limbs trembling with fear and anxiety for the consequences of Flora's bold statement, she hurried from the room into the fresh air.

CHAPTER IV.

AS Kathe passed through the hall she saw the widow washing up the tea-things at a table in the kitchen near the door. She nodded pleasantly to the young girl, and made a laughing remark about leaving the lovers alone for a little, perfectly unconscious of the sad state of affairs between them. Kathe winced and did not reply, but hurried on to the garden.

The evening was cool, a strong wind had sprung up, and she shivered as she slowly paced the gravel-walk unprotected

by shawl or wrap from its chilling influence. The hot blood was rushing through her veins, from the unwonted excitement she was in, so that, although she shivered, she was not conscious of the cold wind blowing about her. Her cheeks were burning and her head ached with the emotion caused by the conversation she had just heard.

Hot as her cheeks were they grew still hotter with shame, as she thought over the cruel bitterness of her sister's conduct to a man who was a "thousand times too good for her," though—and Kathe paused and clasped her hands together in amazement—unworthy as Flora was, he would not give her up.

Kathe wandered on beyond the garden, down the pathway till she reached the rustic bridge. There she leant against its wooden support, and looked over the parapet below into the rushing water,

tumbling and gurgling, hurried along by the wind at her feet—some of the spray, as it dashed against the stones, falling on her skirts, and wetting her boots. Overhead, the full moon was shining brightly —and its reflection appeared visible in the dark turbulent water, still and unmoved as if fixed there for ever. Was this like love, true love? Could love shine like that, in the midst of outward disturbance?

Love was a wonderful passion after all, and led men and women to do strange deeds. Kathe's thoughts as she stood by the bridge, and peered down into the dark waters, wandered away from the scene she had just witnessed to a story the widow had told her a few days before of the last tenant of the old-fashioned house.

She was a young beautiful widow who lived there in retirement, after the death

of her husband, the lord of the adjacent castle. The new lord was a young handsome fellow, and a cousin by marriage. He had seen the beautiful face of the young widow shrouded in her weeds, bending over her embroidery frame at the window, and after a few months he fell into the habit of spurring his noble steed right across the old bridge, and riding close to the window, to have a little talk with the lovely inmate of the house, kiss her delicate white hand, and repeat the vows he had made, that as soon as her term of mourning was over he would fetch her to his castle to reign there again as its mistress.

Then he was obliged to go away to a foreign court, and as the weeks slipped by, and the young widow began to prepare for her second marriage, rumours reached her that the lord of the castle was about to

wed a fair and lovely damsel, and bring her to his home to be its mistress. But the young widow would not believe in so much falseness: she only laughed, and sat at her window daily watching for her handsome lover—till one day the blast of trumpets and the clanging of instruments fell on her ear, and she was told it was in celebration of the arrival of the young lord and his bride at the castle.

A few days later the bride and bridegroom crossed the rustic bridge to pay their respects to the young widow of the late lord. The bride's train, heavy with golden embroidery, rustled and crackled over the gravel-path, and the fan in her hand glittered with precious stones. The beautiful greyhound, which had many a time received biscuits and sweet cake from the hand of the noble lady at the window,

sprang forward towards the house, then turned back to the river, and whined, and moaned in mournful yelps. The bridegroom followed to see what was the matter, and turned pale as he saw before him the cold corpse of the beautiful lady he had betrayed, with her eyes wide open, staring as he thought reproachfully at him.

It was from that same window, where the lady had listened to the false love vows, that the light from the Doctor's evening lamp was always visible after dark; and from it the poor forsaken one must often have gazed into the dark flowing river wherein she had laid her delicate head, rather than live to mourn over the heart she had lost.

Fifty years had passed since then and now, and the sufferer inhabited that room, tormented with similar doubts—but with

this difference, thought Kathe. He is a man endowed with talents, has the world before him, and can overcome the weakness of his love by energetic work and a brilliant career. He would not think of putting an end to his life like the poor weak woman, because the woman he coveted had said she would never be his!

A moment later the girl started and her cheek paled in the darkness, as she remembered Henriette's ominous remark that "any one who had seen how fascinating" Flora could be to the man she loved, would know that he would seek death rather than give her up.

He would be *obliged* to give her up now, for she had told him in bitter cruel words that she hated him.

Kathe turned away from the bridge with a shudder, half fearing in her nervousness to see the corpse of the miser-

able woman appear before her eyes, and stretch out her hands to her for help.

It was quite dark. The forest in the distance looked like a gloomy mass of black clouds, and stood so still and solemn that it was difficult to believe every branch and twig and leaf were swaying to and fro in wild confusion from the force of the wind.

The weather-cock on the roof toiled first one way, then the other. The silver poplars bent their tall heads with graceful ease as the wind swept over them, and every bush and branch in the copse near the house creaked and moaned as each gust passed through them.

With a shy, anxious glance Kathe turned towards the house. A subdued light gleamed from the windows of the guest-chamber, where she had left the lovers standing by the window. The

angry interview was not over yet, for the Doctor was still occupying the same spot, and, as Kathe nervously peeped in, he was standing with his arms raised, as if imploring silence from Flora, who had retreated to the middle of the room. What could she have been saying to call up that drawn, haggard, yet passionate expression on the young man's face? Her own had a mocking triumphant gleam over it, that made her look like a beautiful demon in woman's form. Kathe's impulse was to spring forward, rush into the room, reproach her faithless half-sister with her cruel conduct, and do her best to comfort the man who was being so bitterly wronged. But a moment's reflection showed her how absurd such a proceeding on her part would be. She ground her teeth with rage, then a moment later trembled all over as she asked herself what would he think of her

if he knew she wished to comfort him, he who had hardly spoken to her since her arrival, who had studiously treated her with ceremonious politeness, and who had quietly put aside out of his room the wild blue flowers she had inadvertently left on his writing-table not a week ago. And in spite of the shielding darkness she blushed a rosy red, and felt as if she would like to hide herself under the earth for her momentary desire to stand by his side and express her warm sympathy for his sufferings.

She turned away, her whole frame quivering with emotion and an unaccustomed feeling of loneliness creeping over her. She did not like to go back to the garden, so she hovered about near the house and presently found herself looking in at the kitchen window, where the widow was making some preparation for the next

day's dinner. She longed to go in and offer to help her, but she dared not trust herself just now under the sharp scrutinizing glance of the old lady's clear, searching eyes. She went round to the front door, which stood open, softly crossed the hall, and entered the widow's private sitting-room, hoping to calm and quiet herself before she had occasion to encounter any member of the household. She sat down in the easy-chair near the work-table. The ivy of the tiny alcove touched her hair as she leaned back. The sweet evening perfume of the hyacinth and narcissus filled the air around her, the canary hopped now and again from one perch to the other, twittering feebly as if tired, and trying to keep himself awake; but although the presence of the bird made her feel less lonely, she was still nervous and trembling. In vain she tried to put away from her

thoughts the image the dark water outside had conjured to her brain of the dead woman who had drowned herself for love, and in spite of all her efforts, Henriette's speech, that the Doctor would not survive Flora's loss, recurred to her excited brain and made her head hot and her hands cold, for surely the invalid would not have said it if she did not believe it.

Presently, through the open door communicating with the Doctor's room, she saw the widow go in, light his lamp, replenish the fire, draw down the blinds, and then return to the kitchen. A few moments later the young man himself appeared on the threshold, one hand pressed to his forehead, the other hanging listless by his side. He evidently had no idea that a human being was watching him from the outer darkened room, with a beating heart and a terrified, anxious expression contracting

her young face till it appeared to double the number of her years.

Suddenly he crossed over to his writing-table, and Kathe noiselessly rose from her seat and watched his every movement. She saw him sit down under the light of the lamp which sharpened the outline of his profile, and made her see the deep flush on forehead and cheeks, and the excited gleam of his eyes. He hastily scribbled a few lines on a sheet of paper, though his hand shook visibly, folded and put it in an envelope with feverish, eager haste, then wrote an address on the outside. Whose name was inscribed there? Was there anything left on earth for him to care about, that he could think of now? The note *must* be for Flora—his last farewell. Then he took up the decanter of water on the table, poured some into the crystal glass Kathe had thoughtlessly used

for her flowers a few days before, and opening a drawer drew forth a tiny glass-stoppered medicine bottle. He held it to the light, as if to assure himself it was all right, then dripped into the crystal glass four or five clear colourless drops of the liquid.

Kathe had watched these proceedings with a feeling that her heart had suddenly stood still, and that she could not move if she tried; but the last drop had barely reached the water ere she regained her power of action, and with one noiseless bound stood by his side, her left hand laid on his shoulder, her right seizing the hand which held the glass just as he was putting it to his lips.

She could not utter a sound, but all she felt, all she feared, was expressed in the terror-stricken face she turned towards him. She gave one horrified look into

his eyes, then started back and sank down on her knees, bowed her head in her hands from shame, and burst into an uncontrollable flood of tears.

Then, and then only, it flashed across his mind what she had imagined he was about to do, and the effort she had made to preserve his life when falsely supposing he was in the act of committing suicide. He rose, put the glass on the table, and taking one of her hands in his pressed it warmly and whispered—

"Kathe, dear Kathe!"

He tried to look in her face, but she turned it resolutely from him, feeling ashamed in her warm sympathizing girlish heart that he should see the extent of her emotion. Never before had he realized the existence of such a strong passionate nature in this reserved bright young girl.

His voice was husky, but low and tender as he said again—

"Kathe, Kathe, don't cry so!"

She gently put aside his hand, and hastily swallowing the sobs that still shook her whole frame with their force, making her round bosom heave, she said—

"I have wounded you, Herr Doctor, I know. You will never, never be able to forget that senseless act of mine. Good heavens! how could I have been so mad as to imagine that—" she checked herself and her mouth quivered; after a moment's hesitation, she added softly as she raised her liquid brown eyes to his, with a world of passionate entreaty and self-accusation shining in their clear depths—

"Don't, please, judge me too harshly; all I have gone through to-day might well upset a stronger head than mine. How could I think you meant it? How

can you ever forgive me for such a thought?"

He gazed at the beautiful quivering mouth while uttering these bitter self-accusations as if it pained him, he felt so helpless and wretched himself.

"You have not wounded me, dear Kathe," he said presently, a smile creeping over his face, to comfort her. "And what have I to do by judging you? What you could have seen in my character and actions to cause you to think that I would commit the rash act you feared, I cannot imagine. I will not even think about it, one way or the other, but your mistake has caused me to live through a few moments I hope never to forget while I exist. And now calm yourself, or rather let me as a doctor prescribe for you." He took up the crystal glass from the table. "Drink some of this, it will do you good. But

first perhaps I ought to explain." He hesitated, then, after a moment, went on, "I allowed myself to grow heated and angry a little while ago in the sick-room. I have nerves and hot blood like other people, yet I blame myself for giving way to my feelings while discharging my duty, and to quiet my excited nerves I came in here to get this," he touched the little bottle as he spoke; "a few drops taken in cold water soothes and calms the greatest excitement. Will you drink it?"

She lifted the crystal glass to her lips and obediently drank its contents to the last drop.

"I am very sorry you were a witness to the painful scene between Flora and myself just now," he said slowly and emphatically, taking the empty glass out of her hand. "I regret it all the more, because by a few judicious words from me some days ago

we might have avoided the discussion altogether, perhaps." He smiled such a grim forced smile that poor Kathe shuddered. "I am plagued with such confounded beggarly pride, as one of my college chums once remarked, and I am not given to talking about what I feel, hence this 'beggarly pride' has developed into a sort of Cassandra's curse on me. The world mistakes silence for incapacity, and judges accordingly. I see lots of people of easy-going natures, not troubled with my curse and satisfied with themselves, able to calculate to a nicety the position they will hold after so many years' work; but I—how I hate it all! the hollowness of the world disgusts me!" And he stamped his foot on the ground, as if crushing some venomous reptile to death. He was still excited, still wanting in his usual calm self-possession of manner. His whole being seemed

in a fever, and he began restlessly pacing to and fro, every now and then pausing for a second to look at the photograph, hung over his writing-table, of the lovely woman who had raised his passion, won his love, and now ruthlessly sought to sever herself from his life. Once she had responded to his affection, accepted his passionate devotion, and promised to be the ideal and joy and loving genius of the celebrated and far-famed young Doctor's home.

But that had all passed now ; he had found out by degrees that it was not his home she wished to shine in, but a brilliant well-filled drawing-room. She had no longing now to be his wife and loved companion, but a much-admired queen of society, worshipped and lauded for her beauty, grace, and intellectual endowments. He knew all this, and yet even in answer

to her prayer for freedom from her engagement, he would not give her up. Kathe looked up at him questioningly, longing to ask if he still meant to marry Flora, in spite of her acknowledgment that the love she had once given him had since changed into hatred; but with that stern expression on his face she dared not venture, and to console herself, involuntarily frowned at the smiling picture and shook her head. Then she rose and prepared to leave the room.

"Yes, you must go I suppose," he said, standing still and looking down on the sweet young face and innocent eyes raised to his.

"The maid arrived just before I left Henriette's room, with a message from Madame Urach, begging you and Flora to join her at the Villa, as she has guests to tea, and cannot do without her young ladies.

Don't be anxious about Henriette, she is doing well, and I give you my word that there is no danger at present, so be comforted about her ; I will take the tenderest care of her, you may be sure—now go ; those drops have done you good already——"

She interrupted him, earnestly entreating to be allowed to remain and nurse her sick sister through the night.

"No, nothing of the sort ; the maid is quite sufficient ; but before you go, give me your hand, Kathe." He held out his, and she laid her slender fingers in it without a second's hesitation. And now, whatever you hear said about me this evening, don't be led into condemning me. In a few days she will think differently," and he nodded his head without looking up at Flora's portrait, "and that will decide me. I must not, dare not re-

proach myself with taking advantage of this happy moment."

She looked at him, as if asking for an explanation to his words; but he merely shook his head gently, as much as to say, "Yes, so it is;"—and neither spoke.

"Good-night, good-night!" he said presently, and letting go her hand he walked over to the table, while she went towards the door. Involuntarily she turned her head on reaching the threshold; she saw him raise the empty crystal glass to his lips; the next moment it had fallen to the floor, dashed in a hundred pieces——

When Kathe reached the sick-chamber Flora was standing ready dressed for going home. "Where have you been, child?" she asked sharply; "grandmamma is waiting for us, and we shall get a sharp reprimand

for keeping the tea standing, and all from your fault."

Kathe did not answer; throwing the wrap the maid had brought round her head, she went over to the bedside. Henriette was sleeping gently, and the fever in her cheeks seemed subdued; softly kissing the little hand on the coverlet, the young girl followed her elder half-sister into the hall. There, a footman awaited the young ladies, with lantern in hand, to conduct them through the park to the Villa. As they crossed the old-fashioned oaken floor, a side-door opened, and Doctor Bruck appeared, holding in his hand the hasty note he had written, which Kathe had so falsely mistaken for his farewell to the world. Her cheeks flushed painfully as she heard him ask the footman to take it to the house of one of the doctors in town, and wait for an answer. Without glancing at his face,

the young girl hurried past him, and entering the kitchen, bade good-night to the widow.

A few moments later, the Doctor's aunt opened her eyes wide with astonishment on entering the hall, to find that Flora had left her house without so much as a formal good-night, or word of thanks ; but she said nothing, and quietly followed her nephew into the sick-room to see that all was satisfactorily arranged for the sick girl's comfort.

Just beyond the bridge, Flora stood still and looked back at the old-fashioned house. The light from the hall shone faintly on her face, exhibiting the scornful expression which curled her mouth as she muttered aloud in ironical tones—

"Certainly the old place is to my taste—just what I should like—a hut and a heart—a husband without profession or influence—a skeleton in the cupboard, and no other

income than my miserable pittance, which is barely enough to dress me decently. Never before to-day have I realized what it is to be humbled; for the first time in my life, I felt oppressed and overcome by all those poverty-stricken surroundings; and I shuddered as I realized the narrow escape I have had of being tied down to such an existence for life. God grant Henriette may get over this attack, for I shall never enter that house again—never—not even to see her again. How I have been deceived, to be sure; good heavens! I shall never forgive myself for being so blind as to be caught by him——!"

The wind blew her skirts round her knees and loosened the scarf on her head, and the water dashed in a fury against the stones at her feet, but she heeded nothing; her thoughts were concentrated on the subject of her unfortunate engagement. She

went back a few steps, and stood on the boards of the old bridge.

"He says he won't give me up in spite of all my entreaties, and all I have told him," she said, catching hold of Kathe's arm to prevent her going on; "you were there, you heard him say so. What a poor mean-spirited fellow he must be, to cling so tenaciously to the letter of our engagement, when he knows the spirit of it has gone for ever! He knows he has deceived me shamefully, and if he were an honourable man he would release me from our bond. Let him—let him remember for the rest of his life that a shadow rests on his honour—from this moment I am free—free!"

And snatching off her betrothed ring, she flung it into the seething river at her feet.

"Flora, how can you!" cried Kathe in an agonized tone, stretching out her hand as if to recover the lost ring which had

gleamed for a second in the dark air, then disappeared for ever in the waters. She shuddered too, and laid her hand over her eyes as if she feared the spirit of the wronged fair widow would rise out of the river, to avenge this insult to faithful love.

"Don't be foolish, Kathe—if I had sprung in under the waves myself you couldn't look more scared," said Flora; "I have no doubt that many a woman has done it too, from a less cause; I have simply flung away the last link of a hated chain—it was merely a thin gold hoop, 'simple' as everything else over there," she added, caressing the third finger of her left hand, and nodding towards the house they had quitted; "and yet it felt as heavy as iron. Well, I've done it, there let it lie; a new life is before me!—"

Yes, she had thrown off the yoke at

last—"thrown it off at any cost," as she had often threatened to do; and the symbol of the bond she had broken lay out of sight under the rolling waters.

When the sisters reached the Villa, a man-servant met them in the hall, and informed them that several visitors had arrived, and tea was to be served in the large drawing-room.

"All the better!" remarked Flora to Kathe. "I am not at all in the humour for a lecture from grandmamma. Old Madame Steimitz will have so many scandals and so much gossip to retail, that I and my actions need not be discussed to-night. I shall just go and pour out tea for them, and then retire to my own room, to rejoice in and enjoy my new-born freedom," she added in a whisper to Kathe, as they separated at the top of the stairs.

But Kathe felt too upset to listen to the

gossip going on in the drawing-room, and sent down a message of excuse for her absence on the plea of severe head-ache. Her heart and body both ached, and the blood coursed feverishly through her veins, as if she were going to be ill.

CHAPTER V.

THE next morning the Villa was in a state of commotion. Late over-night the Counsellor had arrived from Berlin, accompanied by two friends, and before retiring to rest had announced to the housekeeper that he had invited several friends in town to join him and his guests at breakfast the next morning.

"Now mind, the notice is short, I allow, but I expect you to do your best, and let the breakfast be first-rate. About seven or eight gentlemen will be here by ten,"

he added to the sleepy and astonished woman, who knew very well that a "first-rate breakfast" was not such an easy thing to prepare as her master seemed to imagine, especially when the order was given in the middle of the night and the nearest butcher's-shop was two or three miles off.

All night through Kathe had been wakeful. The wind howling round the house, added to the excitement of the day, prevented her sleeping. For hours she sat at her window, watching the swaying to and fro of the trees in the park, and trying to catch a glimpse of the gilded weather-cock over the roof of the house by the river; but in vain. Every now and again, in her anxiety about Henriette, she fancied she saw a messenger coming along the path on that side of the park, bringing, of course, the worst news of the poor little invalid.

The wind was so high she had not heard the approaching wheels of the carriage bearing her guardian and his friends to the door; and it was with a start of surprise that she saw the servants hurrying to and fro with shaded lanterns, assisting the gentlemen to alight. She had not been looking that way at all, and when she turned her head and suddenly observed the bright light from the hall shining on the figures of the new arrivals, and glittering on the silver and gold ornaments of the harness, together with the flashing of the lanterns on the bronze and marble pillars of the portico, she drew back from her position at the window, imagining, in her astonishment at the unexpected scene below, that she herself could be seen.

She recognized the tall, elegant figure of her guardian as he sprang down from the curricle, and watched the kindly way he

patted the horses' necks ere he entered the house, with a curiosity and wonder quite involuntary on her part. The whole scene was so noiseless and unexpected, it appeared more like a fairy dream than a reality; and when all was dark, and the last light had disappeared, she threw off her dressing-gown and lay down on her bed.

Early dawn was creeping in at the windows ere she closed her eyes, and then she slept till a couple of hours later than usual; so that instead of reaching the house by the river soon after six, as she intended, it was nine o'clock when she found herself in the park.

It was a beautiful, bright, clear morning; the wind had lulled at sunrise, and the air was sweet with the perfume of violets and other spring flowers.

When Kathe reached the bridge, the

water, which had been so turbulent the evening before, was flowing peacefully along, glittering in the sunlight and murmuring under the worm-eaten planks with a soft, gentle gurgle, that tempted the young girl to linger by its side and listen to the music of its voice.

The old house had an air of festivity and gaiety about it that attracted Kathe's attention, and made her wonder what could have happened to give it such a joyous appearance. The path leading up to the porch was sprinkled with the finest silver sand, and carefully raked in a pretty zigzag pattern. The table by the door was covered with a clean linen cloth, on which stood an antique vase full of lovely flowers and freshly-cut evergreens.

The faithful old servant, who has been with her mistress so many years, was standing by the kitchen-door, her face glowing

with happiness and soap and water, her sleeves neatly pinned above her elbows, and a large white apron half hiding the cleanest and freshest of cotton skirts; and the widow herself was dressed as if she expected visitors. It was scarcely nine o'clock, and yet she wore a rich brown silk dress in place of the usual simple stuff jacket and skirt; costly lace adorned her throat and wrists, and a cap of the same dainty material partly covered her silver hair.

"Can it be in honour of Flora?" thought Kathe, with a tightened feeling at her heart, as she remembered her half-sister's bitter words of the night before. "Can these gay preparations be meant to please Flora, who, the widow imagines, must come here again to see poor Henriette?"

But the widow said nothing about it, when presently she came out into the

porch and greeted the young girl with a smile. Kathe noticed that her cheeks were flushed, her eyes full of tears, and her voice trembled, but that a happy, pleased expression shone in her grand, handsome face, as, in answer to Kathe's inquiry of how the patient had passed the night, she tenderly took her young visitor in her arms, drew her to her heart, and kissed her as lovingly as a mother kisses her child, and informed her that Henriette was no worse, but, if anything, slightly better.

A few moments later Kathe entered the sick-room, blushing and smiling at this unusual expression of affection on the widow's part. She found the maid combing out the long fair hair of the invalid, whose small thin face, sharp cheek bones, with dark rings round her large eyes, looked wan and ghastly in the morning

light. Her voice was stronger, certainly; but she was restless and fretful.

She told Kathe, with kindling eyes, how good and kind *her* doctor had been, how he had sat up all night, how he had given her medicine and refreshment with his own hands, and eased her aching, burning head with his cool fingers, and how he had gone to lie down now for an hour to get a little sleep before going into town to see his patients. Presently, when the long hair was put in order, face and hands refreshed with water, and her pillows smoothed, she begged Kathe to go back to the Villa and fetch a book she had promised to lend to the widow to read.

"I want it at once, Kathe, dear. I told her she should have it—she is so good to me—more kind than I can tell you; and Flora has it, I know it is in her room." Then she added, fretfully, "Don't let Flora

or grandmamma come here. I don't want them—they worry me; but if Flora should come, then tell her not to stay long."

She little guessed how needless was the precaution, or what sad and painful consequences had followed her feverish wanderings of the evening before. Kathe could scarcely look her in the face as she remembered all that had passed, and she was very glad when the invalid urged her to go for the book at once, and to bring back with her several things she named from off the writing-table in her room.

On her road across the park Kathe could think of nothing but the sad havoc twelve hours' fever and suffering had made in Henriette's usually thin, pale face. The sunken features, death-like pallor, and feverish eyes of the poor little invalid haunted her. Full of vague fears and anxieties as to the result of yesterday's

accident on Henriette's delicate frame, she was absently crossing the hall to mount the stairs on her arrival at the Villa, when her attention was attracted by the brilliant appearance of the breakfast-table, seen through the open door of the dining-room. The glittering silver, costly china and glass, and exquisite damask cloth and serviettes formed a fitting centre to the oriental walls, marble floors, and exotic plants of the room and winter garden beyond. On a magnificent carved stand at the side, several bottles of rare and old wines were conspicuous for their grim and dust-covered appearance.

She stood still for a second, fascinated by the beauty and elegance of the room thus prepared with every luxury for the delight and pleasure of the Counsellor's guests, then shuddered and turned away as Henriette's death-like countenance rose before her mental vision. Slowly mounting the

stairs, she gathered together the few things Henriette required from her room, and then wended her steps towards Madame Urach's boudoir, to pay her usual dutiful morning respects to the old lady, and inform her of how her granddaughter had passed the night. Hesitating for a moment on the last stair, as she recognized the postman's voice in the hall, she leaned over the carved balustrade, and heard one of the men-servants remark—

"Now, really, here be this packet come back again for the third time! I'm sick of the thing. Our young lady must think I've nothing to do but carry it into town. She'll be sure to send it somewhere else to-day. I'm half inclined to put it in the kitchen fire to have done with it."

"What's in it?" asked another.

"Oh! only a lot of paper on which Fräulein Flora's scribbled, as big as you please,

something about women's rights. I saw the title when I stood by her a few days ago, while she wrote the fresh address. What can such as she know about——"

Kathe hurried to the boudoir and knocked, but the maid who opened the door told her that her mistress had a visitor—one of the ladies from the Court; so the young girl turned away, and retraced her steps to the hall, to fetch the book from Flora's sitting-room.

Her heart beat fast as she opened the door to enter. She had no desire to see her half-sister. The anger and indignation she had felt over-night towards her for her ungenerous and cruel conduct to the Doctor took possession of her again, and her face flushed painfully as she said—"Good-morning" in a rather constrained tone.

Flora stood at the table in no very amiable mood, and her cheeks flushed

also as she returned her young half-sister's greeting.

But it was not regret or shame of last night's scene that caused the angry colour to mount to her brow. A letter she had just finished reading and flung into the waste-paper basket proved that, and she hastily covered over the packet Kathe had noticed in the servant's hand not five minutes ago, and which now lay on the table beside several other letters and papers.

"You have seen Henriette, have you? She is going on all right, I hear. I sent down at eight o'clock to inquire how she was. What a thoughtless man Moriz is! Fancy his sending me a note early this morning, which he wrote in the night, saying that he wished to introduce his friends to grandmamma and me before their breakfast. You have heard he ordered a grand

breakfast for himself and friends at ten? Just as if the world would stand still if we did *not* see these men! Grandmamma won't be pleased, I know. How do you like my toilette?"

"As usual, you look lovely."

Flora smiled. If what is said is true, that women dress themselves according to the humour of the moment, then Flora must have awoke this morning in a very happy frame of mind, for she was dressed from head to foot in a soft shimmering blue, that was very becoming both to her complexion and figure. Even her hair was ornamented with a dainty little knot of the same colour. But whatever humour she had been in when she made her toilette, the expression on her beautiful face now was one of discontent and irritation. She looked thoroughly bad-tempered, and her smile, in answer to Kathe's exclamation of

admiration was forced and constrained, and more mechanical than voluntary. She made no reference to last night's conversation. On the third finger of her left hand two small diamonds flashed where the plain gold betrothal ring had formerly shone.

At Kathe's request she turned to her book-shelves for the desired volume.

"Surely Henriette is not allowed to read?" she asked.

"Dr. Bruck would forbid it, of course. No, the book is for his aunt," replied Kathe quietly, as she held out her hand for the volume.

Flora's mouth curled into a sneer, and her eyes flashed displeasure and anger at Kathe for daring to utter Dr. Bruck's name in her presence. Kathe had opened the door and was leaving the room when she came face to face with her guardian, the Counsellor, who looked handsomer than usual in his

grey morning suit, and had an excited air about him as he hurried forward, exclaiming—

"There you are, Kathe! Don't go. I must first convince myself that you are safe and well."

He half pushed, half led her back into the room in a playful manner, shut the door, and flinging his hat on to a chair, said:

"Now, for God's sake, tell me the truth about your hair-breadth escape yesterday. Anton gave me a confused account of it while I was dressing, but no one said a word to me about it last night for fear it might disturb my rest, for which consideration I am not thankful. What will be thought of me and my heedless conduct! There is Henriette lying dangerously ill, and I giving a champagne breakfast to a lot of fellows in my own house! What

on earth is the truth of the affair? A crowd of wretches attacked you?"

"Not *us*—but me specially, Moriz," said Flora. "Henriette and Kathe had to suffer simply because they were with me. I am sorry to have to say it; but I must reproach you with being greatly to blame for the attack. You ought to have acted differently at the first sign of discontent amongst them. Such a rabble as those workmen ought to have a firm, decided, masterful hand over them. But you from the very beginning dallied about your duty, and were so weak——"

"Weak in giving way to you and your grandmother if you like," interrupted her brother-in-law, white with anger. "You neither of you gave me any peace till I had withdrawn my promise about the land —and thus unnecessarily irritated the hands. Bruck was right——"

"Spare me *there!*" exclaimed Flora, her face flushing with rage. "If you have no other authority to mention but him, then——"

The Counsellor drew nearer his angry sister-in-law, and looking into her flashing eyes, with no little astonishment expressed in his own, asked earnestly—

"Flora, do you mean it? are you still so hostile towards him?"

"Do you think I am such a weak-headed fool as to change my opinions as often as one does one's dress?" she asked bitingly.

"No, not so; but isn't it rather too daring for you to defy the world's——"

"What is the world to me?" she broke in with a loud laugh. "The world—society! Will you tell me then how it would be possible to make 'society' accept your much-to-be-pitied protégé?"

The Counsellor seized her hand, and for a moment appeared speechless from surprise.

"Ha! how is that possible?" he gasped rather than exclaimed. "Don't you know ——"

"What don't I know?" she broke in again impatiently as he hesitated, and she frowned ominously, and lightly stamped her foot.

Before he had time to reply the door opened, and Madame Urach entered the room. She had on a violet-coloured silk dress, but whether or not it was the colour that ill became her, or yesterday's excitement had given her a bad night, whichever it was she looked haggard and worn, and very much distressed.

The Counsellor hurried towards her and respectfully kissing her hand regretted he had not been able to wish her "good-

morning" half-an-hour before. He had been to her boudoir, but was informed that she was engaged, and could not receive him.

"Yes, Fräulein von Berneck was with me, expressing her sympathy for the sad state Henriette is in. She was horrified at hearing of the attack on Flora," the old lady replied. "We shall have a trying day I expect, for all in town are astonished and excited at the news, and our friends will be sure to come to inquire if it is really true."

She sank down in the nearest easy-chair with a lassitude and want of energy that was not usual with her, as she went on :—

"The lady-in-waiting had other reasons for her early visit. I know her well; she is one of those who love to be the first to impart startling news, not caring or stopping to consider if in so doing she was betraying

a Court secret. Imagine, she came to congratulate me privately on the good fortune which is to befall our house—and I hardly know if I ought to weep or rejoice over it! Good heavens, what a dilemma it has put me in! It is really shameful too, the way our Court is proving the truth of the old proverb about ingratitude, instead of giving a good example to the contrary. You know how my poor old friend Bär has sacrificed himself to serve the Court, and yet now he is to be overlooked and ignored. He is still strong and well, and yet they are pensioning him off."

"And is that what Fräulein von Berneck came to congratulate you about?" asked Flora angrily.

"Of course not *that*, my dear," answered her grandmother with more energy. "Wonderful things are happening, Flora. Who would have believed an hour ago

that Dr. Bruck would be appointed physician to the Prince?"

"Mere Court scandal and gossip! I wonder what next their inventive heads will hit upon," laughed Flora. "Court physician indeed! And you listened to such nonsense, grandmamma, and let that old tittle-tattler congratulate you?"

"Now really it is hardly possible to believe that civilized beings living close to a capital town don't read the newspapers!" cried the Counsellor, clapping his hands together. "You don't mean to say you have no idea of what is going on? and I came back a day sooner simply on that account; I could not stay away for joy. The newspapers are full of the wonderful operation Bruck performed in L—— the other day. You must know the hereditary Prince was at L—— studying there; he was thrown from his horse, and hurt his

head so seriously that none of the doctors dared undertake the necessary operation, not even Professor H—— himself. Then some one suddenly remembered that Bruck had treated a similar case in the late war, and to every one's astonishment brought his patient successfully through the operation. So he was telegraphed for to the Prince ——"

"What, *your* Dr. Bruck, your protégé ?" interrupted Flora, trying to laugh, but her pale lips seemed turned into stone, and her whole face turned white as death.

"Certainly, *my* Bruck, as I am only too proud to call him," replied her brother-in-law good-naturedly, too decidedly glad at the happy turn things had taken to notice Flora's sneer. Long ago he had ceased to feel any scruples of conscience relative to his silence on the subject of the late miller's death ; he had almost ceased to think about

it, for he was a true son of modern days—an egotist — who in the choice between "he" or "I" never hesitated for a second to pronounce in favour of "I," while he was glad that the clouds which had lately hung heavy and dark over the young Doctor's career were clearing away, and that sunshine was streaming on his head again.

"Besides," he went on, "a pamphlet of his is making a great sensation among the faculty. It appears he has some theory of his own about operations in general which he wants adopted. It is by no means to be denied that Bruck has a grand career open before him."

"Who would believe it!" remarked Flora in a strangely subdued tone. Doubt and mistrust visible in every feature, she looked for a moment like a gambler risking his last hope on the card he was

playing. "You don't convince me, Moriz, with all that nonsense; either there is some mistake in the name, or the whole story is a trumped-up affair,"

As his sister-in-law uttered these bitter words the Counsellor forgot his usual courteous manner before ladies, and not only stamped his foot in a passion but turned on his heel and walked away.

Meanwhile Madame Urach was anxiously watching her granddaughter's countenance. She could thoroughly understand how bitterly she must regret having despised and slandered a man who had proved himself worthy of honour and respect. It was certainly a sad defeat for the proud woman, but the well-experienced worldly dame tried to make the best of it for her grandchild.

"It's of no use disbelieving the affair, Flora," she said. "In the end you will be

forced to accept it as a fact. I, for my part—wonderful as it all seems—don't doubt it for a moment. The Duke of D—— is the young Prince's uncle. I don't wonder that he is thankful and happy at his nephew's escape. Yesterday evening I saw the grand Darmstadt decoration lying on Dr. Bruck's table."

"And you tell me that now, grandmamma? now for the first time?" cried Flora as if mad. "Oh! why didn't you speak of it last night? why did you keep silence about it so long?"

"Keep silence?" repeated the old lady, angrily shaking her head with a nervous movement not unusual with ladies of her age. "You impertinent girl! I should like to know what else kept me from mentioning the fact, except that for months past we have hardly dared mention Bruck's name in your presence without a scene.

I have avoided as much as possible——"

"If my conduct had your sanction, chère grandmère——"

"I avoided this mention of his name because it always upsets me to witness outbursts of feeling. You have been his bitterest opponent, have judged and condemned him more severely than his enemies, and the slightest attempt to exonerate him always puts you in a passion. Moriz and Henriette could tell a tale about that, and haven't you even now showed the scoffing way you take with Moriz whenever he tries to screen the young man? How have you just received the good news of his advancement?"

The old lady must have been terribly put out to refer in this open manner to Flora's disgraceful behaviour to her lover during the past few months. It was so

contrary to her usual habit of silence as regards her family's faults before others, that the haughty girl was dumb from astonishment. Standing by the window with her back to her grandmother, the quick heaving of her bosom showed how she was struggling with herself to keep her feelings within bounds.

"Tell me *when* I ought to have imparted to you my discovery of the order?" the old lady went on presently. "Yesterday evening before my guests when you barely remained half an hour in the drawing-room, though you knew I wished you to help me to entertain them? or in the Doctor's house earlier in the afternoon, where I did not see you for a moment alone, and where you sat in your corner looking the picture of disgust at your lover's poor surroundings."

"You will be kind enough to remember,

dear grandmamma, that that troubled you as well as me, the same thing concerns us both, as you know very well."

"My dear, it is of no use talking to you, you turn and twist everything to please yourself, and you have very little respect for truth where a falsehood suits your purpose," retorted the old lady with an impatient movement of her hand which scattered several papers lying on the table. Endeavouring to gather them together her eye lighted on the packet returned to Flora by the postman.

"Ah! has that article found its way back again after its zigzag journeyings hither and thither?" she exclaimed, pointing to the packet. "I should have thought you would have left it in peace in the waste-basket long ago. This continual sending to and fro, and the refusal of the publishers to accept the work, would be unbearable to

me. What a storm there would be if one of us were to venture to protest against your possessing talent and power enough to write, and yet every month or so you allow it to be told you by——"

"Don't excite yourself, dear grandmamma! You can make a mistake like other people, sometimes," interrupted Flora with a speaking glance at Kathe, who had been forced into hearing similar statements made the evening before. "You are not yourself this morning, you are upset at the thought of losing your influential friend at Court. I pity you, dear grandmamma, because I don't think Dr. Bruck will care to be an intermedium between you and the royal family; not even for love of me would he retail scandal. But sorry as I am for you, I don't see why I need be sacrificed to please any one, so I shall take myself off till you are in a better frame of mind."

And gathering her papers together, she swept across the floor and vanished behind the door of her dressing-room.

"She is a very peculiar girl," said the old lady with a sigh. "She doesn't take after her mother, who was softness and sweetness itself. Her father spoilt her by allowing her to head his table when she was quite a young girl, almost a child. I told him several times he was doing her harm, but one might as well have spoken to the wind. You know, Moriz, how obstinate he could be when once he had taken an idea into his head."

Kathe moved towards the door to leave the room, for it pained her to hear her dead father reproached for Flora's faults, however much those faults might have been encouraged by his own mode of bringing her up, and reproached, too, by his mother-

in-law, whose presence in his house he had good reasons for refusing.

"You are so pale, Kathe, and look so wan and tired, I think you must be suffering from yesterday's excitement. Poor little one!" said her guardian, following her and taking her hand as he glanced kindly in her face.

"I have noticed her change colour at a mere nothing for several days past, and she is so serious too," remarked Madame Urach quickly, before the young girl had time to speak. "I know what ails her, she is home-sick, and no wonder; too she is accustomed to the quiet, regular life of a simple family where she is made much of, and where, of course, every wish and whim of the rich pupil becomes law. It is quite impossible for us to indulge her to the same extent, our household is on a different scale, we live in the world, and I have no

doubt that she feels the constant society around her here is too much and too exciting: am I right, dear child?" she asked, stroking the girl's cheek softly.

"I am sorry to contradict you, Madame —but I must say no," answered Kathe, in her ringing young voice, drawing back her head as if she objected to the caress. "I was not made much of, nor were my whims and fancies regarded as law, in the house of my dear kind governess. I was brought up very strictly, I can assure you —and since I have been rich"—and she laughed with a mischievous twinkle in her eye—"I think my faults have not been condoned so easily as they used to be. And I am not so unaccustomed to society as you imagine, Madame. Our rooms are so small in Dresden, we cannot have many whist-tables—but we had charming

evenings without cards, when the Professors of the Academy, and other friends, would enliven us with their delightful conversation; or when some celebrated musician would come to us, and be compelled to play on my poor worn-out piano." Her lips quivered with suppressed merriment, but there was a decided shade of sarcasm discernible in the tones of her voice, as she drew up her figure and looked straight at Madame Urach. "There is one thing I am thankful for," she went on, "and that is, that I was taught not to think of myself when another's comfort and happiness were at stake. Don't be shocked, Moriz!" she added, facing round fearlessly on her guardian. "Let me stay on here some time longer, will you, for Henriette's sake?"

"Bless me—I have no other desire or wish than that you should remain,"

he replied so fervently that Kathe was astonished.

Madame Urach was standing by the table turning over the leaves of a book, apparently more interested in what she saw there than in the young girl's remarks.

"Of course you shall stay here as long as you like, my dear; but we must not let you sacrifice yourself to your affection. Nanni takes all possible care of Henriette—she is accustomed to her delicate state too—besides there is my maid to assist her, if needful. You can go home, dear child, and be at ease about Henriette, she will be well attended to."

"Let the motive be what it may, grandmother, it is enough that Kathe wishes to remain with us," remarked the Counsellor quickly, still looking earnestly at the bright young girl at his side, as he added,

"Besides, I was so sure you were going to stay some time amongst us, Kathe, that I ordered your new pianoforte—ha! and a splendid instrument it is too—worth twenty such gimcracks as that one in the drawing-room, and I ordered it to be sent here direct."

"But, Moriz, how could you?" cried the girl, in a startled voice. "Dresden is and always will be my home—it ought to have gone there—I only visit here, you know;" then laughing, she added merrily, "Am I to carry a grand-piano about with me as part of my luggage?"

"I fancy you will think differently in reference to Dresden some day," he replied, with a slight expressive smile. "Any way, the instrument arrives to-morrow, and will be placed in your room for the present."

Madame Urach closed the book in her

hand with a sharp snap, but she spoke in her usual indifferent manner.

"You are making arrangements, Moriz, which will upset several plans of mine, though of course that won't matter very much. But I shall be obliged to write to Baroness von Steiner to-day, and postpone her intended visit."

"I don't see why."

"The room Kathe occupies now was intended for her companion. You know she never goes anywhere without her."

The Counsellor shrugged his shoulders.

"I am very sorry, but naturally Kathe, my ward, remains where she is."

Opposition from him! He dared to look her coolly in the face, and announce that Baroness von Steiner must yield to Kathe—he who formerly moved heaven and earth and considered nothing a sacri-

fice to obtain guests of rank and position to visit at his house!

The old lady bit her lip and raised her brows.

"I will write at once to my friend," she said, "and explain the unfortunate position I am in—I regret it, and I must say, because, of course, I could not foresee what would happen."

She rose, gathered her skirts together, and was leaving the room when Kathe sprang forward and detained her.

"No, no, Madame, you must not do it. You can't be in earnest, Moriz," she said, turning to her guardian. "You can't really mean to make Madame's guests give way to a young girl like me? It must not be. Besides, haven't I a house of my own? I will take up my quarters at the Mill-house as soon as Baroness von Steiner arrives."

"That I can't allow, my dear Kathe,

indeed I can't," replied the old lady severely. The proud haughtiness of her nature flashed in her eyes as she went on, "I am not a very severe person—your mother never had any reason to complain of unfriendliness on my side—but the intimate relations that would ensue between the Mill-house and the Villa I could not tolerate—the running to and fro would vex me to death; besides, I would not have such a thing known to my friend for anything, she would be simply horrified. Moriz, you will find me in the blue drawing-room when you wish to introduce your friends." And with a slight inclination of the head, she left the room.

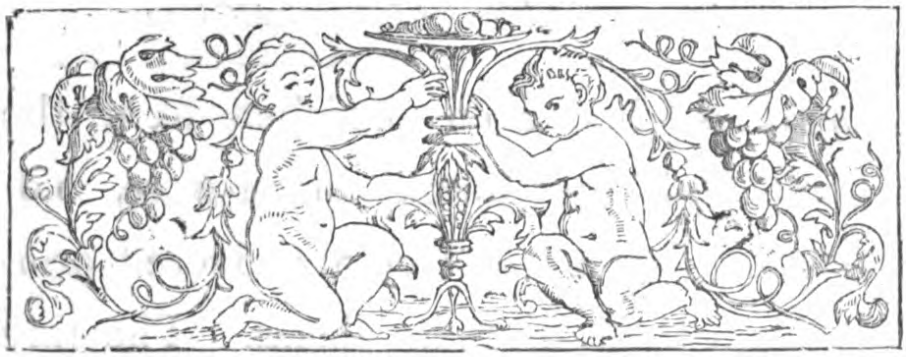
The Counsellor waited till the rustling of her silk skirts had ceased in the distance, and the door of her boudoir was sharply closed, ere he turned to Kathe, and with a light laugh remarked,

"You have had quite a lecture! The old lady lets her claws be felt in spite of her soft velvet paws—doesn't she? But she won't be able to do it much longer. Poor old dame, she has had a heavy blow, and feels it, but she is harmless now. With her old friend Bär's retirement from Court her influence there and in society is at an end." He rubbed his hands with delight. "Don't you yield an inch to her, Kathe dear; you have more right in my house that any one else—remember that!"

A servant entered as he was speaking, and announced that his friends awaited him in the drawing-room. Snatching up his hat he offered Kathe his arm, but she slipped past him, and went out into the hall.

Her guardian's manner and tone towards herself did not please her at all, neither did she admire him for laughing at the old

lady as soon as her back was turned, when in her presence he was almost subserviently respectful. The young girl felt uncomfortable, and it was with a sigh of intense relief that she turned her back on the red-curtained room, and wended her way through the fresh sweet morning air to the house by the river.



CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Kathe returned to the Doctor's house, she found the sick-room furnished with the same simple furniture it had had when Henriette was first carried in there, and laid on the bed.

Doctor Bruck had yielded to the sick girl's passionate desire to have the things from the Villa removed out of her sight, so they were piled together and placed in a corner of the wide hall. The green damask fauteuil, elegant fire-screen, and costly carpet—even the gold-bordered washing

apparatus—had been banished from the room, and the simple stone-ware, old-fashioned screen, and chintz-covered arm-chair put back in their places. The tiny fountain freshened the air with water supplied from a red earthen basin, and on a table by the bedside stood Henriette's canary cage, which had been fetched from the Villa at her expressed wish. Her favourite bird flew in and out of the cage-door as unconcernedly as if he had been at home, hopped over the bed, picked bits of sugar from the little invalid's weak fingers, and perched on the curtain rings over the windows, to the delight and amusement of his mistress.

At noon, the maid had been despatched to the Villa to take a few hours' rest, the widow undertaking to watch over her invalid guest for the rest of the day. She still wore the rich brown silk dress and

dainty lace; but to avoid the rustling of her skirt against the furniture, she had covered it with a large linen apron, fastened round her waist.

When Kathe reached Henriette's bedside, she found that her half-sister was already aware of the happy change in the young Doctor's prospects. It appears that Nanni had seen one of the gentlemen of the Court arrive in the hall, soon after Kathe's departure for the Villa; had seen him greet the widow with a warmth and respect that raised the curiosity of the serving-woman, who had immediately gone to her young mistress and told her of the unusual and early visit, and that the gentleman was talking with the Doctor and his aunt in their sitting-room. As soon as the visitor had driven off in his carriage, Henriette's impatience and curiosity got the better of her; she sent for Doctor Bruck,

and questioned and cross-questioned him about his noble visitor, till he had satisfied her by telling her the whole history of the successful operation, and its happy results.

"They expected the visit this morning, so that is why the dear, dear old lady is dressed in her best, Kathe; doesn't she look nice?" asked Henriette, later in the afternoon, when the two girls were alone.

The Doctor had gone to the Palace to have an interview with the Prince, and his aunt was busy in some household duty in her own room. The invalid was propped up in bed, her pale wan face radiant with heartfelt joy and happiness. She had been forbidden to speak, for the cry of delight she had uttered, when earlier in the day the Doctor had informed her of his good-fortune, had exhausted her so completely, that he had feared a return of yesterday's hemorrhage. For hours she had

been obedient, had hardly opened her lips, and had refrained from asking either him or his aunt a single question relative to the subject uppermost in her mind; but now that she was alone with Kathe, and the widow's warning finger was no longer there to stop the words which rose to her lips, she started up in bed, and after telling Kathe all she knew, and before Kathe had time to answer her question about the widow, she became suddenly very excited, and said—

"Where is Flora?"

"You know your grandmamma has sent over several times to say that she has such a constant succession of visitors, she can't escape away just yet, though she is longing to come and see you, dear."

"Grandmamma, indeed!" exclaimed Henriette, impatiently jerking herself on her pillows. "Who wants her? Let her re-

main where she is. I spoke of Flora." Then, clasping her hands together and leaning towards her sister, she added, "Isn't that a splendid justification for him, Kathe! How I thank God I have lived to see and know it! How I hope he won't go to the Villa on his return from the Palace. I must see him and Flora meet for the first time after this grand news—I must. I do so long to see her humiliate herself before him—I——"

"Henriette, don't talk so much; you will excite yourself," Kathe entreated.

"Let me alone; I *will* talk," she went on, angrily. "If the Doctor knew what suffering he inflicts on me by obliging me to hold my tongue, he would let me talk." Then, leaning on her elbow, and passing her hand through her thick, fair hair, she asked, "Do you remember, Kathe, how Flora sneered at the Doctor when he re-

turned from that journey lately, and told him to his face he had only been amusing himself for the few days he was absent?" Her eyes grew excited and feverish, and had the same wild expression in them as in her delirium of the evening before.

Kathe tried to soothe and quiet her, but it was of no use.

"Don't you remember, too, how angry she was with Moriz because he suggested Dr. Bruck had gone to see a patient? No, no; if she were to beg on her knees for forgiveness, it could not atone for her malice and wickedness to that man! Her conduct has been shameful—shameful! I would give anything to be able to see into her heart just now! What humiliation for her! She deserves it, doesn't she? I should think she won't be able to look us in the face when next we meet—or him

either. Do you think she will? When will she come here?"

Kathe sat silent by the bedside, as silent and still as if she had been the culprit. Her angry and indignant invalid sister had no idea that Flora's feet were not likely to pass the threshold of the Doctor's house again; neither did she know that Flora had herself snapped the last link of the chain which bound her to her lover, by throwing the simple gold hoop which formed her engagement-ring into the foaming waves under the bridge. And who was to tell her this? Who was to let her know the sad consequences of her last night's half-delirious ravings?

"Why don't you speak, Kathe?" Henriette grumbled. "Have you cold blood in your veins, that you are so little interested in this affair? Of course, you don't know us very well yet; and you

can't be expected to feel as deeply about the affair as I do. You have seen the Doctor so seldom, and have hardly spoken ten words to him; so I suppose he does not interest you. But you have seen Flora's detestable behaviour, have heard the heartless way she has spoken to and of her lover; and surely you must be glad that she is punished—that justice is being meted out to her?"

Kathe looked up, and her flashing eyes and the rush of blood to her cheeks and brow, dying even the snow-white throat, were proof positive that the blood within her was warm and passionate.

"And if her punishment is carried out to the full, and Flora has to acknowledge her falseness and heartlessness, what then? What good will that do to the injured man?" she asked, in a low, constrained tone. "Flora has expressed aversion and

dislike to the Doctor, you say. Well, his being raised to a position at Court can't possibly make her love for him return."

"Certainly, without doubt it will. Flora has such a pitiful ambitious disposition," replied the invalid, in a bitter, contemplative tone. "And he? You will see that the very first attempt she makes at reconciliation, he will forget the past as if it had never happened."

She shut her eyes and shook her head for a moment ere adding, in a whisper, "If only love were not such an unfathomable enigma! He loves her as much as ever. How else can one account for his strange toleration of all her wilful, wicked caprices? If Satan himself looked out through her beautiful face, and her hands were raised to strike him, he would still love her, and take her hands and tenderly caress them."

After a while she half hid her pale face on the pillows—the bitter smile playing round the corners of her colourless drawn lips was painful to see—and said, in a distinct voice—

"If she offers reconciliation, he will accept it with joy, and be as happy as he was some months ago; so the best thing for all of us to do is to ignore her late bad behaviour, and never allow it to be referred to again amongst us."

Kathe did not reply. No answer seemed to be expected from her by the invalid, who was impatiently awaiting the momentary return of the young Doctor, whose happiness she was so anxious to see secured. What if Flora did not come, and it was at last necessary to tell her that the faithless bride had, by one rash act, put a summary ending to the long torment she had been lately inflicting on her devoted lover?

"Then you will cease to mention—never come near our house," Henriette had moaned out in her delirium the evening before to the young Doctor.

Sitting there by the bedside, Kathe had time to revolve in her mind all she had seen and heard about this unhappy engagement; the strange conduct of the bride-elect, her chilling neglect and openly-expressed contempt for her lover, ending with the scene of the evening before, when she had earnestly entreated to be allowed to withdraw from her engagement, and be a free woman.

Now that was all changed. She was to be forgiven for her past neglect, and thanked for a reconciliation, which, if she sought at all, would be merely to gratify her ambition, and not for the sake of the peace and happiness she had it in her power to bestow. And he—would

he take her back to his heart on such terms? Certainly he would; for had he not refused to give her up, even though she had said that she hated him? In her heart Kathe felt angry with the Doctor for being so weak where his love was concerned. Why could he not have more pride than to allow himself to be treated in such a way?

For a moment she felt as if she could weep for his folly; but the next she had swallowed the indignant tears ere they rose to her eyes, angry with herself for indulging in such a feeling at all. What could it matter to her what he did? She had no right or business to think about it, whichever way it turned; and if the wedding did really take place at Whitsuntide, the sooner she set about embroidering the sofa cushion she intended as a bridal present, the better.

Her thoughts were broken in upon by the widow's entrance with a branch of syringa in her hand, which she laid on the sheets, and smilingly told Henriette was a greeting for her from the bright spring morning outside. Then, taking up her knitting, and going round to where Kathe sat, she said gently—

"You look pale, my love. Go into the garden for a while and breathe the fresh sweet air—it will do you good—for an hour. Yesterday's excitement has driven the colour from your cheeks, and that won't do. Young faces were meant to be rosy and bright."

Nothing loath, the young girl obeyed the kindly meant order, put on her hat and went out into the garden. The widow was right, the fresh air and sunshine did her good, she breathed more freely, and the tight pressure on her bosom felt relieved

by the time she had reached the quaint old bridge. But she did not cross it. She stood still for a while, gazing at the beauty of the scene around. From the beautiful blue heavens overhead her eyes wandered to the glistening waters at her feet, the fresh green grass beyond, the budding trees near at hand. On one side the dark sombre forest, on the other meadows and fields, with the roofs and windows of a distant village gleaming in the merry sunlight.

Then her attention was attracted by the twittering of birds around the wooden loft near the house, and she saw the first swallows of the year flying in and out of the openings, evidently intent on building their nests. Many a time, as a child, had she lain on the grass by the river, and watched the coming and going of these spring birds; but then the house was deserted and shut

up, and a human being rarely disturbed the quiet and loneliness of the place by his presence. Now the old house was inhabited, smoke issued from its chimneys, windows and doors were open, life, with its accompanying passions and interests, sorrows and joys, had taken possession of the place, and all seemed changed; even the girl herself, who was standing by the bridge, was no longer the child she had been seven years ago. For the first time it struck her that the place which had always strangely fascinated her ever since she could remember, had for a few short weeks belonged to her, as her grandfather's heiress. The sum which the Doctor had given for it belonged to her, and was lying side by side with other rolls of precious papers in the new iron safe her guardian had told her contained her immense fortune. Why this thought brought the blood to her

cheeks and made her heart beat she could not tell, but so it was. She did not stop to examine the hen-coop, which she now observed for the first time in a corner near the loft, but wandered on through the orchard till she came round to the other side of the house and reached the hawthorn hedge which formed the boundary of the little property. Here she noticed several bits of shining glass lying about, and all at once it flashed through her mind that they were the remains of the crystal glass she had drank from the evening before, when the Doctor ordered her to take the soothing draught. Burning tears rushed to her eyes as the remembrance of that scene came back to her. She blamed herself bitterly for letting her fears and anxieties run away with her judgment, and the longer she thought over it the more angry she felt with herself for imagining

for one second that the Doctor was capable of the weakness she in her foolishness had imputed to him. She felt sure he would not be able to forget it, and that, for a time at least, he would avoid her, and cease to smile if she were unavoidably thrown into his society.

Henriette would soon be able to return to the Villa, and the intercourse between the great house and the house by the river would be ended. For after all that had happened last evening—however much the Doctor might insist upon his rights—surely if Flora did not advance the hoped-for reconciliation by a visit to her sick sister, he would have to acknowledge that his engagement with her was annulled. Or would he do as Henriette feared, and visit the Villa on his return from the Palace, to inform his haughty lady-love of the golden change in his prospects ?

Such thoughts as these were passing through her mind as she wended her way by the river, when she heard a loud noise in the vicinity of the loft, which caused her to retrace her steps to see what it was all about. In the enclosure around the loft the watch-dog had broken loose and was wildly careering after the screaming hens. As soon as she could, Kathe caught at his chain. Laughing heartily at the scattered hens, and the noise and confusion amongst them, she dragged the dog back to his kennel. But he, as soon as he discovered that he was to be re-fastened to the post, tried to release himself from her grasp by pulling at the chain, crouching down and refusing to move; and finally, when he found that such resistance was of no use, by barking and showing his teeth in angry defiance. He was a good-sized animal of savage nature and sinewy build, and might

have attacked Kathe in his anger if she had not had the presence of mind to seize him with her arm round his neck, while with her free hand she slipped the chain quickly over the strong hook on the post, and then sprang nimbly back out of his way and beyond his reach, but not before the enraged animal had snapped at her dress and torn a portion of it to ribbons.

"Brute! lie still!" she commanded, and took up her skirt to see the extent of the damage done by his white glistening teeth.

Presently she heard rapid steps crossing the rustic bridge. She knew it was the Doctor, without turning her head. She hoped he did not observe her, and that he would go straight on into the house, for if he had been to the Villa on his return from the Palace, he would naturally prefer to be alone, perhaps even be in such a thoughtful humour that he would not notice her at all.

He did not enter the house, but turned off to the left, and came direct towards her, and as soon as he reached the hen-yard held up his stick threateningly over the growling angry dog's head, and obliged him to retire into his kennel and lie down. After which he fastened the chain more securely to the post as he observed—

"I must have the brute removed from this, he is so savage and disobedient. He does as much harm by frightening peaceable people as he does good by keeping off trespassers. You managed to make him obey you this time, but I think you are so conscious of your own strength that you are a little rash where other girls would be timid, don't you think so yourself?"

He spoke earnestly, almost as if he wished to reprove her for what she had just done.

"Oh, I have my moments of fear and timidity just like other girls," she replied frankly. "As a rule I am terribly afraid of strange dogs, and get out of their way quickly enough; but at a critical moment inborn weakness must not be allowed to sway one's actions, so I press my teeth firmly together and go to work; perhaps it is that which makes you think me rash."

The Doctor was not looking at her as she spoke, but watching the flight of a swallow over his head, nevertheless he smiled, and Kathe fancied it was a smile of doubt and disbelief.

"You doubt what I say, do you?" she asked, half in earnest, half in fun. "Do you know that it is not so very long since I was frightened to move about in the dark." Her eyes gleamed with malicious delight, and the dimples in her cheeks

deepened as she went on. "I suppose you can imagine that in such an old place as the Mill-house, hobgoblins and ghosts abounded in every corner and cranny; that lordly ancestors occasionally stepped down from their frames on the walls and walked about distributing corn, and that the ghosts of millers who once upon a time kept back grain that should have been sold, were wont to roam through the scenes of their former existence. Of course I heard all these things, and I believed in them as firmly as if I had been brought up in a Thuringian hut. But as neither papa nor Fräulein Lucas shared in my belief, and if they had found out I was afraid would have scolded Susanne for repeating the legends to me, there was nothing for it but to cure myself of my fear. I was ashamed of it too; so whenever anything was wanted I ground my teeth together,

and without a second's hesitation went upstairs in the pitch dark to fetch it."

"How is it that if you are accustomed to school your own feelings so well, and keep them under control, you were so easily persuaded into believing a man capable of a weak and cowardly act?"

A burning blush spread over her face as he spoke, but she drew back her head and said quietly, though in a somewhat haughty tone—

"You pardoned my thoughtlessness yesterday."

He shook his head deprecatingly.

"There was nothing in my remark to make you doubt that I meant what I said last night, when I assured you you had not offended me," he replied, involuntarily lowering his rich musical voice, as if he did not intend the world to hear of this

episode between himself and the young girl at his side. "I merely meant I should like very much to know the foundation for your momentary suspicion of me."

Kathe did not answer at once; her eyes had resumed their usual bright downy expression, a smile hovered on her lips, and the small childish face looked almost too young for the full-rounded womanly figure, as in a demure voice, and pointing to the corner window, she began:

"Once upon a time a lovely noble lady lived in that——"

"What, that romantic history that all the old women relate over their spinning-wheels! The tragic fate of the lovely lady caused you to imagine——"

"No, not entirely. Henriette made me anxious, and——"

"Henriette is ill, constant suffering

has shaken her nerves and made her morbid. But you are strong and healthy."

"I know I am, but there are things which youth and inexperience naturally prevent one from being able to judge by common rules——"

"As for instance—love," he interrupted with a sudden shy glance at the girl.

"Yes," she said simply.

He stooped his tall head, and began mechanically driving his stick against a square slab of sandstone which stood in the centre of the grassy plot opposite the porch. When Kathe was a child, she had been wont to use this stone as a table on which to place her play-things and the fruit she gathered in her rambles over the old garden—in fact, she had imagined that it had been put there expressly for her amusement; now, however, she recognized

the slab as the remains of a pedestal on which a female statue had formerly stood. A portion of a small foot still remained attached to the sandstone. Presently, as the Doctor was silent, she said :

"That's the pedestal on which either a nymph or one of the muses stood in by-gone times. I can fancy the beautiful figure she must have had from this little foot. Perhaps she had her head slightly turned towards the river half facing the old bridge, so that she could watch the knight riding across, and see also the proud young Chatelaine of the Castle in her brocaded train——" She checked herself suddenly, for on looking up into the young Doctor's face she noticed that he was not heeding her remarks, but evidently absorbed in his own thoughts, which from the expression of his countenance were sad and sorrowful.

The sudden silence of the young girl roused him out of his reverie.

"Yes," he said, shaking himself together. "Those wretched people who stayed here once for a while, took a delight in destroying the statues. The garden was full of sandstone figures at one time; there are several pedestals and disfigured statues lying about the outhouse; I'll have them hunted out and renovated. In spite of its wild and overgrown state, I think the original plan of the garden can still be traced, and I will have it restored."

"I dare say it will be very pretty and tidy, but—don't you think the charm of this overgrown corner will be lost if you have it as you say restored? The peep from your study window—"

"My study will be occupied by a friend of my aunt's next winter," he interrupted

calmly. "In October I settle down in Leipzig."

Kathe stared at him like a startled fawn; clasping her hands she repeated—

"In Leipzig? You mean to be separated then? What does she say?"

"Flora? She goes with me of course," he answered coldly, his eyes flashing pain and anger combined. "Do you imagine I would leave her behind me? You may be at rest on that point then."

Kathe had alluded to his aunt when she spoke, in reference to his journey to Leipzig, and not to Flora, but she was too shy to rectify the mistake, when he had that stern forbidding look on his face.

Presently she asked timidly, while her cheeks flushed with anxiety—

"You have just come from the Villa?"

"No, I have not been to the Villa," he replied, in a tone which appeared to Kathe to have a sarcastic ring in it. "And as yet I have not been fortunate enough to see any of the family; I should have liked to have a word with Moriz, but just as I was passing the house his friends were laughing and talking and saying good-bye, so I preferred walking on unnoticed."

Then he had not had an interview with Flora, and yet he was thoughtful and absent.

"It is very strange," Kathe said to herself, beginning to feel very uncomfortable and to wish herself anywhere away out of the young man's presence. Fortunately for her, just at this moment the hens began carelessly picking up the grains near the enemy, the dog, who sprang forward barking furiously. Kathe went over

to him and dexterously managed to drive him into his kennel, when she shut to the door and drew the bolt, and thus kept him quiet for the time being.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Kathe turned round from shutting up the watch-dog, she noticed the young Doctor's face was white as ashes, and that he was staring in the direction of the bridge. His stern attitude, compressed lips, and contracted brows reminded her of the moment when she had asked him to inform her of the cause of her grandfather's death. Involuntarily following the glance of his eyes, she could not be more startled if she had seen the figure of the drowned noble lady advancing towards her, as she was to

recognize Flora's graceful person walking across the bridge with the calm unembarrassed manner of one who has nothing to fear, and knows she will be welcome, come when she may.

Kathe could scarcely believe her eyesight, as she watched her beautiful sister quietly gliding past the spot where the night before she had passionately declared herself a free woman, after throwing her betrothal ring under the seething wave. Not twenty hours had elapsed since she had openly declared that her lover had deceived her, and that nothing should ever induce her to cross the threshold of his house again. Yet there she was smiling and happy looking, and with light eager steps advancing over the pathway direct to the door of his house, and no wave curled its white summit, or gust of wind blew around her whispering of heartlessness,

"That is a bad omen; however the ring can't possibly be lost," said the widow in reply. "We shall be sure to find it this evening when Henriette's bed is arranged for the night, and then I will send it over to you by a servant."

"I will reward her royally. I will give her a handful of gold if she does bring it," said Flora, evidently very much put out at her temporary loss, and scarcely able to master her impatience.

Meanwhile Madame Urach and the Counsellor drew chairs to the bedside, and sat down by Henriette, who had not spoken a word while the ring was being sought for. Once she had raised her head and opened her lips to speak, but had sunk back on her pillows; and once, when Madame Urach was complaining of the tardiness of the tradespeople in forwarding

the furniture, she had muttered half to herself, half to the Doctor—

"Because they were partly countermanded; no tradesman would send them home on such terms."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE widow left the room to order coffee, and Kathe followed her. The poor girl's brain was in a whirl from trying to fathom and understand the meaning of the comedy Flora had been playing during the last half hour. She begged "auntie" to let her arrange the coffee in such a coaxing way, that the elderly lady willingly acceded to her request, and handed her the bunch of keys generally hanging at her side.

"Dear, dear Kathe! my brave, noble girl!" she said softly as she put her arm

round the maiden's waist and drew her close to her bosom ; "I love to look into your sweet innocent face, it gives me a feeling of peace and rest, and makes me think of Luther and his true, brave, beloved Katherine, who walked by his side through life, always helping and encouraging him by her strong courage and undaunted faith in him. You are a dear child, Kathe!" and she tenderly kissed the blushing girl, sighed deeply as if moved by some inward misgiving, and quietly returned to the invalid's room.

Kathe went to the pantry and took out the coffee, and the freshly baked sponge-cake which she knew the widow would like to have placed before her guests, and while the maid was putting fresh logs of wood in the stove to boil the kettle, she filled the pretty blue glass basin with sugar, and polished the crystal cake-dish. She

had just begun to cut the round cake in slices when she heard some one coming out of Henriette's room. The kitchen door was partly open, and through this opening she saw Flora cross the hall.

The bride-elect was evidently uncertain which way to turn; she was not at home in the "wretched surroundings" of the Doctor's house, but her eyes must have had some magnetic influence, for as she glanced hesitatingly at the opposite door, it suddenly opened and the Doctor himself appeared on the threshold.

Flora flew over to him with outstretched arms. Her long black dress trailed over the red stone floor, the dark drooping veil hanging behind her like a cloud. With her small white hands stretching forth from the falling black lace, and her pale face and flashing eyes and sable robes, she looked like the beautiful woman whom legendary

lore declares to rise at night from her grave to murder the young of every living thing she meets.

"Leo!" it was a low musical voice which half whispered the name.

Kathe could hardly believe her ears, her breath came and went in wondering surprise. Was it really Flora's voice? It was so soft and tender, so entreating in its tone, that surely the lips Kathe had heard angrily asserting her desire to be free only the evening before, could not have uttered that sweet, loving sound now? The young girl turned her eyes away, the knife shook in her trembling fingers, and she longed to shut the door so as neither to see nor to be seen, but she had not the courage or strength to move from where she stood. There was no answer to the soft appeal.

"Leo, look at me!" said Flora louder, and in a more entreating tone. "Look at

me, and don't torture me in this way when your own heart even rebels against it. I know you are trying hard to appear stern and punish me, but thank God! it is hard for you to do it! Am I to be punished because yesterday I was half mad with excitement, and did not know what I was saying or doing? Leo, my life, which belongs to you, was in danger; my blood boils still as I think of it—and—you are exciting me still more, Leo!"

Kathe was spell-bound, and for a moment could attend to nothing else but Flora's words; the next she heard the maid at her side titter with surprise at such a beautiful lady apologizing to her young master. In an instant Kathe recovered her self-possession, ordered the servant to set the coffee cups, and quickly placing the cake on the crystal dish she took it up and walked courageously to the hall with it in her

hand. In spite of herself she saw as she left the kitchen the Doctor's stern, pale face turned away from his bride, his arms hanging loosely by his side, and his lips compressed as if with pain, while Flora hung round his neck in a close clinging attitude.

The sharp closing of the kitchen door made the young man look that way, and at the same instant his eyes encountered Kathe's.

If he had been caught in some guilty act he could not have started more violently, or the blood have rushed to his brow with greater force than it did now, as he endeavoured to disengage himself from the embrace of his betrothed. But Flora would not loosen her hands, she merely glanced at her young half-sister, and burying her head deeper on his shoulder muttered in his ear—

"Nonsense, Leo, it is only Kathe."

Kathe heard and hurried across the hall as fast as her feet would carry her into the sick-room. Her heart beat aloud in her vexation and shame at having witnessed the sensational Romeo and Juliet scene outside. With trembling hands she placed the cake-dish on the table, and at Henriette's express wish put a morsel of the sweet cake in the canary's cage.

On the clean white sand at the foot of the cage lay the much-sought-for gold ring, which must have slipped through the bars without hitting the wires and noiselessly fallen on the soft sand inside. Kathe lifted it up and quietly put it in her pocket. The coffee had still to be made, but Kathe shrunk from going back through the hall to the kitchen. She fidgeted about the canary, now giving it a bit of sugar, then a bit more cake, listening the while to

Madame Urach's remarks about the "trousseau," and vaguely wondering why she should be so anxious to impress the widow with the importance of everything being in the right style.

As the minutes rolled on, the young girl grew more and more nervous and unwilling to surprise the lovers a second time in their *tête-à-tête* interview. How should she manage? The coffee must be made, and she *must* make up her mind to face the hall. How great was her relief when the door opened and the Doctor walked in. Quick as lightning she slipped past him without raising her eyes, and went out into the hall. It was empty. Flora was not there. The maid was grinding the coffee in the kitchen. Perhaps it was the disagreeable noise of the mill which had shortened the reconciliation scene!

The coffee was soon made and the tray

laid; and while the maid put on a clean apron to carry it into the sick-room, Kathe went over to the window, took the ring from her pocket and examined it. "E. M., 1843," was engraved on the inner side. Ernst Mangold. It was not the ring come back in some mysterious way from under the waves of the river, but the marriage ring of Flora's mother.

Kathe grew cold all over as she thought of the false, mean part Flora was playing. Her own frank, innocent nature could hardly understand a disposition that was ready for every emergency, and that, with a cold indifference as to consequences, could gather up the threads of intrigue and make use of them to weave a fresh net for future use. She shuddered and drew back, and glanced with a pained feeling at her heart at the little simple symbol of faithful love that Flora's mother had worn to the

day of her death, and that now, through her daughter's false-heartedness and deception, had become sullied and dishonoured. It burned her fingers as she held it, and she wished she might have thrown it into the shining river out of every one's sight. But it was not hers, it belonged to Flora, and to Flora she must return it, and that without delay.

Slowly quitting the kitchen, Kathe went out into the porch. Flora was standing by the palings gazing into the distance, with her back to the house, her arms folded on her bosom, and her fair golden hair shining brilliantly in the sun. The watch-dog had caught sight of her figure, and began barking so furiously that his noise prevented Kathe's approach being heard. When she reached Flora's side, the latter started visibly, and contracted her eyebrows into a deeper frown, while her angry face

flushed scarlet and her eyes flashed scornfully.

"You are there again, are you? prying into and meddling with what does not concern you!" she said, in a tone that was neither refined nor ladylike.

Kathe's cheeks flushed with indignation at this unlooked-for attack, and she felt inclined to resent her half-sister's bitter insinuations by a few hot words, but she checked the inclination, and said, with reserve and pride—

"I have found the ring."

"Give it me!" Her features softened, she took the ring from Kathe's outstretched hand and slipped it on her finger. "I am very glad it is found. It was rather an unfortunate sign."

"You don't mean to say that you look upon it as a bad omen?" remarked Kathe.

"Why not? Do you imagine that

people with minds are *naturally* free from superstition? Napoleon I. was as superstitious as an old beldame, let me tell you; and I—I don't deny, at least, that I am, too."

She looked into Kathe's eyes with an entreating, but firm, commanding gaze, as if she would compel her young half-sister to forget all that had passed not very far from the spot where they were both now standing. But Kathe's fearless honesty and straightforwardness were not to be daunted. With hot cheeks and kindling eyes she said quietly, as she pointed in the direction of the bridge,—

"You forget, Flora, that you were not alone when you stood there last night."

Flora laughed bitterly.

"That's what comes of having a young sister constantly running against one's skirts. That is just like a school-girl—to

judge and condemn one's actions when one hardly knows what one is doing, and then remind one of them at unpleasant times. Have I not already declared in there," and she pointed to the windows of the room where Henriette was lying, "that yesterday's scene in the forest upset my nerves to such an extent that I was half mad and consequently not responsible for what I said and did afterwards? My dear Kathe, you, in your superior wisdom, seem inclined to intimate that, as—well—as my betrothal ring is under the river, that it is impossible for it to bring me bad luck. That's it, is it not, little one?" She laughed sharply again. "What if, in all my passion and excitement, or any other feeling a dispassionate critic might be disposed to call the state I was in, I had not thrown my little jewel from me? Did you hear it fall, my dear? Impossible! for here it is"

—she drew the hoop on her finger— "although it seemed just now as if it were inclined to part company with me for ever."

"Because it is too large. Your fingers are more slender than your mother's were," remarked Kathe bitterly, her whole body trembling with anger. Flora sprang forward as if she meant to strike her.

"You viper!" she hissed between her teeth. "I knew the very first moment I saw your round dairy-maid face that you would cast a shadow across my path in life. How can you stoop to dodge me and my actions as if you were a spy? You spying me! Is that the honourable way your 'excellent' Lucas has brought you up?"

"Leave Lucas out of the question!" said Kathe quietly, her half-sister's sudden outburst of passion and anger cooling her own. "Whatever I may think or do, my education has nothing to do with it. I *know* that

I inherit my father's love of honour, for I hate and despise falseness of every kind, and I would be dumb for the rest of my life sooner than tell a lie. If you have accustomed those around you in daily private life to wink at and tolerate your falseness, don't expect it from me; young and unaccustomed to the world as I may be, you won't change me in that respect. I won't allow myself to be hoodwinked. I have good eyes and a good memory—"

"Ah, yes, those are Nature's gifts, which in a more refined disposition would be modified, of course, as regards their observations," interrupted Flora, who had several times smiled scornfully while her sister was speaking, and made a move as if to go away and leave her and her moralizing together. She had clenched her hands, bitten her lips, and snipped off the buds from a neighbouring bush, but she had not moved

away, and now spoke without a trace of the passion she had exhibited not five minutes previously. "I don't know whether you understand me, child; I hardly think so," she added, shrugging her shoulders; "you have your own rule for judging other people, and you unfortunately adhere to it as firmly as the shopman does to his yard measure, no matter if he is selling fine stuff or coarse, red, green, or yellow. But I will try and make myself plain to you, and make you understand me once for all."

Stepping nearer to the young girl, so near that Kathe felt the warmth of her breath on her face, she went on in a low suppressed voice, as she glanced for a second at the windows—

"Well, you are right, my betrothal ring lies under the river where I threw it in a fit of uncontrollable disgust at the thought of a life of poverty by Bruck's side. A girl

of your ideas will not be able to understand that, but no matter. You think only of a husband who has a pleasant appearance, is well grown, and has a handsome moustache, and when once the irrevocable 'yes' is promised, you would go with him through fire and water, all of which is very good in its way. Such a girl would become a self-sacrificing mother, and bring up her sons in a worthy manner, I have no doubt. A girl of this kind, though, would love to hide under the shelter of her home and timidly shut her eyes if an eagle soared in the air above her. But in that sort of eagle I should glory. I would soar in the air with him, for that is the air I like to breathe, and never leave his side; on the contrary, I would urge his mounting higher, trying his strong wings in still higher—"

"And if he damaged his wings and fell, you would cry out he was only a crow, and

leave him to his fate, like a coward," broke in Kathe. But the moment the words were out of her mouth, she recognized the force of their taunt, revealing as they did the outspoken truth of her half-sister's shameless conduct, by the paleness which overspread Flora's face and the lassitude of her manner; but she went on courageously, "If you had only left him quietly and silently, it would have been better, instead of bitterly crying out that you hated him! You declared he had deceived you, and been false to his position; you said this only last night, on the very spot where you are now standing, and yet you returned to the house——"

"As Dr. Bruck's adored bride-elect, who had first to bear a terrible reverse in order to enable her to appreciate to the full the intensity of her future happiness," Flora finished, with a triumphant smile, as her

sister hesitated for a moment. "You can be charmingly impertinent, Kathe! I was quite struck just now with the ready way you turned my own parable against me. Your plebeian inclinations and propensities are all very well in their way; but they go too far when they lead you into misunderstanding a nature like mine, and a soul full of aspirations and fire. How can you understand a psychological problem? Had I spoken yesterday of unfaithful friendship, you might, with some show of reason, pretend to be shocked at the sudden change in my manner, and say I was merely playing a part, simply because friendship never breaks forth into love passion; but *hatred* and love lie side by side in the human breast—they set fire to each other, and very often a burning, outspoken hatred is the result of an excess of love. You, with your blunted feelings, are not capable of

understanding the nicety of the distinction. You would cook your husband a favourite dish to reconcile him; but a nature like mine would burst forth into bitter accusations, of burning self-accusation, and suffer death for his sake."

Then, laying her hand under her bosom, as if she were stabbing herself with a stiletto, she added—

"And now I will say that never have I loved Leo Bruck so passionately or so intensely as since I have known that he has suffered like a martyr, and held his tongue like the hero that he is—since I have had to confess, too, that I pained and wounded him deeply; but never, never"—she suddenly seized Kathe's hand, and the slender white fingers were as cold as the current of air from over the water—"no, never before," she hissed into Kathe's ear, "*never* till now did I feel such hot, glow-

ing jealousy! Mind that, child! He is *my* property; and even if I have nothing worse to fear than you—he does not care for you, that I noticed long ago; besides, he has only eyes and ears for me—still, I am not accustomed to endure any one near me who so persistently lays herself out to please as you do. Your housewifely doings and continual coming and going in this house do not please me. You will for the future discontinue everything of the kind. Do you understand?"

And with this plain and undisguised behest, she gathered up her sweeping skirts and walked slowly back to the house, evidently to avoid any further discussion. But it was an unnecessary precaution on her part.

Kathe's face and lips had turned white as death; but she had no desire nor any intention of replying in words to such

haughty, double-tongued observations as had just fallen from her half-sister's lips. Her young honour-loving nature recoiled from so much duplicity; and she was silent.

CHAPTER IX.

IT was the month of May. The trees were sprouting forth young leaves, the splendid hyacinth beds, which had been the pride of the gardener and delight of all visitors at the Villa, were faded and over for the season; the tiny buds on the syringa bushes were deepening in colour, green little petals were beginning to appear on the rose-trees, and the shadows of the pretty zigzag walk and linden avenue were growing broader and broader each day. The river had become brighter and clearer, and flowed

along between its green banks with a glimmer and sparkle on its surface, which the beautiful May sun intensified; while behind the old house a sweet perfume of May flowers filled the air, and the thick, strong vine which clung to the walls at the side began to look gay with its green leaves and shoots.

Henriette had long since been removed to the Villa, and was apparently stronger and better now than she had been for many months past. "Auntie Diakonus," as the girls called the Doctor's aunt, ascribed this improvement entirely to the effect of Kathe's good nursing.

The two sisters lived a quiet, retired existence, which they both seemed to intensely enjoy, especially since Kathe's piano had stood in her own room; and this peaceful daily life away from the excitement of society, which Henriette had

formerly shrank from with a vehemence that was painful in her delicate state of health, together with the refining and kindly influence of constant visits from the widow, seemed to have produced a wonderful change in the mind of the invalid as well as in her body.

While the two girls were thus living apart by themselves, the drawing-rooms in the Villa were never so thronged with visitors as since their host had become ennobled. Festivities and gaieties of every kind were daily organized, in which the inventive powers of Madame Urach and the wealth of the Counsellor appeared inexhaustible. Certainly the Counsellor was a fortunate man. Everything he touched seemed to turn into gold. All his undertakings in the commercial world were not only successful, but simply fabulous in their returns, and his reported income

amounted to millions of thalers ; and, with all his success, he was a great favourite. He seemed to understand the art of winning friends and keeping them. The haughtiness and pride of fortune and nobility were never discernible either in his manner or speech. Always pleasant, affable, kindly, and simple, he made every one admire him, and gave no occasion for envy and hatred.

The promenade in front of the Villa, under the overhanging linden-trees, became the daily resort of fashionable families. Strangers begged for admittance to the house, to admire the costly paintings, sculpture, and works of art which, day by day, were being added to the already rich collection. And when the fine dust raised by the wheels of one of the Counsellor's exquisite carriages blew into the eyes of the loiterers as it drew up

before the Villa, facetious remarks would be uttered that "surely it must be gold dust," as it belonged to the millionaire who owned the property.

Alterations of various kinds were going on about the park. Here and there familiar pathways were temporarily rendered impassable by beautiful slabs and blocks of white marble lying across the grass, for the improvements going on in the stables, which had long since become too small for the increased number of horses.

Immense mounds of earth marked the spot where the new lake was to be, and numbers of workmen were occupied in decorating and repairing a large ancient pavilion, which commanded an uninterrupted view of the town on one side, of the promenade and grounds around the house on the other. The interior of the

house itself had been subject to many alterations and many changes; under pretence of enlarging a window, or having a door opened through a wall, the Counsellor had suggested changing the furniture of the room, and had produced from his pocket samples of rich carpet, and designs for embellishing the ceiling, entreating Madame Urach to make a choice and give orders for the furnishing of the room according to the dictates of her invariable good taste. She generally grumbled and objected at first, but in the end agreed to the wishes of her grandson-in-law, while protesting against improvements which she herself considered quite unnecessary.

While these alterations were going on the Counsellor came and went like a bird of passage. He travelled about a great deal, and when asked by Madame Urach why he did not retire from business, he

replied that he intended doing so in a short time, when he would purchase an estate for himself and live on his property as befitted his rank and wealth. Whenever he allowed himself a few days' leisure at the Villa, he passed many of his hours on the first floor in Henriette's and Kathe's private sitting-room, where he never failed to appear also for his after-dinner coffee, and as Madame Urach was far too wide awake to allow her 'dear Moriz' to lounge about Henriette's sofa alone with the two girls, she made a sacrifice of herself and generally managed to appear in the room either a few moments after his en trance there, or to join him on the stairs before his arrival.

As far as Kathe was concerned she was very grateful to the old lady for her opportune visits. The young girl felt a strange painful shyness in her guardian's

presence, since the time when he had spoken so tenderly and affectionately to herself, but so falsely and slightingly of Madame Urach. Unwillingly she adopted towards him the bashful reserve of a grown-up young lady, where she had formerly been as out-spoken and ingenuous as a child. But this change in her manner appeared to delight the Counsellor, and to render her presence more and more attractive to him. Every wish of hers he gratified as soon as he had had time to divine it. Some weeks ago he had sold the uncultivated piece of the Mill-house garden to the factory hands, and any charity scheme of hers he had carried out at once, and no matter how often her purse was empty, he refilled it without an objection.

"You can have what you want, Kathe; I shall soon have to buy you another

strong box," he remarked once, glancing significantly at the iron safe containing the receipts of her immense fortune, a note of which he held in his hand.

She did not reply, but received the statement with an air of gloomy reserve that did not escape his notice. In spite of his diplomatic reasoning and wily answers to her searching questions relative to the manner in which her grandfather's fortune had been realized, the doubt raised by the women in the forest, that it had not been gained without considerable oppression among the poorer classes, remained obstinately in her mind, and each time her wealth was alluded to she grew silent and nervous, and evidently afraid of the amount of gold she possessed.

During the past few weeks she had become more thoughtful and less childish than formerly. The sunny smile which

had illuminated her face fifty times a day was rarely seen now, her joyous laughter was hardly ever heard, her old merriness and light-heartedness seemed to have quite deserted her, except when she passed a few hours in the house by the river, and then only returned by fits and starts.

It was the widow's custom to collect as many of the poor children of the neighbourhood as she could gather together, every Wednesday and Saturday afternoon, for the purpose of teaching them to sew and knit; and in this charitable work Kathe earnestly entreated to be allowed to take an active part. She loved children dearly, and the little creatures soon learned to love her as warmly as she herself could wish. She clothed them where necessary, making the pinafores and frocks herself, and what the widow could not possibly do—provided a meal of bread, and fruit, and milk for

each of the children, when the lesson in sewing was over. The old lady's face always beamed with satisfaction, as the young girl appeared at her bi-weekly gatherings with a tray of fruit, and dainty little loaves in her hand, which she distributed among the hungry little guests, with a smile that made the welcome gift a double pleasure to receive. When the weather permitted, the poor children were allowed to sit out under the trees and enjoy the sweet fresh air; and often when the work had been done well, and little fingers had diligently mastered the difficulty of turning a heel in a stocking, or hemming the bib to an apron, Kathe would produce balls, skipping-ropes and other toys, and encourage the children to play for an hour on the grass in front of the house, before returning home to their fathers and mothers.

These proceedings did not please Flora at all; but she had the good sense to refrain from openly-expressed objections to what Kathe did, in the hearing of the inmates of the house by the river, for she knew, as she remarked one day with a sneer—"The old lady thinks all the world of Kathe, and imagines she is endowed with every virtue under the sun."

Flora herself visited the house every day; she had had a dozen white embroidered aprons made, in one of which she always appeared, knowing full well that it became her charmingly, and pleased the widow whom she exerted herself to her utmost to fascinate. She would stoop her lovely face over the hot stove, while "auntie" taught her how to make pancakes; she learned the art of preserving fruit and bottling vegetables; she penetrated the mysteries of the laundry, and even once took up an

iron and passed it slowly over a handkerchief that the maid had just straightened for ironing. She looked over the housekeeping books, and made her head ache by casting up accounts; but do what she would, she could not succeed in coaxing the widow out of the habitual reserve of manner she had adopted towards her, since the evening of the day Henriette had been carried to her house.

The sudden change in Doctor Bruck's future prospects was still regarded with wonder and astonishment. Many of the families in town found it difficult to believe that the hitherto slighted and retiring young Doctor could possibly be the man who was henceforward to walk along the streets of the capital as an honoured Hofrath and professor. Public opinion veered round in his favour; patients poured in from all quarters, and a fortnight after his

good fortune in securing the Duke's favour was known, he rarely had time to sit half an hour at his desk—had to sleep in town, dine where he could, and if he wished to pay a flying visit to the Villa and his aunt, he was obliged to steal the time for his absence, by refusing to place on his over-full list the name of a new patient.

Kathe saw him very seldom, and when she did, she could not help remarking how changed he was. He looked pale and haggard, and an absent, thoughtful, well-nigh gloomy manner, had taken the place of his formerly reserved, but genial conversation and appearance. Since the moment when she had surprised him with Flora's arms round his neck, he had scarcely interchanged two words with Kathe, and then in such a hurried shy way that the young girl fancied he could not forgive her unintentional appearance on that occasion,

and resented it by avoiding her whenever he could. She, on her side, felt wounded and pained by his coldness, and rarely ever entered the room when she knew he was likely to be there.

His manner to Flora had not undergone the slightest change as far as Kathe could observe. He had ever been a reserved undemonstrative lover since Kathe had known him; but often she found herself wondering whether the passionate scene in Henriette's sick-room had been a mere dream on her part, or whether the young Doctor was capable of forgetting disagreeable events sooner and more completely than other people. Flora must naturally have hoped, that after humbling herself to beg for forgiveness for her bitter words, her lover would return to the old affectionate relations which had existed between them when first they were engaged.

Was he not supremely happy in feeling sure of her whom he had so passionately worshipped, even when she repulsed him? Perhaps he preferred concealing his happiness—at all events, he did not show it; and his beautiful betrothed comforted herself with the thought, that a man of his temperament found it rather hard to forgive; but that when once they were married, and the wedding was fixed for September, all would be well.

In the meanwhile, the 20th of May, Flora's birthday, arrived. Her room was gay with sweet-smelling flowers, sent by many of her friends. On a centre table stood a superb bouquet, the gift of the reigning Duchess, who sent it early in the day as a mark of honour to the future wife of the new Hofrath; and several congratulatory messages had arrived during the morning from various members of the

royal family. Certainly the fair bride had cause to congratulate herself on her future prospects, and to consider herself, at least on this special day, a favourite of the gods! And yet a shadow was over her forehead, and her mouth quivered more than once with suppressed impatience and anger. On a round table, between her grandmother's gifts and those of her sisters', stood a handsome black marble timepiece, the birthday gift of Doctor Bruck. He had sent it with an accompanying note, saying that it was impossible for him to come over to the Villa in the morning, on account of his not being able to leave a patient who was dangerously ill.

"I can't understand Leo's not finding me a prettier present than that stone thing there," she said, with an air of vexation, to Madame Urach, who was stooping over the Duchess's bouquet as if she expected

it to smell sweeter than the others about the room. "A black birthday present is not a happy choice—and I must say that I think it is greatly wanting in taste on his part."

"The clock is just the thing for this room, and was chosen to please you, Flora —it matches the furniture splendidly," said Henriette who was lying on a sofa near the window, as she pointed significantly to the corners of the room.

"Absurd! You know as well as I do that I can't carry away the furniture here. Moriz had it made to please me, but he did not *give* it to me; besides I have no desire to take it, one gets as weary of looking at the same furniture always, as one would at the same dress. What can I do with that black thing? It won't do to put it in my boudoir in Leipzig, where

the walls are to be pale lilac, and the decorations all of bronze ?"

"A fresh bunch of flowers would have been more to my taste, but then you see, Flora, you are not a bit sentimental," answered Henriette, with a malicious twinkle in her eyes, as she glanced across at Kathe who was standing by an exquisite myrtle tree.

This myrtle plant had been reared with great care by "Auntie Diakonus," who had sent it over to the bride-elect as a birthday gift; but few beside Kathe and Henriette seemed to appreciate the beauty of the present, or to understand that it had been given at the cost of great self-sacrifice on the part of the widowed lady.

After dinner the drawing-rooms and balcony were soon filled with a succession of visitors, who came to congratulate

Flora, and to admire the tables full of presents. The day was so warm that windows and doors were thrown open, and the sweet-perfumed outer air gained free admittance through the magnificent sweep of apartments in which the guests were assembled.

Henriette reclined on a sofa near the open balcony door. She had wished to appear on this festive occasion in a toilette of pure white tulle and muslin, similar to the dress Kathe was wearing to-day for the first time, but prudence compelled her to wrap her emaciated figure in a white crêpe de Chine shawl, over which her heavy fair hair fell in rich and luxuriant abundance. She looked very ill, and the sunlight playing over her face seemed to heighten the dark rim round her unnaturally large eyes, to sharpen the thin outlines of her features, and to render

more plain than usual the leaden hue of her complexion, which was never tinged with colour unless she was suffering from feverishness. She had just begged Kathe to go and play Schubert's exquisite melody, the "Lob der Thränen," and was impatiently waiting for her to begin, when her pale face suddenly flushed scarlet, and her thin hands were clasped to her bosom as if in pain—for on the threshold of the door opposite to the music-room, stood Dr. Bruck.

Flora flew to his side, and put her hand through his arm, and ere he had time to greet half her assembled guests she entreated him to follow her into her room in order to look at her numerous gifts. In spite of her nine-and-twenty years, and latent desire to be regarded as a blue-stocking, Flora displayed to-day the naïve, ingenuous manners of a girl of

sixteen, which her sweet face and graceful figure enabled her to adopt to perfection.

Kathe was standing by the piano, looking for the notes of the desired melody, when the engaged pair entered and passed through the room. Dr. Bruck bowed, she shyly returned his silent greeting and without a word continued her occupation. Presently through the open door she heard Flora say—

"Leo, I have determined to-day, to put an end to the past, in which I have made so great a mistake, and which was well-nigh the cause of my losing the happiness of my life. I will not refer to that miserable evening when I lost all control over my reason, and uttered words that I in my heart knew to be false, or rather I only refer to it to tell you that you also were wrong in what you said. It was not a mere impulse which prompted me to write—

it may as well be said once and for all—but my inborn genius. Don't question me further—though I will tell you that I should have succeeded as an author if only by means of a work of mine, that you have not seen, on 'Women.' It has been favourably criticized by those competent to judge of its merits, and my name would have been honoured in the literary world; but how could I possibly think now of going through life by *your* side, and at the same time devote my energies to developing my own special talents? No, no, Leo, I will bask in the glory and brightness of your greatness as becomes an admiring wife; and in order to avoid, in the future, being tempted to return to my much-loved study, these manuscripts, which are the result of many hours of thought and poetic inspiration, shall disappear for ever from the face of the earth."

Kathe found the piece of music at last, and as she went over to the piano she saw Flora strike a lucifer, light the leaves of the manuscript, and throw it hesitatingly into the empty stove. With a half-glance towards the Doctor, the young girl observed that he made no attempt to hinder the destruction of the precious papers. Whatever Flora may have hoped or expected from him, he made no sign of wishing to stop the auto-da-fé.

Silent and gloomy in expression, he stood unmoved by the window; and while the fumes of the burning paper were wafted by the summer air to the music-room, and Flora watched the consuming flames with quivering lips and flashing eyes, Kathe placed herself on the music-stool, and began playing Liszt's well-known arrangement of the "Lob der Thränen," determined not to hear Dr. Bruck's reply to

Flora's ostentatious self-sacrifice, unwilling witness as she had again been to a scene between him and his betrothed wife.

As her fingers mechanically passed over the keys, the thought flashed through her brain that he would hate her in time if he became aware of her presence during such moments of private explanation. She heard him speaking, but though his voice reached her ears, the words he uttered were unintelligible; for she resolutely applied her energies to the task before her, and would not allow herself to be beguiled into paying the least attention to what was passing in the room at her side.

Presently, when she had finished, on rising from her seat, she saw Flora emerging from her sanctum, about to cross over to the outer drawing-room. She was not now hanging caressingly on her lover's arm, as she had been when she traversed

the apartment a short while previously, but walked slowly by his side, holding the Princess's bouquet in her hand, with a downcast mien about her, as if she had been forced to recognize at last that she had found her master.

As she passed the piano, she cast an angry glance at Kathe, and, standing still for a moment, said sharply—

"What a blessing you have finished, child! You were making such a terrible noise just now, one could hardly hear one's self speak even in the next room. You play your own compositions very nicely; but then they are such simple, childish melodies, without much depth in them, but Schubert and Liszt are beyond you, my dear, and require more practice and greater knowledge of music than you possess to render them perfectly, and you are not yet a finished pianist."

"Henriette asked me to play the piece for her," replied Kathe quietly. "I have never given myself out as a finished pianist——"

"No, darling, we know you have not; and I am very glad you don't go in for gymnastics on the piano," broke in Henriette, who was standing on the threshold of the door. "But no one knows better than you how to play Schubert with the deepest feeling. Perhaps Flora fancies that the tears you bring to one's eyes when playing his compositions are the result of mere compliment?"

"Diseased nerves, my dear—nothing more!" Flora replied, laughingly, as she followed the Doctor into the large drawing-room.

Here Madame Urach was sitting, with a flushed face and troubled aspect, one hand holding her eye-glass, the other a

letter which had just been brought to her by a servant.

"Oh, my dear Hofrath!" she began, as the young Doctor entered the room, addressing him by his new title, which she made use of as often as it was possible to introduce it in conversation. "I have just received a letter from my friend Baroness Steiner, in which she announces her intention of coming here in a few days, in order to seek help and advice from you. It appears that her little grandson, the last scion of the old Von Brandau family, has been limping in his walk lately, and the worthy doctors she has had to see him are evidently perplexed about the cause of this misfortune. Will you examine the boy, and undertake the case?"

"Very willingly, on one condition."

"And that is?"

"That the lady does not make too great

a demand on my time," replied the young Doctor, who knew from experience that high-born, aristocratic mothers were apt to consider time as of no account, and liked to have a passing cold treated with the same attention as a serious illness.

Madame Urach was perceptibly hurt at the indifferent manner in which her request was granted, but she said nothing. Presently, turning to Flora, she said—

"The Baroness is evidently offended at my last letter to her, in which I was obliged to put off her visit to us for a time. She says as much in this"—and the old lady tapped the paper in her hand with her eye-glass—"and I have no doubt that it would have been long ere she wrote to me again, but for this new sorrow and anxiety about her grandson. You may imagine, Flora, how grieved I am about

it. She now suggests staying at an hotel, the one most available for our Hofrath; and begs me to engage at least *five* rooms for her. She regrets we are so full that we cannot take her in," added the old lady, as she glanced reproachfully at the young girl standing at her side.

Kathe blushed with pride and shame that Madame Urach should thus covertly reproach her for a position she had no power to change, and then the sweet girlish face paled as she opened her lips to speak. But ere she had time to utter a sound, Madame Urach went on—

"We could manage to have her here, and put her on the first floor, if she were not so particular about having five rooms. I suppose she wants a sitting-room for herself and her daughter, also another for little Job Brandau and his bonne, and three bed-rooms—for she brings her maid with

her, of course," she added, as she rested her head on her hand.

"All of which means that Kathe is in the way, and you wish this exacting Baroness to occupy her rooms. Is it not so, grandma?" cried Henriette in her usual sharp angry tones.

"I have already suggested going over to the Mill-house." remarked Kathe quietly, as she gently smoothed Henriette's hair.

"I know a better plan than that, Kathe, if you are obliged to move at all," continued the little invalid, her eyes brightening. "We will ask Auntie Diakonus to let you have that nice pleasant spare room of hers. I know she will be delighted to have you, for she loves you dearly and thinks no one equal to you. Your piano can be taken over for you, and then I shall come and see you as often as I can.

I know 'auntie' will let me, for—" She broke off suddenly as her glance fell on the Doctor who had turned away to the window, but now faced round upon her with such flashing eyes that the poor little invalid fancied he must be out of his mind.

"I think it would be more practical and better in every way to send the boy and his *bonne* to my house," he said coldly and decisively.

Madame Urach fidgeted with the string of her cap, and made no attempt to repress an ironical smile which played for a moment round her mouth as she replied—

"I am afraid, my dear Hofrath, that that arrangement is quite out of the question. My old friend would never dream of parting with the child, besides you have no idea what a spoiled pampered boy he

is. Our hereditary Prince is not half so luxuriously brought up as this last and only scion of the Brandaus. The ugly puny child sleeps in a bed of satin and lace, and—well, the family are rich, you see, and think all such luxuries indispensable; even we find it a difficult matter to entertain them in a manner, they are——"

"How can you suggest taking such a little wretch who is the most tiresome and wilful of boys into your house, Leo? He would worry 'auntie' to death," broke in Henriette, addressing the Doctor; and utterly regardless of what she was saying, she went on excitedly, "What has Kathe done to vex you? I have been noticing for a long time how cold and unfriendly you are to her. What is it? Is she not grand enough for you, because her grandfather was the old castle miller? You never seem to think it worth your while

to talk to her, and really it is too absurd, for after all, she is Flora's sister as much as I am, although her mother was not ours. We had the same father, you know. We all say 'thee' and 'thou' to each other, why should she not say it to you, and you to her, as I do ?"

"My dear Henriette, I have never particularly liked the habit you have fallen into of saying 'thou' to Leo, and if I could have my own way you should not do it any more than Kathe," said Flora sharply. "I have no notion of allowing any one else to share in my special privileges if I can help it, though in your case I make no objection now, considering you have claimed the right from the very first, but I see no reason for Kathe's assuming any such intimacy with Leo, and I shall strenuously oppose it;" and she threw her arms around her lover's neck and looked up smilingly in his face.

It might have been that the young man objected to being caressed in the presence of others, or perhaps Henriette's reproach had irritated him beyond endurance, for he started aside as if he had been stung when the soft hand touched his shoulder, and his face grew livid and pale.

Kathe took advantage of the momentary silence which followed Flora's energetic remark, to quit her position by Madame Urach's chair, and to walk towards the door with the intention of leaving the room. The poor girl's heart ached, and she longed to burst into tears. Bitterly as she felt the unkindness of Madame Urach's behaviour towards her, and the awkwardness of her position with Dr. Bruck after Flora's absurd refusal to admit her into the intimacy enjoined by Henriette, she held back her tears, and forced her manner to assume

a certain amount of calmness, which she was far from feeling inwardly.

She had nearly reached the door when it was suddenly opened from the outside, and the Counsellor walked in. For one moment, Kathe forgot all the shyness and reserve which she had lately felt towards him, all the annoyance caused by his undisguised preference for her society; she only saw before her the guardian who stood to her in the place of her father, the man to whom she had a right to look for protection and help in every difficulty and trouble, and following an impulse over which she had no control she sprang towards him and laid her hand on his arm.

He looked surprised and pleased, smiled down on the upturned beseeching face at his side, and pressed the hand resting on his arm close to his heart. In his hand he

held a somewhat bulky paper box, which he laid on the table near where Madame Urach was sitting.

His entrance had interrupted a rather unpleasing scene, and Henriette, whose unfortunate remark had been the cause of the mischief, was so delighted at his unexpected arrival that she uttered half aloud, half to herself—

"I could hug you, you dear Moriz, for coming here just this very moment!"

"It is a comfort to know one is welcome, at any rate," replied the Counsellor, with one of his bright genial smiles, as he caught the words and stretched out his hands to the little invalid reclining on the sofa. Then turning his handsome face towards Flora he said—

"At last I have brought you *my* birthday gift, Flora, and very glad I am it is all right. My agent accounts for his delay in

sending it, by remarking on the excessive care needed in making it," and he loosened the lid while he spoke. "A propos to your birthday, I have still another pleasure for you," he interrupted himself to add in a light gay tone. "I have just been told that you are revenged, in as much as the leader of that attack on you in the forest has been condemned this morning, and is to suffer a pretty long term of imprisonment for the pleasure she had of showing you her nails; the others have got off with a reprimand, either because they are very young or because they only followed a bad example."

"But surely Flora will not hear this news in the light of a birthday pleasure!" cried Henriette. "The punishment is right, I have no doubt, and even that hideous depraved woman must acknowledge she deserves it, if she considers the

matter at all. But there is so much humiliation and shame for us in the affair, for it is dreadful to know how we are hated by these work-people—and Flora is hated most of all—that I think, Moriz, it would have been better if you had held your tongue about it to-day of all days in the year."

"Do you think so?" said Flora. "Moriz knows me better—he knows that I soar higher than a mere village dame, and that I don't care one iota to be popular; nay, that I would not stir my little finger to be worshipped by the whole lot. You thought the same once upon a time. I should like to know what you would have said eight months ago, Henriette, if any one had ventured to defend the poor, or take up the people's cause in our drawing-room? You know you used to be bitter enough against them, but since Kathe's arrival the question

has been so much discussed between you, that really one hardly dare venture to express an opinion contrary to your changed notions for fear of being assailed with overpowering arguments and youthful indignation. I should not be surprised even to hear that our youngest sister Kathe had ordered roast beef and soup to be sent to that woman to help her keep up her strength during her punishment."

"Nothing of the kind," replied Kathe, courageously repudiating her beautiful sister's irony and sarcasm by a straightforward honest glance in her face; "but I made a few inquiries about her family, and found out she has four little children, and that her unmarried brother, who worked in Moriz's factory, and who had undertaken to look after the little ones, is very ill. Of course, these five helpless beings cannot be allowed to starve while the necessary

punishment is being carried out, and—and I may as well confess at once that—that I mean to take care of them till their natural protector is at liberty again, and their uncle is able to work for them."

The Counsellor turned away, but Kathe went up close to him, and laying her hand again on his arm, she said passionately, with heightened colour and glowing eyes—

"Moriz, it is on occasions like this that the spending of my grandfather's money does not hurt me."

Madame Urach moved impatiently on her chair; such excessive delicacy of sentiment made her feel angry; she had no sympathy with such far-fetched notions of honour.

"A very pretty beginning, certainly!" she cried out angrily. "A fortune could not have found its way into more dangerous hands than yours, my dear. Yes, dear

Hofrath, you may well stand looking at that hand resting on Moriz's arm. It is lying there so helplessly, one would find it difficult to imagine it is the same one which determinately throws out of window to the first poor person, the money Moriz ought to be guarding for her future benefit!"

Kathe drew away her hand immediately, but not before she had had time to notice the frown on Dr. Bruck's brow, as he glanced from those white fingers on the coat sleeve to the pictures on the opposite wall.

"What nonsense, grandmamma! if Leo did glance at Kathe's hand, it was not intended as a reproof," cried Flora sharply, as she drew back a little and noticed, with some little anxiety, the changing colour on her lover's face; "he was always very enthusiastic about the welfare of the people, and—"

"But not now, my dear, not now that he

has been called to fill a post of honour about the Court, and is such a favourite with the Prince."

"And why should my present position alter my opinions?" the young Doctor demanded in a quiet tone, though his voice was low and rather unsteady.

"But, good gracious, Doctor, you surely do not intend being mixed up with this new democratic movement?—it would never do!" exclaimed Madame Urach anxiously.

"I think I have already explained many times that I have nothing whatever personally to do with the democratic societies you refer to, Madame," replied the young man gently; "I only trouble myself with matters intimately connected with every *true* man's duty, that is to say I take an interest in the well-being of those unable to look after sanitary measures for themselves, and—"

But he was interrupted ruthlessly by Moriz, who had been unfastening the box, and now displayed before the delighted eyes of the ladies a beautiful pale amber silk dress, and a piece of violet velvet of rich quality, as he exclaimed—

"There, Flora, are two dresses which I think will help you to make your début in the world as the famous Professor's wife!"

Moriz's object of avoiding an unpleasant discussion was accomplished. Even Henriette forgot her annoyance in admiration of the lovely fan and exquisite flowers which, with head-dress and gloves, accompanied each dress and completed the birthday gift.

But the box was not empty yet.

"I thought I would bring back with me this time a little souvenir for each of you," the Counsellor went on, after the dresses were duly admired and commented upon,

"because I may not be leaving home again for some time, and if I do, I may not be able to find what I want, so I just ordered these few little things while I was in Berlin, and gave myself the pleasure of bringing them with me. There, grandmamma, that is for you," he added, as he laid a costly lace shawl on the old lady's lap, which caused her to beam with delight.

"Here, Henriette!" and he displayed a soft white taffeta robe before the glistening eyes of the little invalid.

Then with an earnest, passionate, and expressive gaze, that caused her to droop her eyelids for a moment, he laid in Kathe's astonished hand a handsomely embossed jewel-case.

This look startled the young girl, and revealed to her the cause for the strange scarcely understood reserve which had lately been working within her, and which

had made her involuntarily shrink from intimate intercourse with her guardian. She did not like his manner towards her, or the warmth and expression of his eyes each time he regarded her. She would put an end to it if she could, but how? It seemed to her as if he assumed there was some secret understanding between them by his daring to regard her in this strange way, and she determined it should not be repeated again. She would *not* have him look at her like that. Shame, indignation, and rebellion at her will being thus tacitly subdued in the presence of others, added to maidenly reserve, obliging her to be silent, were each struggling for the mastery, and for a few moments took away from her her power of utterance.

"Well, Kathe, is it a new experience for you to have a present given you?" Flora

asked. "What has Moriz chosen for you? Come, we shall have to see the contents sooner or later, so let me look at it now, child," she added, taking the case out of Kathe's trembling hands. Pressing her finger against the spring, the lid flew open and presented to view a magnificent necklace of brilliants, which glittered and sparkled on a black velvet cushion. Madame Urach slowly raised her glass to her eye.

"Superb! exquisite! They are really wonderfully artistic and antique-looking for imitation, even if——"

"Imitation!" exclaimed the Counsellor hurriedly, as the old lady reached out her hand and drew the case close to her for the better inspection of its contents. "But, grandmamma, how can you imagine I would do anything so mean! Is one thread of this rich stuff of bad quality?" he asked, touching the violet velvet with his fingers.

"I never buy false jewellery or imitations of any kind on principle—surely you know that by this time?"

The old lady bit her lip with vexation as she said hastily—

"Yes, yes, Moriz, I know that quite well; only the richness of those stones surprised me for a moment. Why, my dear, if those brilliants are pure—and now I see they are—they are finer than anything of the kind possessed by our Princess."

"Then I am sorry the Prince is not able to present her with a set," replied the Counsellor carelessly. "But seriously speaking I should be ashamed to give Kathe false jewellery, if for no other reason than that in a couple of years she will be mistress of such a superb fortune that she will be able to purchase as many jewels as she fancies; and then if my present had

been imitation it would be thrown aside in the corner as worthless!"

"That I can well believe," replied Madame Urach, with cutting irony. "Kathe has a perfect passion for everything rich and costly, as we can see by the rich silk dresses she is so fond of wearing every day; but, my dear child, there is a great art in dressing becomingly, and it must be learned if you wish to make anything of a figure in the world," she said as she glanced reprovingly at Kathe, who was standing near the table without any apparent intention of claiming her right to examine her present. "Diamonds are not worn at eighteen; a girl of your age ought to be content to wear a simple cross at her throat or a velvet band attached to a locket—certainly nothing more expensive than a simple pearl or coral necklet."

"You forget, grandmamma, that Kathe

will not always be eighteen — or an unmarried girl," broke in Flora flippantly. "I know that, don't I, Kate?"

The young girl's eyes flashed with anger and vexation, and she turned proudly away without a word of reply.

"Oh, how superbly disdainful our little one looks!" said Flora, laughing to try and hide her anger and confusion. "One would think I had touched upon a State secret when I teased her! Is it a crime to wish to be married, you little prude? You should not be ashamed to confess openly what you have acknowledged to in private. Then with a sly expressive glance at the Counsellor she added, as she daintily held the ornament in her white fingers, "Now, really, Moriz, I must say that this necklet ought only to be worn by the wife of—a—a millionaire."

Madame Urach rose hastily from her

seat, gathered her glasses, letter, and handkerchief together, and gave an impatient pull to the lace shawl on her shoulders as she said, pointedly :

"I hope, Moriz, you will always be as particular in the future to buy *every*thing of the genuine sort; the champagne we drank at dinner, in honour of Flora's birthday, was certainly not the best; it has made my head ache so badly I must go and lie down for an hour."

And she walked towards the door; but when she had taken about a dozen steps she turned round, and handing her letter to the Counsellor, she remarked :

"When my headache is better I must beg you to come to some definite decision about this," and she waved the paper in a marked manner. "Read it, and you will see for yourself that it will be impossible to refuse the Baroness a second time, and not

to lose her as a friend. I did so at first for peace' sake, that is, I acquiesced in your wish; but I cannot be so submissive again. People of *our* rank are not accustomed to be taken up and put down at the dictation of caprice. Remember that, my dear Moriz!" and the old lady smiled grimly, and with a haughty nod of her head quitted the room.

CHAPTER X.

"YOU will have something to do now, Moriz," said Flora, pointing to the door by which her grandmother had just left the room. "Grandmamma is equipped and armed to the teeth for fight——"

The Counsellor laughed aloud.

"Ah, well you may laugh; but you will see that she will not surrender one inch of the position she holds here—not a hair's-breadth will she yield to another. I have often told you, you gave her far too much power in your house; I warned you long

ago how it would be—now see how you will get out of this mess you are in——" Interrupting herself suddenly, she took hold of the young Doctor's hand and said in an anxious tone, "For Heaven's sake tell me what is the matter with you, Leo!" and receiving no answer she went on after a moment:

"That you are going through some inward struggle I know quite well, although you think to hide it from me. What is it? You may deceive others, but the eyes of love are keener, and me you cannot deceive. Lines are creeping into your face, here and here;" she touched with her finger his forehead which had suddenly become crimson to the roots of his hair. "These fresh-grown furrows make me very anxious—you look pallid and worn too, lately. You are working too hard. Do you know? no, you don't—

well, listen then. I shall take upon myself from to-day onwards, to send one of our men-servants to your apartments in town with special orders from me not to admit to your presence all those troublesome people who come to you for advice, but who once repaid your skill with ill-concealed scorn, and who worry you to death with their meanness and never-ending demands on your time."

Henriette looked up at her sister while she was speaking, with eyes and mouth open wide with astonishment, while the Counsellor stroked his fine beard to hide his inclination to laugh. But Dr. Bruck himself, whose face had hitherto merely expressed indifference and passiveness, now suddenly assumed a sharp angry defiance, and he laughed bitterly as he said sternly, and in a very decided tone :

"You will do nothing of the kind, Flora.

I absolutely forbid you to interfere in any way with my professional duties, either now or in the future." Then turning to the Counsellor he said quietly, "I am very much interested in one of my patients who is dangerously ill both mentally and bodily. I want to talk with you about his affairs, Moriz. Can you give me a few moments alone ?"

"A patient dangerously ill ?" repeated the Counsellor thoughtfully as his brows contracted into a frown, and his mouth assumed a hard compressed look. "Ah, yes, I remember," he went on with a wave of his hand, "it must be that dare-devil Lenz. The man has been speculating to an alarming extent for his means, and he would like to put his hands into my pockets to help him out of his scrape ; no thank you !"

"Don't you think it would be as well if

we were to talk it over in your room?" said the Doctor firmly. "At present we are the only two whom the man has made aware of his affairs — not even his wife knows why——"

"Well, well, I am curious to know how he succeeded in persuading you to be his mediator, but I doubt if I shall move even my little finger to put him straight again. I tell you the affair is hopeless," replied the Counsellor, shrugging his shoulders, for although he had himself gathered riches and wealth around him, and had formerly been good-natured enough to those struggling about him, yet now he seemed incapable of understanding the sorrows and troubles of less fortunate people. After a moment he added: "Besides, you of all people have the least reason to sympathize with the man, for you know that he too picked up a stone to throw at you not so long ago."

"Do you think that ought to affect me?" asked Dr. Bruck from over his shoulder as he gently led the way from the room, his tall manly figure gaining dignity from the determination of his manner, appearing taller even than the Counsellor, whose usual elegant nonchalant manner was changed for the moment to a hesitating, somewhat shrinking, half-defiant, half-frightened air.

When the door closed on the Doctor and the Counsellor, the three girls were left alone. Flora rang loudly for her maid to take away her brother-in-law's costly present, while Kathe drew a pair of gloves from her pocket, quickly put them on, and then reached out her hand for her parasol.

"Are you going out, Kathe?" asked Henriette from her reclining chair.

"To-day is working afternoon at Auntie

Diakonus'. I am already late, so must hurry away, for——" answered the young girl unwillingly, but stopping short in her remark as Flora suddenly threw a paper box of flowers with an angry gesture across the room, scattering their contents all over the floor.

"This wonderful excess of business is enough to drive one out of their senses," cried Flora angrily. "This 'auntie,' the very personification of duty, has refused my invitation to coffee because, forsooth, to-day is the afternoon when all those waifs and strays of the town congregate at her house to learn to sew! as if she could not have put them off — and now, here is Kathe following suit, and gravely asserting that she too has her duty to attend to in teaching those brats!"

Then waiting till the maid had gathered the flowers from the floor and had left the

room, she seized Kathe, who was also about to follow the servant's example, by the arm, and holding her firmly said :

" Just wait one moment while I tell you that you force me to play a part for which I have very little patience. It is a long time yet to September. What is more likely than that 'auntie' will expect her nephew's future wife to make the same heroic self-sacrifice for the good of the people as she accepts daily now from you, her pattern of all that is good and sweet? She will think that I too ought to take hold of the dirty little fingers and patiently pick up the dropped stitches of a dirtier stocking till the stupid little peasant's brain has mastered the art of knitting ; that I ought to wash dirty faces, stroke uncombed hair, and be willing to play at catch-catch with all the little vagabonds of the place. Bah! I should like to see myself doing it! I

did try it once, but it made me sick. And I have no doubt that the dear good woman is pouring into Leo's ears complaints of me from morning till night; how proud and haughty I am—and how heartless I must be not to love dirty children. Now for this very reason, for the reason that I don't mean to be set up as a contrast to *you*, I must beg you in future not to go so often to that house, to my future home. I won't have you visiting there as you do, and I insist—nay, command you to give up going there. Do you hear? I have a right to demand it!"

"Yes, I hear; but nevertheless I shall go on doing what my own judgment tells me there is no harm in," replied Kathe firmly and quietly, while she wrenched her arm from Flora's grasp. "Your right, which you use so badly, I do not acknowledge as having power over me, and——"

"No, of course not," broke in Henriette with glowing cheeks and flashing eyes.

"And I will not submit to it," continued Kathe. "If you imagine that there is treachery in every act of those around you, it is a sure sign that you feel your own power is on the wane."

"On the wane?" repeated Flora scornfully, and clasping her hands in pretended amusement. "My dear little woman, my wisest of all moralizers, you make a slight mistake there. A passionate affection such as I have had cause to test severely in my lover, and which has only grown more intense in the trial, could never *now* be influenced by any one. My power is now, as ever, intact."

"Very unfortunate it is too!" murmured Henriette angrily to herself, adding somewhat louder: "I am constantly obliged to recall to my mind Dr. Bruck's former firm-

ness of purpose in all his actions not to call him an imbecile!"

"It is only a question now of the time between this and September," continued Flora, merely noticing Henriette's remark by a sarcastic shrug of her shoulders, "and I regard the matter as an act of policy on my side towards the old lady; for I have no wish to vex her, naturally. When we are settled in Leipzig all that will be changed, of course, and Leo will soon recognize that the kind of wife his aunt would have chosen for him would not only be a burden, but a drag to him. He will only fully understand my value when he sees his drawing-room frequented by people of good birth, who will consider it an honour to visit us owing to his brilliant position and my being at the head of his house, and when he sees me filling my post with the ease and elegance natural to

me, and at the same time regulating my kitchen and nursery as becomes a sensible wife, then, and then only, will he be able to judge of my worth. I have thought it all over, and I find that with my income I shall not only be able to dress elegantly, but have a first-rate cook and a good nurse and governess if I need them, without touching one penny of whatever he may allow me for household expenses."

She looked at her rosy finger tips as she spoke, and then slowly raised her head with a haughty gesture and gazed at her reflection in the large mirror which reached from floor to ceiling. It was the face of a lovely woman, certainly, which met her gaze, but somehow not one whom involuntarily one associated with a helpless infant on her knee, or as bending lovingly over a sick-bed and whispering gentle caressing words to ease pain, not one whose natural

place was the nursery, where tiny arms would be stretched out in loving welcome at her approach, or rosy faces be held up to be kissed!

Presently her glance wandered from her own face in the glass to Kathe's white-robed figure standing near the blue velvet curtains dividing the rooms, and she could not avoid noticing the fresh youthful beauty of the clear complexion and the innocent depths of the truthful brown eyes in contrast to her own more regularly beautiful features, with their worn expression and anxious sharply-defined outlines. Perhaps the contrast vexed her, for she smiled spitefully as she nodded her head at the figure in the background, and remarked:

"It is all very well, little one, but you will soon lose that violet-like modesty of yours, and you will no more care for the domestic duties and worries your beloved

Lucas has taught you to consider the height of happiness, than I do. Moriz won't allow you to go about the house with bundles of keys clanging at your side, of that you may be quite sure; although he may be gallant enough to promise you a dozen times over a poultry-yard, you won't be allowed to superintend it yourself! And just because he is a newly-created nobleman, he will be more particular about the appearance of his wife's hands than the oldest and noblest prince in the land."

Kathe flushed like a peony, and moved away from her position by the curtains, as she asked simply and wonderingly of her elder half-sister:

"What has that to do with me? Surely Moriz can do as he likes?"

"Flora, how can you have so little tact as to meddle with Moriz's affairs in any such way?" cried Henriette in distress,

while watching anxiously the wondering look in Kathe's eyes.

"Nonsense, he ought to be very much obliged to me for smoothing his way for him. Besides, you know very well that I am not referring to a matter that Kathe has not known for a long time. Every girl above fifteen has that within her which instinctively warns her first and then like an electric shock assures her that she has won a man's heart. And those who will not acknowledge it are either absurdly stupid, or refined and finished coquettes."

Again she looked at herself in the mirror and arranged the hair on her forehead, ere adding,

"All who have eyes can see for themselves how charmingly our little one has succeeded in making herself pleasant, and how well she has played her part. *You* understand me, don't you, Kathe?" she asked

with an expressive smile, glancing under her upraised arm at Kathe as she spoke.

"No, I do not understand you," replied the young girl, her breath coming and going quickly with an undefined instinct that made her anxious, while she struggled hard to keep down the anger which Flora's tone, more than her words, had provoked.

"Come, Kathe, let us go," said Henriette, throwing her arms round her stronger sister's waist and leading her towards the door. "I will not allow such treason to be heard by you," she added, stamping her foot with rage.

"Don't excite yourself about nothing, Henriette!" remarked Flora, laughing. "Here, Kathe, you had better take your jewels, and not leave them in the drawing-room where the servants are constantly coming in and going out."

But Kathe laid her hand with a childish action behind her as Flora thrust the case towards her.

"Moriz can take them back again," she replied shortly but firmly. "Your grandmamma is quite right, it is not a becoming present, such jewels have no right to ornament my neck."

"Am I really to believe in such well-acted ingenuousness?" cried Flora, quickly losing her temper. "Nonsense, my dear, such pretended affectation does not become a strong robust girl like you. There is the lace shawl which Moriz brought for grandmamma, it lies there still—why? because being more exacting than your sisters—who thoroughly understand how *it* is that a present to you is of ten times the value of theirs—she scorns such a gift And now you pretend that you do not know *why* such a costly *étui* is given to

you! Bah! little one, don't be so absurdly silly! Have you not heard and seen the alterations going on over there in the Pavilion? Every one in the house, even the lowest labourer carrying hods of bricks up and down the ladder outside, is aware that those alterations are rooms being prepared for grandmamma's use, in order that the Counsellor's young wife may reign as queen in these magnificent apartments. Well, little innocent, must I speak still more plainly?"

The young girl had listened to this tirade with quick coming breath, and a dumb kind of consciousness that what she said was true, and her eyes had a frightened distended look in them as if she were watching the gradual approach of a danger she had no power to avert. But as Flora ceased speaking a proud smile flitted for a second round her pale lips, and she said

bitterly, the tones of her voice ringing strangely hard and metallic-like in their sound :

"You may spare yourself the trouble, I quite understand you at last. You have even more courage than your grandmother in causing any further stay in this house impossible on my part."

"Kathe!" cried Henriette. "No, no, you are making a mistake. Flora has been terribly thoughtless, and wanting in tact as usual; but in this matter she intended no such allusions, I assure you. Did you, Flora?" Then clinging closer to Kathe, and looking piteously up in her face, she went on in a half-angry, half-tremulous voice, "Why need any such silly remarks drive you away, Kathe? She only said it to tease you. Have you really been so unconscious of the existence of the love Moriz has shown you so plainly on every

opportunity? Now, listen, I have over and over again wished to die, I do so still; but if I thought it possible that you would some day be mistress here in our old paternal home, why then—then——"

Kathe suddenly wrenched herself free from the soft encircling arms, and tossing back her head, her eyes flashing scorn, anger, and wounded pride, while her whole girlish figure seemed to dilate with passion, she cried:

"Never! never!"

"Ah! never, you say!" said Flora, sarcastically. "Pray, then, is the match not grand enough for you, or what is it? Are you waiting for a ruined count, or perhaps a prince, to come and pluck the rose from the bush and wear it in his heart for ever? only remember that out of the fairy books in real life, such things are only done for the sake of the golden fortune accompanying

the rose, not for the rose itself. Such marriages are common enough now-a-days, though every one knows exactly what becomes of the unfortunate wife. If you wish to be constantly reminded that your grandfather followed the plough, and that your grandmother ran about barefooted, then marry into a family of proud descent by all means! Any way I should really like to know what you have against Moriz, or rather why you treat the idea of marrying him so scornfully. You are certainly very rich, but we all know how you got your money. You are young and fresh-looking, but you are not beautiful, my dear; and as to your musical talents, which you know how to display on fitting occasions and make the most of, they have been greatly exaggerated by your well-paid masters, who, the moment they lose their reward, will soon cease to praise you."

"Flora, how can you?" exclaimed Henriette.

"Silence, child!" Flora went on, putting the little invalid aside with a strong hand. "I am speaking to you for your good, Kathe. Do you want Moriz to be more passionately in love with you than he is? My dear girl, he is no longer a young man anxious to be the hero of some girlish romance. The chief question with you ought to be, Would you ever be chosen for yourself alone?—one can never tell in the case of an heiress how it might have been. I don't understand you; up till now it has pleased you to play the part of a watchful nurse to an extent that few old maids would have willingly done, just because no one especially wished you to do it; and now that Henriette's whole future well-being seems to depend on your staying in the house, you declare your intention of going

away. For my part I shall be much more at ease, when I leave here, to know that Henriette is under your kind hands; and Leo, too, will be glad; yet you must have seen how very little he cares about you; he would rather, as you heard just now, have that spoilt, ill-tempered little wretch, Job Brandau, to plague him from morning to night than have *you* in his house, though, of course, he is very anxious about the welfare of his patient; and, as she is so fond of you, he would like you to stay with her when he leaves here for Leipzig."

Henriette did not say a word, but stood leaning her hot cheek against the wall, her mouth quivering with pain at the cruel bitter tone of her elder sister's remarks to Kathe.

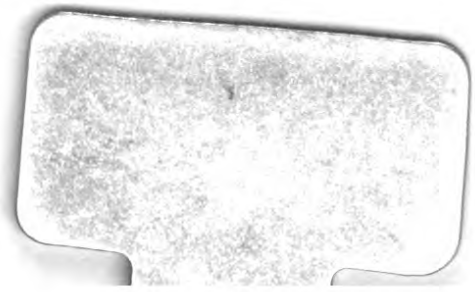
Kathe, however, on her part, had quite recovered her equanimity, and without taking the slightest notice of Flora, she said to Henriette quietly:

"You and I know best about that, don't we, dear Henriette?" but the lips she pressed tenderly against the invalid girl's cheek were hot and trembling, and her hands were cold as ice, as she added, "You must go to your room now, darling, and lie down after taking your medicine. I shall soon be back—I won't be away for long," and without so much as a glance at Flora she turned and left the room.

"Conceited girl! I believe she is in a rage because I do not think her a beauty, and that men like Leo Bruck do not fall down and worship her," remarked Flora, with a sarcastic curl of her mouth as the door closed on Kathe's retreating figure; and while Henriette silently took up her own pretty delicate present, and closing the necklace-case, carried it away with her to her own apartments, Flora began humming an opera melody. Crossing the corridor, she

knocked without hesitation at the door of the room where Moriz and Dr. Bruck were talking, and said, gaily, as she put her head inside :

"What an ungallant pair you are to leave me all alone on my birthday !"

END OF VOL. II.

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