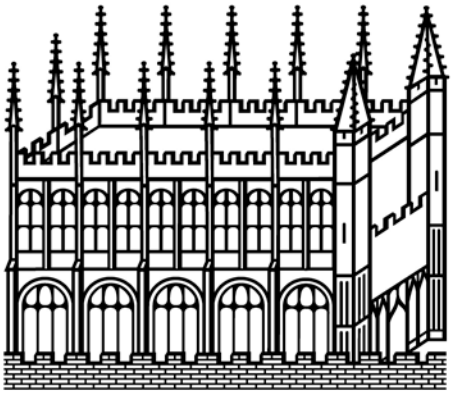

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# The Second Wife

TRANSLATED BY

ANNIE WOOD

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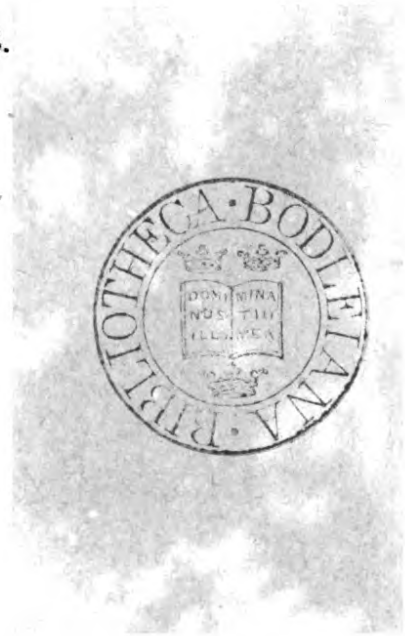


LONDON:
D BENTLEY AND SON.
1875.
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251. d. 247

# THE SECOND WIFE.

From the German of E. Marlitt.

BY

ANNIE WOOD,

TRANSLATOR OF

ELVIRA, LADY CASTERTON," "LOVE OR PRIDE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

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251. d. 247.

# THE SECOND WIFE.

## CHAPTER I.

THE Duchess sent word to the Hofmarschall that she and her two sons would pay him a visit. There was nothing unusual in this proceeding. During the life-time of her husband, she and the Duke had constantly partaken of the hospitality of Schönwerth, for the Hofmarschall was high in favour wtih the royal pair, and regarded as a true and faithful subject by both. Even during the year

following the Duke's death, when the royal widow lived in retirement and solitude, away from the pomp and ceremony of the court, she had often, when riding through the forest, dismounted from her horse, and accepted a cup of coffee in the drawing-room of Schönwerth Castle. On these occasions her beautiful face, with the crêpe ruched cap on her head, looked, in its sorrow and sadness, as if carved in marble; and the old Hofmarschall, as he gazed at her in his polite, kindly way, gradually arrived at the conclusion that the grief-stricken lady had really loved her husband. But after the announcement of Baron Mainau's approaching marriage, she ceased her friendly visits at the castle, merely sending now and then to inquire after the health of her old friend who had suffered lately from an attack of gout somewhat severer than usual.

Now, however, Herr von Rüdiger appeared one afternoon with the announcement that the little royal princes were very anxious to come and pick the fruit from the castle garden, as they had been in the habit of doing every summer for years. Dinner was just over, and dessert was on the table, when Herr von Rüdiger arrived. The old Hofmarschall sprang up as if he had suddenly grown young again, put his crutch in the corner, and made an effort to crawl to the window without support. Then he beckoned Liane to his side, and gave her a number of instructions regarding the viands and wine to be had the next day.

"Now what are we to do?" exclaimed Raoul to his wife, as he followed her from the room when she had finished speaking to his uncle. "I had agreed, as you know, to your wish that you should not be pre-

sented at court till after my return from the East; but as the Duchess intends honouring us with a visit to-morrow, you *must* receive her and be duly presented." And he added, as he tried to suppress a smile of self-consciousness, and shrugging his shoulders in malicious despair, "I don't see how you can avoid it."

"I know that," she replied, calmly; and taking from her pocket a tiny note-book, she began writing in it the orders she had just received about the cellar, slowly walking across the wide corridor.

"Good. Your coolness and self-possession under all circumstances is really remarkable. But there is one thing I should like to give you a hint about, if I may?"

"Why not?" provokingly indifferent came the question.

"The Duchess has a—well—dislike to all

studied simplicity of dress; she laughs at it, and——. Now your inclination, Juliane, is in that——"

"I hope you give me credit for having tact enough to know when to follow my inclination, and——when to appear as befits the honour of my rank," she interrupted, laughing, as she stuck the pencil in her note-book, and put both in her pocket. "Don't fear; I won't wear a muslin dress."

At the door of Baron Mainau's apartment stood two new travelling-cases, which had evidently only just arrived. Raoul's eyes glistened when he caught sight of them, as if in spirit he had already crossed mountain and dale, river and sea, and was far away from Schönwerth, out in the beautiful East."

"Ah! I see my trunks are come. I *am* glad," he said, joyously lifting the lid of

one of them, and trying the hinges and lock, while Liane left him and went on to the housekeeper's room to give her orders for the following day.

The housekeeping at Schönwerth was no easy task for the young wife. The Hofmarschall had silently acquiesced in her assuming the control of the house; but his penurious disposition, and being obliged to account to him for every farthing she spent, made the duties an irksome and onerous task. His unlimited suspicion, his fear of being robbed of even one penny, and his belief that every one deceived him, were daily sources of anxiety and worry to the young mistress. The only reason for his dislike to his nephew's second marriage arose from this cause: he feared that more money would be spent, and extravagance and luxury take the place of his miserly habits and mean, close expenditure.

Liane soon found out how he watched her actions and interfered in all her arrangements, and that nothing went on at the castle that he did not more or less spy into as far as was possible; even her letters were always passed through his hands before they were brought to her. Those from her brother and sister she had no objection to his looking at; but one day a letter arrived from her mother—the first she had received since her marriage. Liane could not help noticing that the seal was broken, and it was with a beating heart and heightened colour that she hastened to read its contents. In the first few lines the Countess complained of the sad state of her health; that a stay at one of the baths had been ordered her, but that Ulrike was as hard as a flint, and would not advance her one penny for the journey. Then she

went on to appeal to her "dearest daughter's" kindness, and begged her to send some of her riches, a little of her pin money, to help her mother recover her health.

That the Hofmarschall had read this letter Liane had no doubt; but she was convinced of the fact by the malicious, triumphant, fixed look he gave her when she met him at dinner in the dining-room. Of these constant worries, small as they were, she made no mention to her husband. In his presence the Hofmarschall kept a guard on his temper and tongue, and treated her with marked politeness and respect. Besides, as she thought to herself, what advantage would she gain if she did complain, and that, too, to one who would have peace at any sacrifice, so she said nothing, but passed it by all in silence.

## CHAPTER II.

IT was just three o'clock in the afternoon when Liane entered the drawing-room. She wore a long, rich, sea-blue silk dress, trimmed with velvet of a darker shade. Her hair was beautifully dressed, and the bright golden shimmer of the thick plaits shone in beautiful contrast to the dark folds of her dress, and gave a charming grace and beauty to her appearance. Wide, open, hanging

sleeves showed her dimpled arms to the elbow; and the body, cut square in the bosom, with folds of lace to her throat, displayed the exquisite contour of a figure as perfect and as rounded as Hebe's. Not even in her brocaded bridal robe had the "red-haired Trachenberg" looked so queenly and dignified as she did on this occasion.

"You are much too soon, my dear lady," cried the Hofmarschall, who was sitting by the window in his own chair on wheels, to be able to bow to the Duchess as she passed in her carriage, ere entering the courtyard. He was conversing with the priest, who was standing near.

As Liane walked towards him, he fixed his sharp eyes with a frown of displeasure on the large bouquet the girl held in her hand.

"Good heavens! what a waste of flowers!

The greenhouse must be stripped bare to supply such a bouquet! Raoul is really a fool to have so many of these exotic flowers. They cost enormous sums, and are of no use except to fade in meddling hands. The hostess, madam, need not appear as if she were going to a ball!" he added, with a sneer.

Liane stood still, and let the cross old man have his say uninterrupted. She could have told him that his own daughter had often, in a fit of temper, plucked just such a costly bouquet to pieces, and stamped her tiny feet on the broken flowers; but, instead, she quietly observed,

"My husband desired me to hand these flowers to the Duchess when she arrives."

"Ah, ha! then I beg a thousand pardons!" He looked at his watch, and added, "There is still plenty of time before our

guests arrive for me to say a few words to you on a subject that, although painful and disagreeable to me, I cannot avoid mentioning. This morning you sent a small box to Rudisdorf, addressed to the Countess Ulrike, your sister. Now you know that I prefer seeing what goes to the post, and sending it off myself to the town. However, be that as it may, your little packet must have fallen into very awkward hands, whoever it was you confided it to, for it was returned to me in this state," and he took from the side of his chair a small box, with a portion of the lid wrenched off.

As he spoke, a deep red flushed the cheeks of the young wife, but when he produced the box, and handed it to her, with his withering smile, the colour died away, and left her face so deathly white,

even to her lips, that one would have thought the blood had deserted her body.

Involuntarily she glanced at the priest, who slightly bowed, gazing at her with an expression of admiration and entreaty in his eyes, which immediately brought her to herself. Laying the bouquet on the table, she stepped nearer.

"And I have something else to say, which I hardly know how to put into words," said the Hofmarschall, stroking his upper lip, and hesitating as if he were really pained at being obliged to speak out what was on his mind, while he looked steadily at Liane as a cat does at its prey. "Besides, we are quite en famille, my dear lady, and I am sure it will never creep beyond these four walls that you have made a slight mistake, as I conjecture, at least."

Slowly unbuttoning his coat, he took from his breast-pocket a small jewel-case.

"This, unfortunately, slipped out of the box, as, angry and annoyed at the carelessness of the servants, I snatched it too roughly from the table."

Touching the spring with his fine, half-bent forefinger, the lid flew open, and exposed a beautiful amethyst, set round with brilliants, flashing its red-blue light on every side. The jewel was made in the form of a rose, to be worn either as a brooch or a locket.

"You must pardon me if I mistake," he went on, holding the ornament towards her, "but I could swear that this beautiful little jewel has often hung on my daughter's throat. It is one of Raoul's family jewels, is it not?"

"No," replied Liane, firmly and calmly, taking the ornament out of its case, and deftly moving the gold plate at the back. "I suppose you know the crest of the Prince von Thurgan? At all events, have the goodness to convince yourself that it is engraved here on the gold. I received this brooch from my grandmother—my father's mother—or rather, I inherited it. I suppose you will acknowledge that the grandchild of *that* Princess von Thurgan is incapable of such an act, or, as you presume, 'mistake,' which——"

"For God's sake, dear lady," he interrupted, now really embarrassed, "don't say such things. Have I then been so unfortunate as to cause you to completely misunderstand me? Impossible! How could I say what I did not think? I was right in what I meant. I said the word

mistake—that meant I believed the cases had got mixed—for in our family there exists a jewel exactly like this."

"I know there is. I have Raoul's family jewels in my dressing-room, and soon after I came here I compared the jewels in the case with the inventory."

"That is, you took possession of them at once, which I don't blame you for. You have a right to them, full right, especially when you send back the remains of your family grandeur to your sister. You required that jewel no longer, but to her it would be very welcome."

He spoke sneeringly, and with a sarcastic smile playing on his thin lips, which made him look hideous. Liane had a hard struggle with herself to keep back the tears the old man's taunting words brought to her eyes; but she knew that if he saw

this proof of his power to wound her, his triumph would be complete.

Taking the box from the stool on which it had been put, she laid it on the writing-table with the costly carving, near which the old man sat.

"You are in error," she said, looking him straight in the face. "I hold the memory of your daughter in honour, and the jewels that she ornamented herself with, I will never wear. I examined them simply because I am responsible for them while they are in my possession. You are still more in error, Herr Hofmarschall, in supposing that I sent that ornament to Rudisdorf, in order that my sister might deck herself with the 'remains of our former grandeur.' How Ulrike would laugh at such an idea!"

Then taking a paper-knife from the table,

she slipped it under the lid of the box, and opened it wide. With trembling hands she took out first a packet wrapped in blotting-paper, containing some carefully-dried plants, which she laid aside, and then a picture, from which she removed the soft paper, and taking the empty box in her hand, she tapped it lightly with her fingers, and added bitterly, her bosom heaving, and her eyes flashing proudly at the old man,

"Besides that jewel, which I inherited from my grandmother, you see there is nothing of much value in the box."

The Hofmarschall's face reddened with shame, and his eyes drooped before the young wife's searching glance. He had deserved the reproof; but he said, hastily—

"But why, the devil! do you prove it to me? Do you expect me to apologize for

what I have not done? How can you suppose that I doubted your veracity for one second? I believe your word—believe all you say; and even if you were to assert that you were sending that jewel to your home for the sole purpose of its being hung round the neck of your mother's lap-dog, I would believe you!"

His tone was so insolent, his expression so scornful, that Liane felt her blood boiling with indignation. She was about to turn her back on her tormenter and leave the room, when she noticed the priest, who had been a silent witness to the insults she had received, touch the Hofmarschall's arm, and give him a side look, as if in warning.

Did he mean to come to her aid? she thought. Was this one of the moments of trouble that he had prophesied would come

to her, in which he begged her to call to him? No; never would she hold out so much as a finger to this priest to implore his aid—no, not if he had the whole world at his command, and with a glance could free her from sorrow.

"Such an absurdity would never enter my head," she hastened to reply, before the priest had time to speak. "You know I am a Trachenberg, and life has ever been too earnest with my family for such childish silliness. Why should I conceal it? The whole world knows how poor we are; that our fortune is all gone. I was sending that jewel to my mother, that she might dispose of it, and have the money necessary for a month at the baths."

"Ah! why do you tell me all that?" said the old man, laughing aloud; "or shall I accuse you of niggardliness. You have

pin-money to the extent of four hundred a——"

"I believe that is my affair, and *mine* only, what I do with that money," she broke in, excitedly.

"Certainly; and I have no right to inquire if you invest it or spend it on your toilette. But what an idea you must have of the value of the jewel!" Touching the case with his finger, he said, contemptuously, "Why, the thing is only worth about ten or twelve pounds. My stars! Ten pounds for the Countess Trachenberg's expenses for a month!"

"The stone was valued once," she replied, courageously. "I know the sum will not be sufficient, that is why I——"

She hesitated, and a warm blush mounted to her cheeks. She seemed afraid to go on.

"Well?" asked the Hofmarschall, stooping forward, and looking at her with his cold, malicious eyes.

"That is why I was sending another object, which Ulrike won't sell for less than five pounds," she replied, in a low tone, with her voice slightly trembling.

"Ah? What are the wonderful resources you have at your disposal, fair lady? Is this the object you refer to?" pointing to the picture covered with soft paper, on which her hand rested. "It is a painting, is it not?"

"Yes."

"Your own work?"

"I painted it."

She pressed her hands together on her bosom, to still her beating heart. Like a flash of lightning, the scene in Rudisdorf dining-room rushed before her eyes, when

her mother in her anger had flung the botanical book out on the terrace, and she feared—she knew not what—for the fate of her picture.

"And you intend selling the painting?"

"I said so just now."

She would not look at him. She knew that his small, shrunken eyes blazed with evil triumph, from the slow emphasis of his question. It was like a cat tormenting a mouse.

"I suppose you know some amateur—or have some rich friend who wandered into Rudisdorf, and then duly paid his debt by buying such works of art—as that?"

At these words her courage returned. She no longer felt nervous or bashful; her fear vanished, and she was calm and herself again.

"That kind of begging I would scorn to

employ, of course. I preferred selling my paintings to an authorized dealer," she said, quietly.

The Hofmarschall started as if he had been stung.

"That is to say, in plain words, before your marriage you earned your bread by the work of your hands?"

"Partly—yes! I am aware that in telling you of this I put myself in your power, and that, in consequence of this avowal, my position in this house will be more painful to me than hitherto; but I risk it, preferring a thousand times to brave your displeasure than to hide a secret of which I am not ashamed. I will not, and *ought* not to act towards those here as I did to mamma, for fear of her anger. She knew nothing about it."

"The deuce take it all! How could

Raoul replace my proud, gentle child—my Valerie—by such a—a—substitute as you?" cried the old man, in despair, gnashing his teeth, as he threw himself back in his chair.

The priest sprang forward, and would have taken Liane's hand; but she waved him away, and retreated to the end of the room.

But he followed, and said, earnestly—

"You are unwise to speak so, madam. You must acknowledge that you are excited, and are saying things now that in a calmer moment, and under different circumstances, would appear in another light."

"No; I won't acknowledge anything of the kind, Herr Hofprediger. What I have said is true, and I maintain it. With my hands I have worked for money, and received payment! And now that I see the

impression my confession has made I breathe freely. I know that the sharp eyes of the Hofmarschall would sooner or later have discovered what I have done, and I should then never have forgiven myself for keeping silent about it; for I should have felt as if I were ashamed of my poor days. *I* ashamed! No; God knows I am not."

And turning to the Hofmarschall, she added, passionately—

"Would it have pleased you better if you had heard that I lived on charity before I was married? You despise a noble lady because she works when she has no fortune to support her. But how, on the other hand, could nobles respect themselves if they thought that their crests dared only appear on a golden shield? Thank God that we live in days when no one is ashamed to be a devotee to art!"

"Art!" repeated the Hofmarschall, sarcastically. "Art! the daubing, you mean, that the drawing-master teaches to a dozen girls from the same copy—and——"

The words died away on his lips.

Was the changing expression on his face caused from shame or astonishment? He had taken the paper carelessly off the picture as he spoke, and as his eyes glanced on it, he fell back in his chair and heaved a deep breath.

The priest hurried to his side; but the old man covered his hand over the painting, as if he wished no one to see it.

It was a picture of the "Lotus-lily" that the young wife had painted; not lying on her bed of pain, paralysed in all her limbs, but as a young lovely girl, in all the glory of youth and beauty. It was the same face, but free from suffering; the same

Bajadere from Benares that the German noble had brought with him to his northern home.

She was slightly reclining, with her head resting on her hand. Gold ornaments were in her hair, and one lovely, shining black tress lay on her bosom, and rippled across the gold and purple silk scarf which covered her shoulders and part of her arm. The large, fringe-like leaves of a musa-tree cast a soft shadow over the figure; while, in the background, the sun shone bright and glistening on the marble steps of the temple and the rippling water beneath.

The water and background were only sketched in; but every line and touch of the brush showed the finished hand of a master. The head, with its passionate eyes, and small, unearthly, beautiful features; the turn of the throat; the way the

tiny feet were half buried in the green grass; the graceful, voluptuous figure, enveloped in a Bajadere's veil—all was so exquisitely painted, with such firm outline and pure colouring, that as a picture it was a work of merit such as is rarely seen, and one that even the Hofmarschall was obliged to confess to himself, was a proof of considerable talent.

He soon recovered his surprise, and raising himself on his seat, he said tauntingly—

"Ah! even this young lady with her cold, passive manner, has her Eve's share of curiosity, and seems to take a delight in finding out all the piquant histories in our family, diving into the musty archives at home, and into the secrets of the Indian garden here. You have certainly a great talent," he added, bitingly, "and have

succeeded admirably in your subject, but for that very reason you will understand that this painting ought never to go beyond the walls of Schönwerth. We have been foolish, it must, unfortunately, be confessed, but the idea of bringing to light that story of our shame in order that a woman, under pretence of filial affection, may win glory and renown as an artist! My dear, that picture I shall take possession of, and I will send the Countess Trachenberg the necessary money for her visit to the baths."

"No such thing, Herr Hofmarschall; I refuse in my mother's name," cried Liane, losing all self-command in her distress. "She would rather stay at home, I know."

The Hofmarschall uttered a shrill mocking sound of laughter as he with difficulty rose from his chair, and going to the carved cabinet, took from a drawer a little rose-

tinted note, which he held towards her, saying—

"My dear, take the trouble to read this, and judge for yourself if a lady who did not hesitate to apply to an old admirer for the loan of five hundred pounds to pay her gaming debts, would be likely to refuse a kindly-meant offer to defray her bath expenses? She accepted the five hundred pounds thankfully, but has not repaid me. Luck was against her, I suppose."

Mechanically, but with an incredulous look on her face, Liane took the paper from the hand of the Hofmarschall and moved to the window. She could not and would not read the well-known angular writing, the "Mon cher ami," which caught her eye as she seized the letter, stabbed her to the heart with shame. For a moment she felt as if she could no longer bear the scrutinizing

looks of the two gentlemen, and to avoid their gaze she turned round to hide her face in the embrasure of the window, when she started back with a cry. The glass-door was open, and outside, on the stone steps, with his back towards the room, and with his elbows resting on the stone-work, not a couple of yards off stood her husband. He must have heard every word that had been uttered inside the room, not a syllable could have escaped him; and, if he really had been there all the time, and had heard all the bitter, insulting things which had been addressed to her, then he must be a coward. Love from him she did not ask for or expect, but surely she had a right to his knightly help, to his defence of her honour; even as a brother would come to the aid of a sister in like circumstances.

"Give me back my letter at once," cried the Hofmarschall, as he imagined she was putting the little note in her pocket to keep it; "one must have some hold over you, young lady, for you are by no means a harmless adversary to contend against. To-day I have learned to know you; you have the instincts of race in you, and more spirit than I gave you credit for, so please return me my much-loved rose-tinted little note."

She handed him back the paper, which he carefully laid in the drawer and locked. Just then Baron Mainau stepped forward through the glass-door, not with his usual elegant nonchalant manner and bearing, but with a firm, hasty tread and flushed face.

Had a thunderbolt suddenly fallen into the room the Hofmarschall could not have

looked more astonished than he did at the sudden appearance of his tall nephew. He sank back in his chair, and exclaimed—

"Mein Gott! Raoul, how you startled me! I did not hear you come up the steps."

"Why not? Is it so very astonishing that I should join you here to receive our illustrious guest?" replied his nephew, quietly, but looking anxiously across the invalid's chair to the spot where his wife stood. She was leaning against the carved table, but one could see that she trembled, from the fluttering of the lace at her sleeves. The cruel communication, the triumphant Hofmarschall had just made about her mother, had wounded her to the quick. She felt as if she should never get over it, but she would not let him see how deeply it had pained her, and was struggling

with herself to be outwardly calm, and the dark grey eyes which met the gaze of her husband unflinchingly, were calm and dignified, though her whole frame shook with angry and indignant emotion.

Raoul went to the large table in the centre of the room, poured out a glass of water from a caraffe, and handing it to her, said—

"You look feverish, Juliane; do drink this."

But she waved it away with a proud gesture, astonished that he should offer her water to calm the excitement which a few decided energetic words to her enemy on her behalf might have prevented altogether.

"Don't distress yourself about her, Raoul," soothingly remarked the Hofmarschall, as his nephew put the glass on the table again. "It's the natural excite-

ment of a débutante, or, rather, of the débutante here in Schönwerth, for out in the world, on the walls of the art dealers, the young lady is already well known. What do you, who are a sworn foe to all blue stockings and female Raphaels, what do you say to this? Just look here at the secret talent that was hidden behind the marriage contract you and your beautiful wife signed. It's a great pity—a thousand pities—that I am obliged, by circumstances, to confiscate this painting."

The young man seized the picture and studied it carefully, while his wife's heart sank within her at the flush she saw mount to the roots of his hair. Each instant she expected to hear a contemptuous "Mere daubing" come from his lips, but instead, with his eyes fixed on the picture, he said to his uncle—

"You forget that the right to confiscate or the contrary remains, in this case, with *me*. How came the painting here?"

"Ah, yes; how did it come here?" repeated the Hofmarschall, shrugging his shoulders. "Why, through the awkwardness of your servants, to be sure. The box in which it was locked was brought to me broken open."

"I'll have that inquired into, and punish such careless, rough hands," answered Raoul, laying the painting, without a word of comment, on the table. "And this, what is it?" he asked, pointing to the packet of dried plants, by the side of which lay a manuscript.

"That," said Liane, before the Hofmarschall could speak, "that paper contains a few dried wild plants, as you can see, a few species of orchids which are rarely to

be found round Rudisdorf. Magnus sells to Russia numbers of pressed plants, and I have often helped class them. If I have sinned against the etiquette and prejudices of your family by indulging in this innocent amusement, then I deplore the unfortunate mistake," stretching out her hands to her husband with an entreating gesture. "You can see," she added, that I have no ink-spot on my finger; and you know that I have not once committed the imprudence of wearying you with my botanical knowledge. And yet, by the awkward carelessness of your subordinates, I am standing here as if unmasked, and dare not justify myself."

And with a charmingly graceful movement, she put her soft, outstretched hands to her temples, as if to stop their throbbing, as she went on, in a low, passionate tone—

"I am sorry to be obliged, against my wish, to break through our compact. Let me, Raoul, just this once, speak the truth and acknowledge the cruel, unnatural compact we made. But I could not help myself; it was not my fault, and it shall not happen again. I must say one thing more, and refute the accusation just made by your uncle, that I sent my paintings to the dealers to make a name for myself in the world. When my first painting appeared before the public, I was ill for weeks; not from fear of my right to paint —oh, no!—but from anxiety as to the risk I ran. And when the money for it was laid in my hands, I shed bitter tears; for I felt I had sold a portion of myself—my soul—and so it has been always."

During this painful scene, the priest paced up and down the further end of the

room, his hands folded behind his back, while his broad chest heaved with inward emotion.

If either the uncle or his nephew had given him even one hasty glance, they would have seen that the tall, black-frocked man was evidently struggling hard with himself not to spring on them like an enraged tiger.

As the young wife finished speaking, he ceased his hasty strides, went over to the window, opened the glass door, and shading his eyes with his hands, gazed up the narrow winding road, as if searching for some object.

"I thought so—I heard aright," he cried, eagerly, drawing a deep breath of relief, as he turned towards the Hofmarschall. "The Duchess will be here directly; I can see her carriage on the road."

"Ah! very well. We were going to be

sentimental, I fear," said the old man. "It's time to go;" and he rose from his seat, with tottering, uncertain steps, walked to the chimney-glass, put his white tie in order, and sprinkled some costly perfume on his handkerchief, waistcoat, and coat; then, with hat in hand, he left the room, dragging one leg after the other in painful uncertainty.

When he was gone, Liane folded the paper neatly together, put it in the box, and tried to fasten the lid on.

"Well, venerable sir," said Raoul to the priest, who was evidently hoping that the young man would leave the room first. "Don't you think that her highness will be disappointed if she does not receive the usual blessing from your lips on her arrival?"

The two men looked at each other; the one with a mocking, cold light in his eyes;

the other with a warm, angry glare, that he took no pains to conceal.

"I will follow you directly," continued Mainau, waving his hand towards the steps; not with the polite, respectful manner that the court chaplain was accustomed to have observed towards him, but rather as a polite command from the lord of the castle, who added, as his lip curled with a sarcastic smile—

"Don't distress yourself about me; I shall be in my place at the right moment."

The priest slightly bowed his tonsured head, and retired.

Raoul watched his retreating form, as he slowly, step by step, disappeared from view; then, suddenly turning round, the cold light in his eyes changed into a soft, warm regard. He held out both his hands to his young wife.

"Why do you offer me your hands?" she asked, keeping still as a statue, and not moving from her place. "Is it a token of your generous pardon? I don't acknowledge it, for I have done nothing wrong. I have not neglected one of my duties, either to your son or as mistress and dame d'honneur of this house, to pursue my favourite studies. The plants I gathered in my walks with Leo, while teaching him the A B C of botany; but my painting and writing I do in the early morning, hours before any one is about. If it is your wish and desire that I give it all up —give up my painting and writing—then, of course, I ought and must submit. But I ask you if it is right for the husband to throw off all the responsibility and care of his household, in order to amuse himself by travelling abroad from year's end to

year's end, while the wife is denied even the freedom to continue a favourite study to help her while away the tedious hours of loneliness his absence imposes on her. I have conceded hitherto, and shall still continue to do so; not because I am an obedient, submissive wife, but—as Leo's adopted mother. And," she added, proudly, with the colour flushing her pale cheeks, "as I have undertaken this duty, I shall go on with it; but for it I would not even now be presented to the Duchess, and I would listen to the dictates of my heart and inclination, and return home to my sister."

And, with a haughty gesture, she raised her train in one hand, took up the beautiful bouquet with the other, and swept across the room.

But in an instant her husband stood

before her on her way to the door. His face was deadly pale, his strong manly frame seemed convulsed with inward emotion. She trembled for a moment as she stood close to her—so close, that his warm breath fanned her cheek—and she felt frightened at the strange sensation which crept involuntarily through every vein.

"One moment, Juliane," he said bitterly, raising his hand. "You are wrong in supposing I wanted to crush you with my pardon. I would not dream of doing such a thing. I am not so able to control my emotions as you are, and I am much more impulsive, and speak out what I feel at the moment without reserve. And I can assure you that just now the thought of my heart was *not* to humiliate you, but to entreat *your* forgiveness. Either you can-

not read the expression on another's face—which is not consistent with your wonderful talent for painting—or the proud, deeply-wounded Trachenberg *would* not understand. I choose to believe the latter, and bow to your will which refuses all atonement. However, there's the carriage, and we must appear before the world as a friendly, amicable couple," he added, in his usual light, careless tones. "So be good enough to take my arm as we go down the steps."

## CHAPTER III.

TWO carriages were before the door. In the first, drawn up at the foot of the broad steps, sat her highness the Duchess and her sons; the second contained the lady in waiting and the young princes' tutor. The Duchess was still seated in the carriage, and had just given her hand to the Hofmarschall, congratulating him on his recovery from his late fit of the gout, when Mainau de-

scended the steps, leading his young wife on his arm. A glowing look lit up the dark eyes of his high-born guest, the words died away on her lips, and she sent a quick, questioning glance towards her lady of honour, who was respectfully standing near her; then, with a graceful movement of her hand, the Duchess finished speaking to the Hofmarschall, and, assisted by the priest, alighted from her carriage.

Who would have thought that the grey, shrinking, nun-like figure, whom the Duchess had glanced at for one moment on her wedding-day, could be the same haughty, beautiful mistress of Schönwerth who now, in rustling train and costly lace, was advancing to welcome her guest on the arm of her husband? Or who would have believed that the heavy, shimmering red hair, which had on that occasion covered her

shoulders like a veil, was the same bright, gold-tinted mass of plaits which shone on her head now like a glory?

The two ladies stood side by side. It was said by those about her court that the Duchess, in laying aside the mourning and appearing in fresh-coloured toilette, wished to renew her youth and appear as young and as handsome as ever. And so it was to-day. She was dressed in a rose-tinted silk dress, which became her dark hair and colourless complexion; her very beautiful shoulders and arms were covered with white, clear, fine lace, and round her straw hat a simple wreath of apple-blossom was twisted.

A shade crept over the face of this princely lady as she met the proud, unembarrassed expression of the dark grey eyes, and saw the young, fresh countenance, which looked

so fair and girlish in the broad light of day, but one side-glance at Baron Mainau restored the smile to her lips and brightness to her eyes.

Rumour was right, he did not care for his young wife, or he could not stand so indifferent and statue-like, and present her with only a few short ceremonious words, while Liane bowed and handed the bouquet to her guest. It was graciously accepted, and most likely a few of those amiable phrases would have been uttered, which are apt to sink deep into the heart of a subject when addressed for the first time by the lips of a sovereign, had not the glance of the Duchess suddenly fallen on the Hofmarschall, who was pale as death, and seemed as if about to fall.

"I have overtaxed my strength," he murmured, "and I am afraid I must beg

Your Highness to allow me to sit in my usual chair."

The Duchess signified her consent, and the chair was immediately brought, into which the invalid sank—a bitter moment for the man who had always prided himself on his punctilious etiquette and strict adherence to the forms and ceremonies of the Court. Slowly the heavy vehicle was rolled over the gravel into the park, while the beautiful royal guest, in her rose-coloured dress, walked on in front, leaning on the arm of Baron Mainau. Never had she appeared so happy and light-hearted as now. She talked and laughed in unconstrained friendliness, and seemed to have quite forgotten the silent man in the chair, whose brilliant conversational powers had at one time greatly attached him to the proud, reserved beauty. The little princes,

too, had always gathered round him, and claimed him as a partner in their games; but now they seemed to think it quite natural that he was old and ill, and did not speak, and was drawn about in an arm-chair on wheels. It was very bitter for the accomplished courtier to be thus neglected and condemned to a living death, when his life hitherto had been such a brilliant career.

And from one to the other the "red-headed Trachenberg" moved about, so dignified and self-possessed, that even the old courtier was obliged to acknowledge to himself, against his will, that this dowerless girl's bearing was much more noble and graceful than that of her royal guest's, against whom he felt resentful and angry.

"Excuse me, young lady," he cried, in a shrill voice, glad to have some one to find

fault with, as Liane stooped to pluck a tiny Carthusian pink growing in the grass at her feet; "excuse me, but to-day you had better not gather orchids and other rare plants for the Russian market."

Raoul's face flushed a dark, angry red, as these words fell on his ear, and he turned to give his uncle a sharp reprimand for his wilful indiscretion, when the calm, quiet manners of his wife as she placed the little bud in her waistband, silently ignoring the taunting remark, made him hesitate, and, shrugging his shoulders, he, too, thought it wisest to be silent; so he said nothing, but, returning to the side of the Duchess, continued the attentions, which his royal guest seemed only too pleased to accept.

That part of the park where the rich, ripe fruit was waiting to be plucked, lay near the tropical garden, under the shadow

of the mountain whose sheltering sides kept the exotic plants in perfect health. Here the concentrated rays of the sun compelled the banana trees to stretch forth their branches, ripened the most delicious peaches, and caused grapes and other climbing fruit to hang in most enticing clusters from palings and cordons and every other support with which the place abounded. This little nook, which was intended more to please the palate than the eye, led to the forest through a broad pathway, at the end of which was a cool, gravelled resting-place, overshadowed by a group of maple-trees. From this spot could be seen the gabled end of the so-called gamekeeper's cottage, a small, pretty brick building, with shining windows, and the usual large antlers ornamenting the roof. It was looked upon as a half-way

stage between the castle and the forester's house, which lay hidden in the forest a good couple of miles further on.

One of the huntsmen in charge of the hunting-dogs occupied this little house at the present moment, and on grand occasions this man always wore his best livery, and appeared among the visitors as Baron Mainau's gamekeeper. He also had charge of the guns.

Whenever the weather permitted, any out-of-door amusement that the guests liked to indulge in, was always arranged in this open space. It was the most charming spot in all Schönwerth; the air was cool and fresh, the bright-coloured Hindoo temple glittered through the tropical, foreign-looking trees, while in the distance one could see the pinnacles of the Castle, above the costly trees which surrounded the inner park.

On occasions like the present, the cook up at the Castle was replaced by Frau Löhn. There she stands by the snow-white tiled fireplace of the gamekeeper's cottage, making the coffee.

It was an old-established, long-standing custom for her to do this for the visitors, and it was as natural to see her broad-shouldered, stout figure, dressed in black silk, standing at the door of the cottage, as that the sand sprinkled on the gravel should be carefully and daintily raked before the arrival of the guests.

Her grave face, in a cap with tartan ribbons, never smiled; but the coffee was so delicate, and everything that came from her hands so exquisitely tempting and delicious, that her silent, morose manner, was allowed to pass unnoticed.

To-day it must have been hotter than

usual in the tiny kitchen, or the cooking had required extra attention, for the poor woman looked heated and tired, and but for her known unmoved character, one would have supposed she had been crying, her eyes seemed so swollen and heavy.

"Are you ill, Frau Löhn?" asked the Duchess, kindly.

"No, indeed, Your Highness, thanking you all the same for inquiring. I'm as fresh and well as a fish in water!" she hastened to reply, with a terrified side-glance at the Hofmarschall, as she brought a tray of finely woven little willow baskets for the princes to choose from.

The coffee-table was soon deserted, and the royal children, with little Leo, dashed into the fruit plantation, and made such an onslaught in all directions on the best and richest clusters, that the head-gardener

was in despair, and wondered if the "little Vandals" could not be restricted to only gathering that which hung nearest to their reach.

The Hofmarschall also was driven to the fruit enclosure, but he was determined, cost what it might, that his terrible helplessness should be overcome for an hour at least, so he rose from his chair, and grasping the trellis-work which led to the tropical garden, with tottering steps he succeeded in creeping along, gathering a few of the choicest grapes, which he laid in a basket, and with a great deal of difficulty and pain managed to drag himself back to the coffee-table, where the Duchess still sat. With a courtly smile he handed her the fruit, but in an instant the smile vanished from his face, and scarlet with fright he cried, "My ring! my ring is

gone!" and hastily putting the basket on the table, he looked ruefully at his forefinger, where, a few moments before, a costly emerald had flashed.

Every one except the Duchess sprang up to seek the lost jewel. The ring, "which had always fitted tightly," as the distressed man plaintively declared, had evidently fallen from the poor shrunken finger whilst he was picking the fruit, and most likely lay amongst the vine leaves, for it could not be found, though they all sought for it most willingly.

"Never mind about it now, uncle," said Raoul, going back to the place where his guest sat, and anxious to put an end to the affair for the time. "I will personally superintend a search for it by the servants later on, when we are alone."

"Later on, when it is safely stowed

away in some one's pocket!" replied the Hofmarschall, discontentedly. "To trust a servant, too! and the public path is on the other side. Your Highness will pardon me, I hope, that I am vexed at my loss," he added, apologetically, and bowing low to their royal guest, "but the ring has great value in my estimation, as a special legacy from my brother Gisbert. Only a few days ere his death he gave it to me before witnesses, writing, as he always did, the words he wished to speak: 'Never forget that you received the ring on the tenth of September.' He wished *me* specially to have it, and it has never left me till to-day. Your Highness knows that my brother and I were not always good friends, that I very much disapproved of his free mode of living, but, que voulez-vous? the heart asserts its right. I always

loved my brother, in spite of his failings, and it would grieve me to lose——"

"A stone of such very precious value," interrupted Mainau, dryly, who was sitting by the side of the Duchess.

"Well, of course there is that consideration too," replied his uncle, with affected good humour. "Who would deny it?" he added, as he jerked his chair round, so as to obtain a full view of the trellis and vine, and watch all who came and went. "The emerald is a very costly one, and the engraving is unusually perfect. Besides, there is a little mystery about it. Close to the crest is a tiny dot or point, that looks as if a bit of the stone had broken away; but under this spring appears a handsome man's head; but to me it looks more like the signature of a name, when impressed on wax or sealing wax."

"Let us drink coffee now, and then afterwards I will also help to find the ring," said the Duchess, kindly. "Such an interesting relic *must* be found."

The coffee was handed round by Frau Löhn, on a rich silver tray, and the rustling of her silk dress, and the crackling of the gravel under her heavy tread, was all that was heard during a pause in the conversation. The sudden clattering of the costly china on the tray, as if it were being knocked together, made the Hofmarschall start and look up, and following the direction of the woman's gaze, he saw Gabriel coming along the pathway.

"What does the boy want?" he asked her angrily.

"I haven't the slightest idea, your honour," was the woman's quiet reply.

With hasty strides the boy went straight

to the Hofmarschall, and with drooping eyes handed him the lost ring. The fingers which held the jewel were beautifully formed—a clean child's hand shyly and tremblingly proffered—and yet the Hofmarschall seemed to shrink from this contact as if they had stung him.

"Couldn't you hand it me on a plate?" the old man exclaimed, pointing with a frown to the table. "Has your intercourse with the castle not taught you better manners than to do a thing in that way? Where did you find the ring?"

"Down by the palings; I recognised it immediately; I have always looked at it with so much pleasure on your hand," answered the boy bashfully, as if anxious to be forgiven for bringing the ring to its rightful owner.

"Ah, really—very flattering I'm sure!" said the Hofmarschall with a sneer, as he

placed the ring on his finger. "Löhn, give the boy a piece of cake, and ask him what he wants."

The housekeeper put her hand in her pocket and drew out a key.

"That's what you want, isn't it?" she said kindly to the lad.

"Yes."

"My patient is thirsty, and I had locked up the raspberry juice."

"Stuff and nonsense—there are servants enough about. He could have asked one of them; but you know he has been allowed, and now thinks he has a right to meddle in everything that goes on; and yet only to-day the Court Chaplain ordered him, in your presence, to indulge in no pleasure of any kind. You heard him say so, and can't have forgotten it, Löhn."

Then, turning to the Duchess, he added:

"This morning it was finally arranged

that the boy enters the seminary in three weeks—it is high time he went."

Liane looked anxiously across at the housekeeper.

This then was why Frau Löhn had been so absent-minded all day—why she had not been able to distinguish the fine damask from the common table-linen—she who was such an authority in all such matters! And why she had mislaid her keys, an unheard-of piece of negligence!

Liane had long since found out that this hard taciturn woman loved the boy with all the depth of her strong reserved nature, though before others she rarely showed any feeling towards him; and the cruel words the Hofmarschall had just uttered were wrenching asunder her anxious motherly heart in sorrow for the boy, while in every one's eyes but Liane's she

stood there an unfeeling, morose, cross woman.

The Duchess looked at Gabriel through her eyeglass, as she said to the Court Chaplain—

"So you think of making a missionary of him?" adding, as she shook her head—"In my opinion the boy is not a bit fitted for that vocation."

This remark was like an electric shock to Liane; for the first time she heard some one express an opinion contrary to the will and wish of the priest and the Hofmarschall, and that, too, from the lips of one who had it in her power to alter a human being's destiny by simply pronouncing a few words.

The Hofmarschall sat still in his place, horrified that even a royal lady had ventured to express such an opinion, while Liane

shuddered as the thought crossed her that supposing she herself were to defend the boy now at this propitious moment, what would the result be? She knew that all who sat round the table were more or less prejudiced against the lad, or, at least, totally indifferent as to his future; her husband was eyeing him now as if he would willingly crush such a worm under his feet; and glancing at Gabriel, who was still standing there like an accused at the bar, the young wife summed up all her courage, and listening to the promptings of her womanly heart, said, as she looked straight at the beautiful Duchess, though her voice trembled slightly—

"Your Highness, Gabriel has one decided vocation, and that is painting—he ought to be an artist."

Each and all gazed wonderingly at the

young Baroness as she spoke; it was the first time she had voluntarily opened her lips since they had been in the garden, and their surprise kept them silent as she went on—

"Without any guide or help whatever, he has succeeded with his pencil to a degree of perfection that astonishes me. I have seen him draw things for little Leo which the academy itself would accept as proof of his talent. The boy has a rare power of design, and a genuine love of art, which, unformed and crushed down as it is, denotes his inborn genius. You are right, Your Highness, in saying he is not fitted for a missionary, for that requires an inward impulse and spiritual calling for the office, which he does not possess, and a concentration of thought which excludes all the ideal; and it would be cruel to the

boy, and a terrible loss to art, to compel him to become what he has no inclination for."

The Duchess regarded her hostess coldly, as she replied haughtily—

"You have quite misunderstood my remark, Baroness von Mainau. I referred to the physical unfitness of the boy, to his delicate weakly appearance, and not to his natural talents. And, as to his tastes and inclinations, *they must* be put aside! I am really sorry that there exists a *woman* who in her heart does not acknowledge that every talent and desire ought to yield before this holy calling. We leave it to rebellious men to think that their knowledge, which is often founded on false learning, can usurp the authority of the consecrated; it is very sad that such is the case, and it behoves us women to be

doubly watchful, to form a phalanx against this onward spirit, keeping a firm hold on our faith, and never to doubt for one moment, but always remain true, and believe everything."

"But Your Highness makes woman's task a very easy one; she is by nature inclined to believe, and it is so easy for her to follow that road, even when it unfortunately leads to superstition, and faith in the power and might of Satan."

Stools and chairs were noisily pushed from the table as Liane ceased speaking, and drew quietly back. Her husband sat near her with his arm leaning carelessly on the cloth poising a coffee-spoon on the tip of one of his fingers; but with his head so turned, that from under his drawn eyebrows he could watch the sweet blushing face, whose owner seemed to have forgotten

every one but the royal lady to whom she was speaking. But as the last words left her lips, she accidentally looked round on his side, and the expression which gazed from her eyes as she met his, was as cold and distant as if she did not know him. His cheeks grew dark red, and flinging the spoon down, he bit his lips.

"What do you say to that, Baron Mainau?" asked the Duchess, smiling at his discomposure, and speaking in a flattering silvery voice. "That concerns you, you know."

His lips curled sarcastically, as he replied in a careless tone—

"Your Highness knows very well that women who believe in witchcraft and ghosts are very attractive to us. A woman is always charming in her helplessness and fear; we clasp her, as we would a child,

protectingly in our arms, and then comes—love." His eyes clouded, and he looked searchingly at his wife as he added, "But a Pallas Athenè freezes us with her breath like the ice-mountain maiden, and we are glad to turn our backs on her."

Could that beautiful face, with the charming, smiling expression, and the look of triumph beaming in her eyes, belong to the woman who glared for a moment at the pale bride on her wedding-day, and then madly rode onwards like the angel of death?

"And you?" she said, nodding to the priest, who with folded arms sat opposite her, apparently in deep thought; "and you," she added, as if anxious to gather every one's opinion against the young wife, who had dared to be independent in thought; "have you no weapons against

antichrist in the shape of soft, tender woman ?"

"Your Highness will kindly remember that such discussions at the coffee-table are not to my liking," answered the Court Chaplain, severely and stiffly, in an instant assuming the manner of the dreaded confessor, who had power over the soul of this high-born dame, and held it under his foot. "Let us leave all that alone, and rest satisfied that Baroness von Mainau has no wish to deny the existence of a spiritual world."

He wished by this remark to come to her aid, to help her out of the difficulty she had unwittingly brought herself into, and if she had bowed her head in acquiescence, the struggle would have ended, but in doing so she would have beckoned her finger to him for help, and for the second

time that day, waving aside his outstretched hand, Liane said in a trembling voice—

"But I do deny the existence of a spiritual world in your sense of the word. I cannot believe in those wonderful heavenly visions spoken of by the Church. If the Almighty sent us messengers from the spiritual world, they must have some form, and leave a trace behind them. Though our good angel is represented with a beautiful face, and the evil genius with a hideous one, it is still a *human* countenance; the wings the seraphs wear, and the mark of the devil, are each borrowed from the animal world. Heaven and hell are always made to appear with the elements that are natural to our earth, simply because we cannot imagine any other form in which to give an idea of them; and it is only in personal comprehension of the tone,

picture, or word that the power of imagination lies hidden."

For a few moments a dead silence followed these bold words; the lady of honour moved her chair an inch further away, and the royal guest sat still as marble, while her glittering eyes anxiously and earnestly gazed first at Baron Mainau and then at his young wife. It is true, that just now he had avowedly expressed a dislike to an independent, self-reliant woman, but there, by his side, sat certainly no harnessed Pallas Athenè, but a beautiful maidenly apparition, with heaving bosom and glowing cheek and flashing eyes, who, in a low, sweet voice, spoke of her firm inward convictions, and expressed an opinion founded on deep, earnest thought. The Duchess could not see the expression on his face, for he had slightly turned his head away

from her, but his careless, nonchalant manner was so evident, that she expected him at each word to shrug his shoulders and good-humouredly remark, "Let her talk; how can it matter to me?"

"But you take your standing-point so far from the orthodox belief, my dear lady, that I will not enter into any discussion on the subject just now, although I am perfectly certain that I should be victorious in the question," answered the priest, breaking the silence with his deep, sonorous voice, as if obliged to speak in spite of himself. "I will, however, make you one concession, and leaving aside all scriptural points of view, remind you of what one of the greatest poets puts into the mouth of his doubting hero: 'There are more things between heaven and earth than you in your philosophy dream of.'"

"That may be; but I understand by that the mysterious powers or forces of nature. Most of those around us regard nature as something self-evident, about which there is no need to think, because they can see, hear, and comprehend her, not thinking that that very seeing, hearing, and comprehending is the wonder in itself, and then people attribute to the wise Creator arbitrary encroachments on His own eternal laws, in order to satisfy some petty human interest. Nay, more; the Church goes still further, and permits subordinate spirits to break through this perfect arrangement merely to over-awe and convince a shepherdess, or some other lonely soul, of God's real existence, and then calls that a 'miracle.' How pitiful and theatrical all this appears compared with God's real eternal ruling and govern-

ing, for a whole firmament of angels' heads sinks into insignificance before the Creator's wonderful power, which can bring forth from the ground a small variegated flower-bud. It is certain that God does not allow Himself to be mocked, nor does He allow Himself to be mocked in that which is His own self—that is, nature—as is proved by the way He allows nature to revenge herself when her laws and rules are infringed."

The Court Chaplain gazed at Liane as she ceased speaking with the same yearning, sorrowful look that had been on his face when an hour or two before he had warningly cried out to her, "You are unwise to speak so, madame."

"And have you forgotten the founder of *your* Church, madame?" he replied. "Martin Luther, who gave to the wicked

God-opposing principle a throne and a power he had never before had on earth ?"

"And in the present day he would not only have hurled his inkstand, but also his powerful pen, against this hideous abortion of human imagination."

"That's enough, that's enough," cried the Hofmarschall, stretching out his hand towards the young wife to implore her silence. "Your Highness will be good enough to pardon such irreligious remarks made at *my* table," he added, turning uneasily to the Duchess. "The young lady, in the retirement of Rudisdorf Castle, has indulged in studies which, by their result, prove their origin, that is, learning on bread and water."

The Duchess rose quietly from her chair ; she could not sit still, for, as princess and

guest, she had no desire to assist at a family discussion.

"Shall we join the children and pick fruit?" she said sweetly and friendlily, as if she had not heard the last remark; and putting her hat on her head, and taking up her parasol, she added to her sons' tutor—"I wonder where the princes are? I can neither see nor hear them, Herr Werther."

The priest walked by her side as, taking Baron von Mainau's arm, the royal lady slowly wended her way to the fruit enclosure, followed by her lady of honour and the tutor, thus leaving Liane like an outlaw standing alone under the maple trees. Not even her husband cast her a look, as he turned his back on quitting the table.

"Don't you perceive anything, my dear?

You have broken your neck to-day," remarked the spiteful Hofmarschall, as he, too, left her, and was driven away in his rolling chair.

## CHAPTER IV.

DIANE turned silently away, and entered a little pathway which led into the forest, past the game-keeper's cottage. Through the window of the kitchen she could see Frau Löhn standing by the stove, and not far off Gabriel's pale face rested against a dark corner of the wall. Here he had fled for refuge when the Hofmarschall had angrily waved to him to be off during the foregoing discussion.

It was a grand mistake, she felt, that she had spoken in the boy's cause; she had only aggravated the animosity against him, and besides, done him no good—nay, even harm; she had had "her own neck broken," as the Hofmarschall had just triumphantly announced, and she knew that, patient long-bearing "second wife" as she was, she had shaken to the foundation the strength of her own position, and that now it was only a matter of time when she returned to the home of her girlhood. At this thought she breathed a sigh of relief as if a weight had been lifted from her heart; for now she was sure that by no effort of hers a separation would be sought for on her husband's side, and the chain she had so mistakenly fastened round her neck would be snapped by another hand than her own. She felt glad she had had

the courage to speak out her opinions at the coffee-table; was not each word a bitter protest against the unnatural programme her husband had imposed on her to be carried into daily use? In *her* hands he could not possibly trust *now* the peace of the household, and the care and instruction of his heir while he was travelling in the East; naturally, the responsibility would henceforth devolve upon the Hofmarschall, who would not hesitate to accept it; nay, more, would, in all probability, insist that it should be placed in his hands.

That scene at the coffee-table had determined her fate—and she would—be free! There, opposite to her, loomed the grey turrets of the castle where she had suffered so bitterly, been so cruelly humiliated; a shining light glimmered faintly over the

building, and henceforth she determined to regard her sojourn within its walls as a wretched dream happily interrupted, and to try and forget that she had ever even had it. Back to Magnus and Ulrike!—to live with them again in the shabby, dear old drawing-room, would indeed be a paradise! Even her mother's bad temper and fits of anger she would willingly bear, to feel herself once again under the shadow of her sister's love. She was not returning to her mother, but to her brother. He had announced so distinctly that the castle was his, and should always be a home for his sisters. Dear old Magnus! And the tears fell from her eyes in happy foretaste of the joy of the reunion.

Just at this moment she heard behind her the barking and yelping of the hounds let loose from the stables. She turned her

head, and saw her husband hurrying along, keeping the delighted dogs at bay by holding up his hand to threaten them each time they sprang up to caress him. How proudly he carried his head, and what a splendid type of manly strength and beauty he appeared! and yet what a moral coward he must be, she thought, for he derided learning and knowledge, and was always silent when he ought to have defended his wife, and that solely because he did not care for her. And she passed on as if she had not seen him, with bitter contempt for him in her heart. But in a moment he was by her side.

"What! tears, Juliane? Then you can cry?" he said, with just a tinge of malice in his tone, as he looked at her from under his still frowning eyes.

Angrily she dashed her pocket-handkerchief over her face as he went on—

"You need not be vexed. No one knows better than I do that they don't proceed from a soft heart. There are such things as tears of bitterness, and wounded pride, and——"

"And deep repentance," she broke in.

"Ah! you regret your courage of half an hour ago? What a pity! And I thought all you said came from the deepest conviction, and that, if necessary, you would have gone to the stake for your opinions. So you repent? Shall I send the Court Chaplain to you? He came to your help just now most gallantly, and the Duchess is furious with him for doing so. Shall I send him to you, Juliane? A more amiable confessor does not exist in the world; I know it from Valerie."

"I ought to allow you," she answered, pained at his mocking tone, "if only to

take lessons in witchcraft, and believe in ghosts, so that I——"

She hesitated, and, blushing vividly, made a retreating gesture, as if to retire.

"That you may be loved, as I explained at the table," he added for her.

"No, no; not *here*—not *here*," she cried, bitterly, stretching out her arms towards the castle behind the trees. Then more quietly she went on. "I repent speaking as I did, because, by so doing, I have done harm to Gabriel and injured his future; otherwise, what I have said I will adhere to word for word, even if I am sent away on that account. And still further, your taunting, mocking . . . . . And I repent, too——"

"Let me speak, Juliane. I don't like to hear such things from a woman's mouth," he interrupted, earnestly, and

with the sudden paling of his cheeks that had once before that day so deeply troubled her. "You repent having blindly, unknowingly, and innocently allowed yourself to be married; and you reproach me, the man of the world, who must have been well aware of what he was doing, with all the sorrow you have?"

"Yes, yes."

"And suppose he repents too?"

"Ah! then you will let me go? You insist upon it? To-day, even?" she asked, holding her breath, and her eyes flashing, as she pressed both hands in warm entreaty on her bosom.

"That was not what I meant, Juliane," he answered, considerably troubled at this outbreak of entreaty. "You have mistaken me entirely," he added, with emphasis, with a nervous tremor on his lips. "But

let us leave the subject now; this is neither the time nor the place for an explanation."

"Explanation!" she repeated, mechanically, as her arms fell to her side. "That is not necessary. Why this delay?" she cried. "God knows I have lost all the desire, all the earnest will I had to perform honourably and faithfully the duties in my new life. I have been exasperated and embittered, and now the one longing of my soul is to return to Rudisdorf. Here there is no peace! For a short while I endured it—but for a life-time, impossible! impossible! An explanation!"—she laughed aloud—"a month ago I would have sought it willingly—would have done all in my power to follow your slightest wish and do my duty; but now, after what has happened—no, no! I give up, and do no more!"

"But not I, Juliane!" he cried, firmly, the veins in his forehead swelling with emotion.

For a moment she stood dumb and irresolute, for she was frightened.

"But would it not be best for both if the rupture were made at once? I think I understand why you really wish me to remain in your house; and at a trying hour like this it is a great satisfaction to me," she said, softly. "You must have noticed how my heart has wound round your child. Raoul, let me take the boy with me to Rudisdorf. I swear to you that I will love and care for him as the apple of my eye! I know that Magnus and Ulrike will welcome him kindly; and think what he would learn from two such gifted beings! And you can travel for years, if you like, without a care on your

shoulders. Raoul, let me take Leo with me!" And she took his hand, and looked up in his face imploringly.

But he snatched it violently away from her as he cried,

"Well, really! I should like to hear every one laugh at such an idea—all—all!" and he threw back his head and gazed into the blue heavens, as if he saw those whom he meant flying above. "Do you know how excessive vanity looks, Juliane? I will tell you one day, but not now, not for a long time; when——"

His young wife suddenly drew back, and silently bowing, retreated under the maple trees, while her husband, turning his head to see the cause of her retreat, was rather taken aback by discovering that his royal guest, accompanied by her lady of honour, was advancing towards him.

It was a specially painful moment for Liane! The inquisitive, flashing eyes of the Duchess had seen the vehement, angry manner in which her husband had drawn his hand from her grasp, and with burning cheeks she stepped towards her guest, feeling more and more confused as she noticed the mocking, amused smile which played round the lips of the lady attendant. Ah! the Duchess had interrupted a piquant scene by her sudden and unexpected appearance.

The husband had no doubt been reproving his wife for her want of tact at the coffee-table, and to her entreaty for forgiveness he had replied by that rough act —an act which proved his dislike and aversion for her; and so pondering, the royal lady watched the advancing figure of the "red-headed Trachenberg," who just

then somewhat resembled "Marguerite," though she had no flower in her hand, and asked herself why she should not confess that this slandered second wife was full of grace and beauty? But the Faust in this case did not *love* his Marguerite, he treated her too roughly, because—well—yes—because he could not unbind himself from this golden-headed maiden as easily as he, in his thirst for revenge, had bound her to him.

"Why do you isolate yourself in this way, my dear Baroness?" said the Duchess kindly to the young wife.

She had a basket of fruit in her hand, and if she had held it a little higher in the air, one would have imagined she was posing to represent the famous picture of Titian's daughter, so artistic was her attitude, as she waited for her hostess to advance.

"Accept my thanks for your lovely flowers. I plucked it myself," she said, handing an exquisite peach to Liane.

The lady in waiting cast a swift, surprised glance at her royal mistress, for she was not accustomed to hear the proud Duchess thus graciously offer her thanks for any favour received; but she was young, and did not yet know that when a passionate loving woman is sure she has gained a victory over another, she can afford to be generous, and intensely enjoys being gracious to the vanquished one.

Besides, the beautiful hand that was put forth to accept the fruit, was it not the very same which five minutes ago she had seen Baron Mainau push from him in aversion? and with a sweet smile, she added,

"I must scold you a little, dear young

madame, and ask why you have shunned us till to-day. I shall hope to see you at the earliest opportunity at the palace."

Involuntarily Liane glanced at her husband, who was standing near; his nostrils were moving slightly, as if he were suppressing an ironical smile, and his whole manner betokened no personal interest in the question, or its probable answer.

"Your Highness must pardon me if I do not fulfil your commands," she replied, firmly. "My husband starts on his journey in a few days, and permits me to return to Rudisdorf."

She had said it, and as calmly as possible under the circumstances, and the solution to her difficulty was pronounced in the most peaceful manner she could have desired.

"What! Really, Baron Mainau, am I

to—to believe that?" cried the Duchess, catching her breath, and forgetting herself so completely, that her companion coughed to hide her embarrassment.

"Why not, madame?" he answered, shrugging his shoulders good-humouredly. "Rudisdorf is a very healthy place, and so quiet for those who like to be alone, and I am such a restless, wandering bird of passage myself, that I have no desire to forbid another to go back to his nest if he likes. Take care, Juliane, he will tear your pretty dress!" he cried, as Leo's favourite hound came bounding round the young wife in joy at being let loose. "The stupid brute seems to have a strong affection for you. What is to be done with him, Juliane? Leo won't part with him, I know!"

Liane bit her lip. This was the answer

to her prayer, and given in such a cold, heartless manner too !

The look which accompanied the words only the lady in waiting observed, and she described it later to the Duchess as a "world of aversion," which, like a spark, flew over the "red-headed second wife."

## CHAPTER V.

IN the meantime the little princes, with Leo, were wandering through the park. They soon tired of plucking ripe and unripe fruit, and strewing the paths with half-eaten peaches and grapes.

The coffee-table had no attraction for them, now Frau Löhn, with her cups and glasses of milk, had disappeared into the kitchen; but on the other side, the noise

and chatter proceeding from the monkey portion of the Indian garden seemed to attract them to a degree beyond resistance.

The royal lads knew that that part of the grounds they were forbidden to enter, without some grown-up person to escort them, on account of the danger of the lake, which was very deep; but the prohibition was disregarded; under the maple trees "they were all talking so fast." Mamma and Herr Werther were not likely to look after them just now, and the lady of honour had no right to interfere, as the hereditary prince informed his playmate, Leo, in strict confidence.

First they visited the bull, who had a corner to himself on the borders of the lake, and was quiet and peaceful enough. Then the swans on the water were quickly

frightened into their houses by the stones thrown at them for fun; and the gold and brilliant pheasants rose up in confusion at the unwonted noise of the children's tramping feet.

"Leo, does the witch still live there?" asked the young prince, pointing to the Indian house.

Leo nodded.

"If I only dared," he said, switching his cane through the air, "make her come out, or drive her in the water!"

"You stupid; don't you know that witches can't do that. They only ride through the air; they are obliged to, if it's for a hundred years; the shepherd told me, who knows it quite well."

The young hereditary prince stared with his mouth wide open at this wonderful news, but he was not to be moved from his wish.

"If we only had some gunpowder," he said, "we could drive her into the air. Captain von Horst explained yesterday how to do it. First one puts a match——"

"There's powder in the gamekeeper's cottage," cried Leo, impulsively. "Yes, the witch shall be roused in the air; that will be fun."

The boys darted back through the plantation, met the tutor on the road, and passed by the palings where the Duchess was picking fruit; but they were cunning enough not to say a word of their intention—it was to be a surprise—and noiselessly they crept into the cottage.

The key was in the door of the press where hung the guns; behind, in a corner, suspended from a nail, was an old but richly embossed powder-horn, which the eldest of the princes managed to unhook

from its place by clambering on a chair to reach it. It was full. The huntsman happened not to be there; and the little fellow did not know what to do without lucifers. Presently he espied on a side-table a tiny end of wax-taper, and in a cup near a few matches.

"That's right," he said, putting the property he had collected in his pockets.

Just then the man in charge of the cottage returned, and in an instant took in the whole state of affairs. He was a young fellow with a rather forbidding countenance, and no favourite with Master Leo.

"You go away," screamed the boy in a harsh tone, in which, however, fear for the safety of the powder-horn mingled.

"What! out of my own room?" answered the man, the blood mounting to his

brown cheeks. Without a word more he went straight to the prince, who had retreated to a corner, holding the precious horn behind his back, and seized the lad's shoulder without any ceremony; but in an instant he was assailed on all sides. His Highness the prince kicked out his feet, his brother dragged him back by his coat, and Leo sprang on him with his cane in the air.

"Wait a second, and I'll do as grandpapa did," cried the angry child. "You know he struck you on the face with his riding-whip."

The huntsman turned white to the lips, and raised his fist as if to strike the unfeeling boy to the ground.

"All of a brood," he muttered, dropping his hand down again without touching the boy.

"Do as you like; for my part I don't care. It would serve you right if a match were placed under you all!"

He went out and slammed the door after him. The boys waited in breathless fear till his footsteps died away behind the kitchen, and then they, too, one by one, left the room.

A few moments later Frau Löhn came quickly out of the cottage, held her hand over her eyes, and looked anxiously around, then ran as fast as her legs would carry her to the group under the maple trees.

"What's the matter, Löhn?" asked Baron Mainau, as the excited woman drew near.

"In the Indian garden—the boys—I saw the little Baron running there," she replied, as fast as she could; "and, God have mercy on us, they have got with them

gunpowder and matches! So the huntsman says."

The Duchess uttered a loud scream and clung to Raoul's arm, who, without a word, led her into the pathway which turned towards the Vale of Cashmere. Liane and the other lady followed, but the tutor, who was carelessly leaning against the palings, suddenly rushed past the Duchess without any ceremony, as fast as his long legs would carry him.

They only arrived in time; a moment later and they would have been too late. Just under the verandah of the Indian house, in between the shining reed matting, the boys had sprinkled a quantity of gunpowder, in the centre of which was burning the tiny end of the wax-taper. The lightest movement, the smallest spark, and the mischief would have been done; for the

taper was very unsteady in its place. There was not powder enough to fulfil the boys' wish and blow the witch's house in the air; the danger lay in the ignorance of the children, who, in their anxiety and impatience to see their "mine" spring, were leaning over the powder breathlessly awaiting the moment when the flame would burn down and set light to the powder.

Leo was stooping between the two princes, and was the first to notice the arrival of the grown-up people.

"Quietly, papa," he cried, half whisperingly, hardly taking his eyes from the spot, "we are going to blow the witch in the air."

With one bound his father reached the verandah, and, without disturbing the matting in the least degree, leant over the

boy and put out the tiny flame with his fingers. When he turned round again his face was white as death, and with an hysterical sigh the Duchess sank into the arms of her attendant. But a minute later she rose and said severely :—

"Herr Werther, the princes are to go to bed without supper to-night, and to-morrow they are to be punished for their disobedience by not riding out."

While she spoke Baron Mainau had taken his little son by the shoulders and severely shook him.

But Liane stepped forward, and laying her arm on the weeping child, said gently :—

"Would you punish the child, Raoul, for the sins of that silly governess? or rather you ought to do it less to him than you would hold the people responsible for

the cruelty which arises from a systematic and deep-rooted error."

She laid her hand over the beautiful eyes which his father's wonderful presence of mind had saved from total blindness.

The face of the Duchess assumed that pale, fixed, waxen look which Liane had remarked when [she first saw her in the forest; she seemed to forget the presence of her lady companion, the tutor of her boys, even the presence of Raoul himself, who, his fright over, stood close by with a mocking smile curling his lips. She only saw the sweet, loving, young girl pressing the child to her bosom; *his* child—his living likeness, whom this neglected second wife was quietly shielding by right of her position as his adopted mother—it was not to be borne — raging, degrading jealousy took possession of her like a mad woman.

She had control enough over herself not to give way to her inclination and drag the child out of her arms; but she could not control her tongue, and forgetting her dignity in her hatred said :—

"Pardon me, my dear, but your ideas are so peculiar that they seem as unfitted for my faithful much-loved Schönwerth, as the tri-coloured flag would be if hung out over those grand old turrets," and she pointed to the castle. "I cannot help it, and you must not be vexed with me for saying, that when you speak you always put me in mind of a teacher, or a simple mayor's daughter, or even of a country miller, with your strange views. Do you care so little for the honour of bearing the illustrious name of Mainau ?"

"Only a short while ago, madame, I was the *Countess Trachenberg*," replied the

young wife, quietly emphasizing her old aristocratic family name. "We are poor now, and the last scion of our name is encumbered with debt; but pride in my long line of ancestry, unstained in honour and fame, is my inheritance, and I know that I shall never cast a shadow on them by having a heart to feel and think for others, and on that score the Mainaus need not concern themselves."

At this unexpected reply, the Duchess drew in her under lip and pressed her pearl-white teeth together, and by the movement of her dress one could observe how impatiently she stamped her small foot on the gravel, and those who knew her best were aware that it was a sign of excessive and unforgiving displeasure.

While his wife was giving this proud reply, Raoul had turned his back, as if

life long carry the stain of having struck a lady, and henceforth retire from the ranks of knighthood." And with cutting irony and sharpness, he added haughtily, "But there is one thing I ought to remind you of, Sir Priest—what will the implacable order to which you belong have to say to your unusual show of sympathy? It is the hand of a heretic—pardon me, Juliane—the hand of a heretic which you have just—pitied."

But the Court Chaplain was master of himself now, and he answered readily, but coldly—

"You speak against your better knowledge, Herr Baron, in giving us credit for such harshness. On the contrary, we are taught never to forget that even wanderers from the fold belong to us by baptism——"

"I am afraid that such large-heartedness would not be acceptable to some of Luther's followers," interrupted Mainau with a short laugh, and not noticing his wife's dissenting gesture, as he sauntered up to the Duchess, who was coming towards them again.

"What terrible things Your Highness has to encounter here in Schönwerth," he said, as he joined his royal guest, and easily and indifferently glided into the usual court jargon.

The high-born lady looked at him doubtfully, at his cold expressionless face, at his graceful nonchalant figure. In spite of the enmity and hatred she had in her heart for the second wife, she could not resist a movement of pity for her pale suffering face; but he seemed unmoved, had not even uttered one word of sorrow

or repentance for the unintentional blow. Surely these two would never to all eternity care for each other.

"Mamma, how is your hand?" cried little Leo, affectionately clinging to Liane's arm as he drew aside her dress, and exposed the swollen hand, lacerated with the effect of the blow, and hanging nervously by her side. "Papa, papa, I never struck Gabriel as badly as that!"

Unmerited as the reproach was, coming as it did from the mouth of the child, it stung his father deeply.

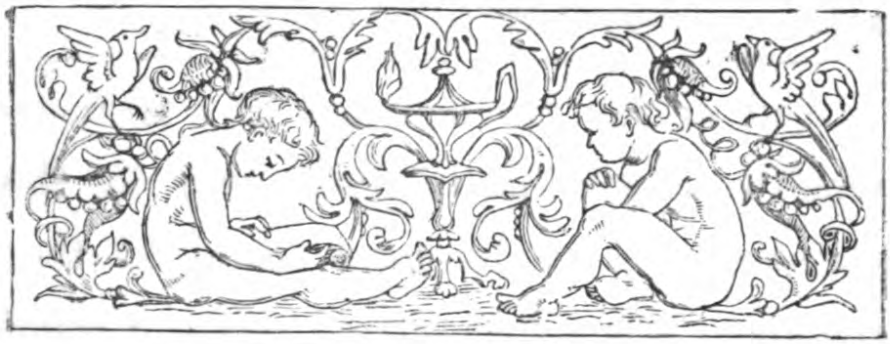
Liane saw it, and tried to remove the sad impression the boy's words had produced. She assured her husband it was nothing, as he drew near with a lowering brow, and protested against the advice of the Duchess to go home and send for a physician, saying that a little cold fresh

water from the spring would soon cool the burning skin, if she might be allowed to retire for half an hour to the fountain behind the Indian house.

"That's your reward for playing such a comedy, my dear madam," remarked the Hofmarschall, impertinently, as the tutor offered to push his chair for him back to the castle. "You may have seen on the stage a lady throw herself between two men in the act of fighting a duel. That's all very well. But the unasked service of shielding an insolent peasant with your aristocratic hands—fi donc—I am ashamed of you! The Princess von Thurgan, your grandmother, of whom you are so proud, must have turned in her grave!" he growled, as Liane quietly and silently passed him by on her road to the fountain.

Raoul bit his lip and said nothing; the tutor gave the chair a sudden push, and all left the place without a word more.

The priest had vanished some minutes before.



## CHAPTER VI.

WHEN all had disappeared, the Vale of Cashmere lay again wrapt in dreamy, hazy stillness in the hot summer afternoon. There, close by where the stone swan dipped his long neck, and poured a stream of water from his bill into the glittering basin below, might be heard the low, monotonous rustling of a metallic pheasant, as he slowly passed over the gravel pathway, his glittering plumage shining in the sun.

. And as the last sound of the Hofmarschall's wheeled-chair died away in the distance, one might have imagined that the angry scene just related was the effect of an ugly picture from a magic lantern, which for a moment had cast its shadow over the bamboo-roofed house, so peaceful and still seemed the whole place around. But on the path there still lay the stem which had wounded the delicate hand, and under the verandah the forgotten powder-horn, which a handsome peacock pecked at wonderingly.

On the surface of the cool water in the basin floated quantities of white rose-leaves. Liane sat by its side, and dipped her swollen, painful hand in the refreshing stream, and was surprised to see how red and inflamed it looked when the fluttering leaves glided around it.

"It would be better to have a compress on your hand, dear madam," said Frau Löhn, as she drew near her mistress, with some linen strips on her arm.

She made no exclamation at the sight of the lacerated flesh, nor folded her hands in despair. That was not her habit; but, hard unfeeling woman as she generally appeared, she had a heart capable of great sympathy for those in suffering, as Liane had found out long ago; and her strong hands trembled now with emotion as she quietly dipped a piece of linen in the basin, and with a glance at the inflamed mark, said gruffly—

"That's the fashion here in Schönwerth —a blow on the hand, that one would think must break every bone, or a furious grip on a poor little throat."

Liane looked up in the woman's face

with eyes full of astonishment; but Frau Löhn wrung the linen out, scattering the drops over the gravel ere she went on, pointing over her shoulder to the bamboo-house—

"She lying there could relate a deal. I always say that this castle is unfortunate ground for ladies"—she spoke in the same tone as the Court Chaplain might have used—"and when you arrived, madam, so refined and so gentle, it made my heart ache for you."

She gave a quick, searching glance at the bushes and the road; but there was no sign of living being near to hear her words—only a little monkey twisted himself along the bamboos, and sprang on the roof of the house.

Frau Löhn tenderly took the wounded hand out of the water, laid the compress

gently over the inflamed part, and sighing, she went on, speaking as if to herself—

"They all ran about in confusion up at the castle—I mean thirteen years ago—saying that outside the red room, where the master was lying ill, they found the one who lived in the Indian-house, lying dead, struck by a fit of apoplexy. Ah, yes! Such young, fair, tender things don't have apoplexy, do they, dear madam?

"And then she was brought here; and the man who carried her, hung her over his shoulder, as if she had been a lamb just slaughtered. He thought she was dead, and he laid her down there on the bed where she now lies since thirteen years. I followed him. I am certainly a hard woman—no, dear lady, I will tell the truth *now*—I am not hard. I have a stupid,

soft heart in reality; and I felt as if a knife had cut me through when the poor young thing opened her eyes as I bent over her, and shuddered with fear, imagining she was to be murdered again."

Liane uttered a cry of horror.

The woman hastily walked away, examined the garden in all directions, then came quietly back, and continued, in a low whisper—

"When A has been said, B may as well follow; and now I have opened my lips and let my heart speak, I may as well go on. The doctor—who, in plain German, I call a wretch—thought the dark blue marks on the snow-white throat arose from stagnation of the blood! Yes, stagnation of the blood if you like, but caused by ten fingers grasping it tight—ten fingers, I tell you, madam!"

"But who did it?" asked Liane, with bated breath.

Any one else would most likely have had the courage to stifle the desire to hear the miserable secret, so as not to be burdened with the weight of the knowledge; but this grave woman, who for thirteen long years had willingly and uncomplainingly worn the mask of harshness and hard-heartedness, touched her, and she was glad to help her tear away the veil of silence in which she had wrapped her soul for so long a period.

"Who did it?" repeated the woman, with a dark look on her face. "Who did it? The hands which are so fond of raising his riding-whip—the fingers with the cramped, bent tips, as if they could never grasp and clutch enough. He did it, dear

lady; and he is a devil!" she hissed from between her clenched teeth.

"He must have bitterly hated her," said Liane, as if unwilling to speak, yet obliged to say something.

"Hated!" and the woman laughed a bitter, mocking laugh. "Hated! Is it hate a man feels for a woman when he casts himself on the ground, and begs and entreats for pity. Ah! who would imagine, to see that poor, yellow, dried-up skeleton, that he once flew, as if possessed by a fury, after that poor lady lying in there! I was standing on the verandah there, and I could see through the window how he was on his knees before her. She pushed him away with her hands, and rushed out of the house, past me, into the night air. He was then nimble enough on his legs, and he tore after her all through the gar-

den; but she was light and fleet as a snow-flake, and had returned to the house, turned the key in the glass door, and was stooping over the cradle where baby Gabriel was sleeping, before he had time to follow her. In my dark corner, I at first feared, and then laughed, as, not three steps from me, he knocked with his knuckles against the door, over and over again. But it was of no use; he had to go away."

Liane conjured up the whole scene, as the woman so graphically described it. She could see with her mind's eye the young mother, with flying footsteps, running round the lake, fear and horror in her beautiful, backward-turned face; while behind her followed the man—the man of form and ceremony, the accomplished courtier, with his cold features, inflamed

with passion and anger. Was such a thing really possible ?

Involuntarily she rose, and moved towards the house to peep in ; but behind the windows and doors hung dark, stiff matting, and she could see nothing.

"You are sorry for her, are you not, madame ?" said the woman, noticing the movement and divining its cause. "The last two days she is very still. She sleeps now ; or, to speak plainly, it is the sleep of death creeping near. A few weeks more, and all will be over !"

"But was no one there to shield and take care of her ?" asked Liane, her eyes moist with feeling.

"Who could ? He who brought her here from beyond the seas—the master—had been lying for months in the red room. The blinds were drawn down and no win-

dow was opened, and at times, when fear came over him, he would have the shutters closed, and papers stuck in the keyhole, that the devil might not enter his room. He was always a sensible man when well, but with weakness and illness he grew melancholy, and saw everything on its dark side; and to make things worse, there were two who took precious good care he should not be better—he with the shaven head, and another who has been sent away since. And they told him he was ill as a punishment for building the Hindoo temple in the Indian garden, and for loving with all his heart the "street dancer;" and, poor man! he believed it. Ah! good God! what can't a man be made to believe when his head and reason are dark! And when he asked after the one he loved best on earth, they told him she was unfaithful,

and had given herself to another. It's fearful to think of the lies that were told, and how he was deceived! And all in the castle played into the priest's hands, even my poor husband—God forgive him! He was valet to the poor master, and would have lost place and bread if he had only grumbled once."

It must have cost the poor woman a hard struggle to overcome her habit of long-endured silence, for she passed her hand over her eyes to wipe away the tears that, for the first time, Liane saw dropping from her eyes.

"And then it was"—she went on in a thick voice, looking away from her mistress—"then it was that I assumed a hardened face, and spoke roughly to everyone, and said the lady in the Indian house was a thorn in my side, and her

child the right. . . . And so it was that I had to take the boy to be baptized, and they compelled me to take care of the sick mother. Now, dear lady, don't you think I have played my part well? It comes quite natural now, when I am up at the castle, to speak sharply to Gabriel and to order him about. And yet he is my darling—my treasure—the apple of my eye! and I would give every drop of my blood for his sake! Haven't I cared for him and nursed him from the first breath he drew, and wept tears enough over the unfortunate child, who always looks at me so kindly and gently, however hard I am obliged to be to him." And she fairly broke down and sobbed bitterly, as she hid her face in her apron.

"And he is, of course, one of the family," she added after a while, controlling her

sobs and letting her apron fall. "He is a Mainau, as truly and surely as that the sun shines above us. And although the late master never saw him with his eyes, Gabriel is and always will be his own child."

"You ought to have told all this to the young Baron, my husband, at the time," said Liane, gravely.

The woman started back a few paces, and held up her hands deprecatingly.

"What! tell him?" she exclaimed, as if she had not heard aright. "Ah! you can't mean it! Why, if the young Baron only catches a side glimpse of the lad, I begin to tremble all over; his look goes through and through me. It is true that the Herr Baron is in general a kind man; he does much to help the poor, and never sanctions an injustice; but there is much that he *will* not

see and hear. He dislikes to be worried or bothered, and there are many things allowed to go on which ought, and could, with a little trouble, be put a stop to. He knows very well indeed why the poor invalid there always cries out when the Duchess passes——"

She hesitated, and was silent.

"Well, go on; why?" asked Liane, anxiously.

The woman looked at her a moment, ere she replied—

"The young Baron is the very image of his uncle; so like him, that one could swear sometimes it was Baron Gisbert come to life again. And once he went by the Indian house with the Duchess on his arm"—Frau Löhn looked cautiously round; then lowering her voice, she added—"and she was looking at him with those burning eyes of

hers. I was not there, so I could not see it myself; but my poor sick lady took it into her head that it was her darling who was talking and laughing out there, and she screamed out in a fit of jealousy; and since then she has always been worse when the ladies and gentlemen ride past. And that shows how intensely she loved her husband. But the young Herr Baron always says, 'Nonsense! the woman is delirious:' and so the thing goes on. No, he will do nothing for us; and in three weeks, unless the good God performs some miracle, my poor boy will be sent away to the religious seminary, and later on out there to the heathens, where he will be completely out of the way."

"But, my good woman, it was the wish of his dead father," said Liane, with some hesitation.

Frau Löhn looked at her young mistress with a long searching gaze.

"They say so up at the Castle; but who believes it? Have you seen and read the paper they refer to?"

Liane nodded.

"I believe—but who knows how it looks? You see, dear lady, that night you came to the Indian house and spoke so friendly to Gabriel, I could have given a yell of joy; for I thought to myself that at last the good God had sent us his good angel. And an angel you are still, madame: I found it out when you so courageously stood by my poor boy against them all; and just now, too, when you spoke up for him again. Ah, it was good of you! But you will never get on well in that house, dear lady: there was only one who could do that who ever came here; and that was

the late Baroness. When she was angry she used to stamp her foot, and throw anything that came to her hand at the servants; even steel and iron and knives, or her scissors—it didn't matter what it was. But I won't tell you any more and worry you, for you have as much to bear for yourself as you can manage. You have often to fight, and to fight hard, too, if you wish to keep any power at all in your hands. And you have such a good soft heart, dear madame; it is wrong of me to burden you with my sorrows. And that wicked old man, the Hofmarschall, is doing all he can to undermine your influence, for he longs to have you go away at any price. And the young baron, he who brought you here—please don't be angry, madame, but I *will* say it—he won't stand up for you and take your side as he ought; that we can all see and

hear. When the tempers of the old man get too insupportable for him, he will turn his back on Schönwerth, make three crosses, and travel away into the wild world, not caring one fig for what he leaves behind—not even for his poor young wife."

Liane's face flushed scarlet. What a rôle she played in this house! The plain-spoken uncompromising woman had pointed out in clear words the dubious, undignified position she held in the household—"that we can all see and hear," she had said. So she was an object of pity amongst the dependants. Not only the pride of the Trachenbergs, but the wounded pride of the woman in her, was stirred to its very depths; but she dared not let the humiliation she felt be seen even by this sympathizing woman before her.

"That is a matter that concerns the

Baron and me alone, dear Frau Löhn, and no one else has a right to give an opinion," she said kindly, as she held out her hand to have a fresh piece of linen wound round the compress.

Frau Löhn did not answer, but bound up the hand, and with a courtesy retired into the Indian house.

Just as Liane reached the end of the pathway leading from the spring, she met the Duchess's lady attendant and little Leo coming to inquire at her Highness's express desire how the "poor dear hand was getting on."

Liane took little Leo by the hand, and returned with him to the group under the maple-trees. She shuddered as each step brought her nearer the "yellow, dried-up skeleton;" and saw the white thin hand with the cramped, nervous fingers, which

had so murderously grasped a human being's throat.

And would not those same fingers be tempted now to grasp the strong woman's throat who was close behind, if he had an idea that she not only knew of his black secret, but that she had betrayed it to another? The man did not know that two eyes had witnessed his dark deed, and that these same eyes were constantly following him from day to day, that they were there now, and belonged to the impassive, grave face of the woman who silently and morosely handed the tray of refreshments round as unconcernedly to one and the other, as if she had not even heard of the fearful secret she had a few moments ago so earnestly and sympathisingly imparted to her young mistress.

## CHAPTER VII.

THE noise of the royal carriage-wheels had long since passed away. At an entreating command from the Duchess, Raoul had ordered his horse, to accompany her a portion of the way back to the palace, and the Court Chaplain had been graciously ordered to take a seat by the side of the royal lady, as the princes insisted on sitting with their backs to the horses, in order to have a last

glance at "dear Schönwerth." The Princess was thoroughly happy, and smiled and talked in charming abandon.

She did not know that many eyes were raised in angry indignation as she passed along the road, at the unwonted sight of a priest sitting in the place of honour. How should she? And if she had—bah! what did it matter to her what the people thought, if it pleased her to show honour to the Church?

The reigning line of the ducal house was not Catholic—the hereditary young prince and his brother were both baptized in the Protestant faith—but their mother, the Duchess, belonged to the Catholic side of the house, and had remained firm to her Church.

The Protestant portion of his subjects had not been very pleased when the late

Duke married the most bigoted of his cousins, and raised her to the throne by his side.

Very soon after the marriage, the Court Chaplain — who was then only a simple priest—was raised to his present exalted post, and such was his influence, that it was rumoured, that if the hand of death had not snatched away in premature decline the reigning Duke, there would have been a change of religion at the Court, for the young Duchess was worshipped by her husband to a degree that blinded his judgment, and made him a slave to her slightest wish.

The rumour had died away in the course of time, but the people did not like to see their smiling, handsome young Duchess bestowing such marked honour on the dark, sombre-looking priest, who was

paler than usual to-day, and seemed to have no answer but a forced smile to the bright friendly remarks of his royal companion.

When Liane had bowed her farewell to her exalted guest, she begged her husband to allow her to remain in her own apartments for the rest of the day, to which he merely added a cold, sarcastic assent, as he sprang on his horse, and rode after the carriage.

She was alone—alone, at her own desire, in her elegant blue boudoir. Leo was to sup with his grandfather, and her husband, she knew, would remain in town most likely till the next day.

She rang her bell, and ordered the maid to undo her heavy hair, and to leave it hanging loose, to ease the pain and throbbing in her head. Then putting on a white

dressing-gown, she desired her maid not to disturb her, and on no account to allow any one to enter.

In spite of the headache and wounded hand, she drew a little table to the side of the sofa, and began writing a long letter to Ulrike; but ere it was finished, she was forced to lay aside her pen, to clench her teeth, and to throw herself on the bed, for the pain in her hand was more than she could bear.

There she lay for hours, her head resting on her left hand, supported by a blue cushion, watching the wonderful changing tints with which the setting sun coloured the walls, from a glowing rich purple to a faint shimmering golden yellow. Across her rounded bosom fell a broad tress of hair, reaching down to the velvet carpet at her feet, catching as it fell a warm rich

glow from the rays of the sun, which would have made a painter lay down his brush in despair at being able to copy its beauty, or the gnome of the burning metal gnash his teeth with jealousy.

For hours she did not move; she was physically too spent and exhausted from the excitement of the day, but she could not avoid thinking of the former wife, with the "light frivolous soul," who threw knives and scissors at her servants, and yet was the same softly perfumed Valerie who was the "idol of the Court," as that wicked old man, her father, was so proud of saying. And Raoul had never loved this wife either; he had married her in bitter mortification, when smarting under the wound of rejection for a man with a regal title.

The first marriage had been also a

"mariage de convenance," but he had remained by her side as a rule, and only now and then, "when the old man's tempers became too insupportable," had he gone forth to travel; and death—not a single harsh, quarrelsome word—had put an end to this uncongenial marriage, and all this he bore for the world's sake to avoid a scandal!

What a contradiction there was in the man's character; in all matters concerning love adventures, duels, thoughtless bets, he gave no heed to the opinion of the world, but he trembled and feared like a child before taking a step which a mistake or an error of judgment in the past called upon him to rectify.

This moral weakness Liane had observed to-day; but the torture of her own life would not last much longer; she would

soon return home now—without Leo certainly—and the thought made her press her face deeper into the cushion; but—not even for his sake, and she loved the child tenderly, inexpressibly dear he had become to her—but not even for his sake could she sacrifice herself any longer, and remain in Schönwerth, especially since she had heard that terrible secret of the Hofmarschall's past life. How could she meet him daily, hourly, and not speak of his sin, not dare breathe a word of her knowledge to a single human being? And a shudder crept over her frame, and she felt chilled to the heart with horror, that she was obliged to breathe the same air, and live in the same atmosphere as the murderous individual who made her daily life a burden heavier than she could bear.

Presently she heard a slight noise be-

hind her. Was it the "yellow, dried-up skeleton," with the sharp, sneering features and thin, crumpled hand, who was trying to enter her room?

For a second her heart stood still; then, in her fear, she gave a faint scream aloud.

"It's I, Juliane!" said her husband, drawing aside the heavy curtains. "It's I!"

As if that did not frighten her still more! Not for one moment had he ever crossed the threshold of her apartments, since the hour he fetched her to lead her to the Catholic ceremony the day she arrived at the castle.

In her confusion and fright, she sprang up from the bed, and laid hold of the bell-rope.

"Why ring?" he asked, taking hold of her hand.

With blushing cheeks and hurried manner, she endeavoured to shake back the thick hair behind her shoulders, and leaning against the wall to hide its profusion and disorder, she said shortly, as she held it with her hand—

"I require Hanna."

He laughed.

"You forget that it's the fashion now for ladies to walk out after their bath with their hair hanging; but, aside from that, why this etiquette with me? Have I not a full right to enter my wife's room when I will without knocking?"

She did not answer; but her bosom heaved, and the colour deepened on her cheek.

Going closer to her, he touched the glorious mass of hair, which defied her utmost efforts to keep back, and fell in rich

waving profusion over shoulder and arm, like a golden tunic on her white dressing-gown.

"What wealth of hair you have," he said.

"A somewhat modified shade of the Trachenberg red," she answered, mockingly, as she let her left hand slip from its hold, and the full beauty of the weight and length of her tresses fall around her.

For a moment he was puzzled, and his face deepened in colour. The tone and words he recognized as his own; but when he uttered them and how she had heard them he could not imagine just then.

"I have brought the doctor with me, Juliane," he said, after a moment's pause, glad to have an excuse for taking no notice of her words. "May he come in?"

"I would rather not trouble him. At

home we were not accustomed to send for a physician each time we had anything slightly the matter with us; he lived too far away, and——"

She hesitated. Why tell him that they were too poor, and could not afford doctor's fees?

"The cold spring water has done my hand immense good already," she added, quickly.

"It's not so much for your hand that he is here; for, to my great relief, I see you have been able to use it," he answered, glancing, as he spoke, to the writing-table, on which lay the open sheet of her letter to Ulrike. "I only wished to satisfy myself, for I noticed you were feverish and excited."

So he had been standing a long time at the door watching her. Why this sudden

interest and anxiety, after the cold, careless manner in which he had hitherto always treated her, and after the want of sympathy he had exhibited that very day?

"Why, what nonsense!" she said, laughingly, looking over her shoulder at him, as she drew aside the veil of her hair. "You seem to forget that I was brought up in a very different school to the generality of those of my rank—that I am Ulrike's sister, and my brother's 'Famulus.' We had really no time to think about our nerves, according to true aristocratic custom. We were taught from early infancy to harden ourselves against all such weakness, as those must who have to depend on their own resources for interest and amusement. I must beg you will send the doctor away. He is waiting, I suppose, outside in the ante-room?"

She spoke decidedly, and emphasized the last words in a manner which he could not mistake, that she hoped by this means to dismiss him as well as the doctor.

"He is not waiting in the ante-room—and if he were it would not matter—but the good man is sitting in the garden-room, drinking a glass of Burgundy, which he likes," he replied, drawing nearer; and then, glancing round the apartment, he exclaimed, "Ah, this is nice! The blue boudoir, which, to confess the truth, I had a great dislike to, is really turned into a comfortable, charming room. That dead-white ivory group in front of the blue satin hangings is really artistic. Why, Juliane, you have enlivened and ornamented the walls as those azaleas over there do the window."

She smiled, but said nothing.

"And that table, too—it used to stand here," he went on, pointing to the place as he spoke. "Do you know that what always tried me terribly with Valerie was her lazy, sybarite habit of lying for hours extended on cushions, doing nothing."

Then, glancing through the wide-open door into the inner room, he asked—

"But where do you paint, Juliane? I see no signs of it here. Surely you don't use the child's room?"

"No; I have taken possession of a tiny cabinet leading off my dressing-room."

"What! that small, cramped place, which, if I remember rightly, is not even well lighted? What a strange idea! How came you to choose it?"

She looked him fully and earnestly in the face, and, after a momentary hesitation, replied—

"I believe that those who love art for its own sake, are endowed with a few feelings, perhaps, different to the rest of the world, and are very sensitive to an unsympathetic uncongenial atmosphere."

"And so retire within themselves. Well, that's contrary to my pre-conceived notions of lady dilettantism. You see I was right this morning to wander into the dining-room, and prove you an exception. But what will you do in winter? The cabinet can't be warmed."

"In winter?" repeated his wife, in a wondering stupor. Then, recovering herself quickly, she added, "Ah, to be sure! You couldn't have noticed, when you were in Rudisdorf, that the large drawing-room leading to the garden has a splendid stove in it, and except by the window, the room, large as it is, gets tolerably warm; and

when the weather is bitterly cold, Ulrike and I go up to a dear, warm, little apartment on the first floor—that you have never seen."

A deep, yearning tenderness was in his eyes, as he looked at the graceful form of his wife standing there, so tranquil in outward appearance, that but for the rising and falling of her bosom, he could not have known the effort it was for her to speak, and the timid anxiety she felt to hear his answer.

"And is that wrinkle so very deep in there?" he asked slowly, touching her forehead lightly with his finger.

"I don't know what you mean by that word," she replied, with chilling earnestness, as she drew back her head, and involuntarily passed her finger over the spot he had touched, as if to remove a mark. "My forehead is too young yet for wrinkles,

and I always take care not to indulge in any of those small, one-sided ideas that—— But you speak of this wrinkle in connection with my return to Rudisdorf. Is it not the wish and will of *both?*"

"I thought that I had assured you to the contrary only to-day," he answered, kindly, as he shrugged his shoulders good-humouredly.

She knew that one word of contradiction would change him; but she was determined not to be intimidated.

"At first you did," she said; "but later on, when the Duchess was here, you distinctly expressed your willingness——"

He laughed so bitterly and so derisively, that she stopped, half frightened.

"I am perfectly sure that I should have terribly wounded your susceptible pride and dignity if I had taken advantage of

the moment to announce, 'My wife desires at all costs to leave me, but I entreat her on my knees not to go away; she won't listen to my prayer, but returns to her old poverty and self-denial with a smiling countenance, simply to be — revenged!' My beautiful wife, don't you know that *such* an open revenge before *one* who was listening greedily to every word you uttered, no man would allow his wife, especially if—he loved her!"

Liane's hot cheeks paled; she was deeply moved. The last words she did not notice; but she wanted to be *revenged*, he said!

"Raoul, how can you say such things, and give such interpretation to my actions?" she broke in, catching her breath. "Revenge! I? I never had such a feeling in my life, and I have no idea even

now of how it takes possession of the human heart; but I can understand that it is often the result of great suffering, though I had no conception that what I have had to endure since I came here had aroused such feelings in me. The Hofmarschall has wounded me times out of number; but you know I told you that I never forget he is an invalid and suffering, and that, whenever it is possible, I take no notice of his cutting words. And towards you? How could I wish to revenge grievances which did not exist as such; and, besides, I had no right to complain. It strikes me we could neither of us give the other much pain."

"Take care, Juliane, take care. Just now each word of yours cuts into me with a sharp knife. You know very well that you are angry and exasperated."

"That I deny totally," she replied, quietly and unruffled; "worn out and discouraged I am, but neither angry nor embittered. Discouraged because all I have tried to do in your home has been as useless as drawing water in silk; and as to Leo's education and my influence over him. . . . Ah, well! the opposition on the other side is beyond me. I have been writing to Ulrike, and endeavouring to explain to her my difficulty."

"Ah! then that will tell me all I want to know," he exclaimed, quickly moving to the table where the open sheets still lay.

"You won't do that, Raoul?" she said, beseechingly and with trembling lips, as she laid her hand on the arm he had stretched out to take the letter.

"Certainly I shall," he insisted, moving her hand from his arm with an impatient

jerk. "I have undeniable right to read my wife's letters when they refer to me. Just glance in that mirror there, Juliane, and see what a white face you have—lips *that* colour betoken guilty thoughts. I will read your letter aloud."

He took the letter from the desk, and going over to the window, began, in a sarcastic tone, as follows :

" 'In a fortnight, at latest, I shall be in Rudisdorf to remain for ever, dear Ulrike; . . . This cry of relief looks so cold and meaningless on the paper, and yet I cannot tell you *how* happy it makes me since I have known that I am coming back to you and Magnus.' (Poor Schönwerth!" he murmured, ironically.) " 'Don't imagine that this separation is the result of a quarrel—oh, no! it is the natural consequence of a want of

harmony between two people, who, if they were to live together till eternity, would never be suitable to each other, for the one only fears what the world will say; while I shrink from each angry word uttered in the seclusion of home life. The rupture will be made without any noise, and the curiosity of outsiders will never be satisfied. One day the Baroness Mainau will have disappeared from Schönwerth, silently vanished from the rooms where for a short while she had the shadow of a reign as mistress, and be soon forgotten by the servants, who divined from the first her uncertain position, and perhaps--who knows? —gave her sympathy and good will. But your Liane? You see she was not entirely uprooted from Rudisdorf, and in the sun of your love and the warmth of your eyes will soon grow to her old place again. You

remember that I always used to think it cruel to cut a flower and put the wound into cold water; *now* I know and can feel how painful it must be, for I, too, have had it to bear. A few shoots have sprung from my soul and taken root here, which I will leave behind; a firmer confidence in one's own moral power, and perhaps disappointment as regards society and its demands—this knowledge can do me no harm.

"'Do you remember when we stood at the window and heard him say to mamma, "I cannot give her love, and I am not so stupid as to expect it from her?" I longed then to go down and quietly return him the ring, not because I wished for his love, for to that I had no right, as I had no feeling of affection for him, but because his words were so full of self-consciousness'"—the hot blood flew into Raoul's face as he

read these words, and clenching his teeth and drawing in his under lip, he glanced over the paper with an uncertain somewhat anxious look at his wife.

When he had mentioned that her pale face betokened guilty thoughts, she had laid her hand under her bosom as if to repel the accusation. There she stood now in the same position, with her graceful, well-developed figure drawn to its full height, one foot peeping out from beneath her dress, and her head slightly drawn back, an elegant, charming attitude, which was new and strange to the man who was gazing at her with a questioning, eager expression on his pale face. Her eyes he could not see, owing to the drooped, heavily-fringed lids, but her cheeks were scarlet, for she had just most unwillingly told him a hateful truth to his face which she knew

he was conscious of, and she blushed for him.

He went straight up to her.

"You are quite right in your judgment of me," he said, apparently calm. "I am quite aware of this failing of mine; and when I think that you heard that remark, with your quick perception of its force, the blood mounts to my forehead with shame. But you, who judge me so severely, I can also accuse you. I was conceited and self-conscious, but you were false to yourself, as with doubt in your heart and with closed lips you went with me——"

"Read a few lines further on, please," she entreated, without daring to raise her eyes.

He went back to the window; it was getting so dark he could hardly see, but he continued reading aloud, more to himself than to her.

" 'I knew that after such a remark from his lips there was no hope for either of us, and that I should never have an iota of sympathy from him, yet I let myself be carried onwards, and a second time I uttered the sacred "yes" before the altar, and thereby committed a fault beyond forgiveness, for I was no thoughtless girl, ignorant of the responsibility I was assuming.'"

Suddenly she flew over to him and tried to snatch the paper from his hand, but he held his left arm firmly against her, and with a clear, ringing voice read on.

" 'Ulrike, Raoul is a handsome man, and gifted with brilliant conversational powers, which, with his pleasant, nonchalant manner, might easily win a woman's heart; but how sadly this brilliant drawing-room talent pales before the strong, earnest, in-

tense light of our Rudisdorf companion, our Magnus, whose physical attractions are not so great, but whose soul is lit with the fire of genius, and hard, untiring study. He never had time or opportunity to make an effect. It is in this effect that Raoul shines, with his deeds and love adventures; even in his erratic travels, when here and there he appears on the scene like some fantastic fairy prince, he dazzles the world, and enjoys the effect he produces. No one knows his faults better than he does himself, and laments them too, but they are the faults of a good cavalier, faults the world condones, and naturally he cares not to correct them himself. With more earnestness of purpose, with more moral courage, and less foolish admiration from women, he would make a grand man, and become a——"

But here the pen had fallen from her hand, and the letter was unfinished.

"You are right, Juliane; you are not angry nor embittered," he said after a pause, as with a sound between a grunt and a laugh, he flung the letter on the table. "If you were embittered you could not have dissected my life and existence in that dispassionate, negative manner, as if I had been a butterfly under your microscope. And you are right, too, to wish to leave me after your manner of judging me. I don't wonder at your going away at any cost; and after what has happened to-day, I won't raise any objection; even in stern, inflexible Rome no one will know that one cause for our separation is—that I struck you."

"Raoul!" she cried out, for his tone cut her to the quick.

But he took no heed to her cry, and passing her went into the room adjoining, paced up and down the floor a few times, then went to the window and stood silently gazing out into the growing darkness.

If his friend Rüdiger could have taken a peep at the young wife's apartments would he not have laughed softly to himself! She stood by the azalea trees whose white blossoms looked so bright in the blue furnished boudoir. In the rich, exquisite wealth of her Lorelei hair glimmered a darker tinge of red than perhaps that world-renowned maiden's; but it fell in glorious profusion around her, covering neck, and arms, and bosom, and reaching far down to her knees; hair that "he" had once said he "did not mind in a wife, but on a loved one's head, no, never," and from between this wavy mass, and close to the

tender flowers of the azalea, appeared a soft, girlish face with "violet eyes à la Lavallière," looking sad and mournful, gazing into the distance with a decision and resolution about the mouth that was surely the result of a deep inward struggle.

And he? A short while ago he had prophesied that if he received letters from her during his forthcoming voyage, they would be "stupid, school-girl effusions filled with the household expenses, &c.," and now he had just read one—though not addressed to him or intended for his eyes—and if one could judge from the shade on his brow and the nervous drumming of his fingers on the window-pane, of the effect it had made on him, it was likely that, contrary to his own boast, sleep and rest would not be his portion this night.

## CHAPTER VIII.

IT was very still in the room after that cry of Liane's. In the ante-chamber the bird in his cage had fluttered and chirruped for a moment or two ere he put his little head under his wing and went to roost for the night; and outside the only sound that was heard was the footfall of one of the servants as he crossed the mosaic floor of the corridor.

It was so still that in the dark, large drawing-room where Mainau stood he could hear nothing; no movement, no sound of any kind came from the little boudoir, only the fading twilight still glimmered faintly on the blue furniture and walls, and made the room look light at the entrance. Could she have left the apartment? As this thought crossed his mind, he started with a mixed feeling of vexation and indignation and rose up; had he expected that she would follow him, because his voice had unnerved and shaken her, as it had unnerved and shaken so many other women? Did he think that the unswerving, strong soul of the girl he had taken for a second wife had also its weak side, and that a few loud words from the lips of a man would bring her in submission to his feet? No; he knew her

better than to imagine she would do either one or the other, and with a quick but silent step he crossed the carpeted floor and entered the room through the portières.

She had not left her apartment, but was still standing by the window among the azaleas, her left hand leaning on the cornice, the soft outline of the profile turned towards him, and her warm, pouting lips slightly pressed together. At the sound of his entrance she slowly moved her head, and looked calmly and quietly at him with her large liquid eyes. There was no sign about her of any inward struggle; her mind was made up, and her decision long since arrived at.

"Leo won't lead me a very pleasant life when he has to return to his old quarters,"

he began, answering her look as indifferently as he could.

A deep sigh escaped her lips, and her eyes filled with tears.

"You won't have to bear it very long; you are going away yourself," she said gently, as she drooped her eyes.

"Yes; I am going away; and this time I mean to enjoy life in its fullest abandon; who can reproach me if I do? Behind me I shall have left the icy region of virtuous pride and cold calculating intellect; and before me stretches out the boundless region of pleasure; out in foreign lands I shall be a welcomed 'fairy prince,' here I am a ceremonious, cold, vegetating gentleman."

He moved, as he ceased speaking, to the door on the corridor.

"Have you anything more to say,

Juliane?" he asked, half turning, and looking over his shoulder.

She shook her head, but pressed her hands against her bosom as if she were forcibly keeping back some unexpressed desire.

"We are *alone* for the last time," he urged, following with keen eyes her slightest movement.

Suddenly she made up her mind, and drew near to him.

"Just now I said many bitter things to you unintentionally, for which I am very sorry; and yet—yet—I have not said all. You yourself ask me if I have more to say—will you listen, Raoul?"

"Yes, certainly;" but he did not move his hand from the door-handle, nor change his position.

"I have heard you say several times

lately that for the next six months you have not one duty to fulfil here in your home. Raoul, do you think it right—to be a father—and ignore the duty the position entails? Is not the bringing up of your child a duty? May I ask, then, in whose hands you mean to leave the care of your little one? You speak with disgust sometimes of the hard unflinching dogmas your Church imposes—of the right it assumes of control over the deepest and most sacred feelings, and of the extreme bigotry of your uncle and the chaplain on all these points, and yet you carelessly leave them to guide your child's young impressionable head and heart; besides, you keep so silent yourself when the subject——"

"Ah! I see. You are punishing me because I did not throw down the gauntlet for you this afternoon in your discussion

on the devil; how could I have done so? who would have ventured by so much as a word to uphold such a doctrine? Leo resembles me in mind as well as face, and when he is old enough to think for himself, he will judge which is right and which is wrong."

"That's the easy way many argue who ought to act, and explains how it is that that most incomprehensible doctrine proclaimed by the old man in Rome has so many believers. Are you sure that Leo will be able to battle with himself on these points as easily as you do? I know that first religious doubts often leave wounds which are never completely healed through life. However much one may watch and study the workings of a child's mind, it still remains a mystery to itself and us. And like the chalice of a flower, we cannot

tell if it will not produce by-and-by a few crumpled leaves. So much, at least, I have learnt since I have had the care of your little one. I beg you earnestly, Raoul, to think twice before you leave him in the hands of that priest."

He did not answer for a few moments, but his fingers detached themselves from their hold on the door, while she watched his face and held her breath, hardly daring to hope her prayer would be granted. At last he said slowly—

"I will respect this wish of yours as a kind of last will and testament before your departure. Does that content you?"

"Thank you, Raoul," she cried heartily, holding out her hand to him.

"No, no," he said, turning away, "there is no need to shake hands over it. You know we agreed to be like two good com-

rades. Besides, it's not fair of you to be so thankful. Your good friend, the Court Chaplain, never lets an opportunity pass of breaking a lance in your favour; it is really a grand act of self-denial on his part, and yet you are intriguing against him."

"He knows very well that I do not wish his knightly aid," she replied gently. "The first evening I arrived here he made friendly overtures to me; but I don't intend to let him convert me in any such underhand, indirect way."

"Convert?" cried Mainau, laughing aloud. "Look at me, Juliane!" and he seized her hand and held it tight; "do you really mean it? To convert you? turn you into a Roman Catholic? I want to know the truth! Has this experienced man of God dared to make a flattering misuse of his renowned persuasive tongue?

Juliane, be open and tell me—if he has only attempted to move a breath to——"

"What do you mean?" she broke in haughtily, drawing her hand away forcibly from his grasp; "I don't understand you—I am not likely to keep anything a secret from you that has been said in your own house and grounds, if you wish to know it. As you ask, I will tell you that he informed me that Schönwerth was rather a warm place for ladies, whether they came from the far-away tropics, or from a noble German house, and then he endeavoured to direct me how to act."

"Splendid start! One must allow the man has genius. He can see at a glance what other people take time to learn. You must understand, Juliane, that my first wife was a most obedient penitent, and true daughter of the Church; and evi-

dently, for the sake of the religious peace of our household, he made an attempt to obtain the confidence of Schönwerth's new mistress. Don't you think so too?"

"I think so—or rather I have no doubt of it," she answered, looking him full in the face with her large, honest eyes; "and that is why I am on my guard, as I told you just now, and don't mean to allow myself to be influenced by him."

"If your will is made of iron, it won't daunt him. Juliane, I wish I had not seen so much of the humbug of society, for then I would have sworn by this"—and he touched her face—"as I would by the Gospel; but"—and he laughed bitterly—"this head, with its beautiful golden glory, would not look amiss in the angels' choir of the Catholic church. The pious converter believes it too; and it must be sweet to

glorify as an angel. You don't know that yet, Juliane. But I mean to bring my energy and influence to work to stop this converting."

"But why?" she interrupted, quickly. "You are going away, and I——"

"I think you have said that often enough to-day," he cried, angrily, and stamping his foot with impatience. "I suppose you will allow that it is I alone who decides if and when I choose to travel?"

She was silent.

What a strange, contradictory temperament the man had! As if he had not for days and weeks been speaking, with unconcealed delight, of this contemplated journey!

"Confess now, Juliane, that in his friendly overtures to you, that amiable,

indiscreet, pious man did not spare me? He spoke of my private life?" he asked, carelessly, as he took from its stand one of the ivory figures and examined it.

"That implies that I patiently listened to him," she answered, indignantly. "You ought to have confidence in me, and know that my sense of duty towards you would prevent my allowing any one to malign you behind your back, even if I knew you deserved it. No; a wife ought to fear the one who wishes or expects her to make a confidant of him respecting her husband."

"If departed souls are capable of feeling shame, what must my Valerie be enduring at this moment!" Raoul cried, as he put the ivory Ariadne back on her pedestal.

"So you have gained your knowledge of my character simply from your own observation?" he added.

She did not answer.

"What? Then somebody else around you has spoken against me! Was it my uncle?" he asked with pretended indifference.

"Well, yes. He did complain of you to the chaplain. He said your constant absence made him anxious on account of Leo. So you see, Raoul, how it is. You travel about to get rid of your ennui, and yet at home there is enough to occupy and interest you the year through, if you could only be made conscious of it. Even if your property was a mine of gold, it would never be so carefully guarded as if you did it yourself; and the eye of the master looking over the management of his affairs is always a safeguard against irregularities."

Raoul's cheeks paled, and he turned away towards the window.

She had grown more and more confused as she spoke, for she knew this was a matter on which she—a coldly tolerate wife—had no right to give an opinion; but she had done it for Leo's sake, and for his sake she put aside her own inclinations, and made all the use in her power of these last few moments alone with his father to urge him to personally superintend the boy's training and education, and take an interest in his future.

"The property is diminishing in value, your uncle says; and he shudders each time he has to take a glimpse into the accounts," she added, hesitatingly.

"Bah! The ridiculous feverish anxiety my uncle exhibits about the deterioration of our property arises from his penurious disposition, as you might know for yourself—the poor old man grows worse and worse

in his dislike to spend money," he answered, with his face turned from her. "But what would you have me do? Shall I put my hand to the plough, and work on my own farms? Or perhaps you would like me to take a theatre, and become its manager—I, who have not a note of music in me? Or shall I seek a vacant post as minister? I have now and then made a dash at jurisprudence, but never done much; and what has been the use of it to me?" He shook his head. "None at all! Come, my wise Sphinx, let me hear how you would have me pass my time here in Schönwerth, when my second wife has left me alone?"

"Did it never enter your head to write?"

He wheeled suddenly round, and stared at her speechlessly.

"What! would you have me turn author?" he said, at last, with a doubtful laugh.

"If you think, with mamma and the Hofmarschall, that writing is mere 'printers' work,' then don't entertain the idea for a moment," she answered, with a slight intonation of contempt in her voice. "But," she added, persuasively, "you converse in a fluent, pleasant style; you relate a story well, and I am certain that you could write not only with power, but even with more grace and finish than you speak."

It was astonishing how these few words of praise from his earnest young wife flattered the blasé man of the world, and made him colour like a girl with pleasure.

"I have often wished I could write down as you told them the interesting things

you have related sometimes at the tea-table," she added.

"Now that's too bad!" he exclaimed. "There you have been criticising me evening after evening, in your quiet, innocent manner, when I often felt inclined to ask you how many stitches it requires to form one flower of your tapestry work, thinking you cared for nothing else but the embroidery in your hand. Really, Juliane, it was not fair of you to let me play such a rôle ignorantly. No, no; hold your tongue!" he added, as she opened her mouth to speak, with an indignant movement of her pretty head. "I dare say I deserved it. But I don't mind confessing to you now," he went on, slowly and half-hesitating, "that I have, at times, thought of my travels and the impressions certain scenes have made on my mind;

but my first attempt in that line met with such a storm of reproach and angry comment, that I vowed to myself I would never use my pen for that purpose again. It was a letter I wrote from London describing my life there; and my uncle sent me such a reply! He wondered I could dare be so indiscreet, reproved me for having so little tact as to describe the back scenes of a court I was not worthy to grace, and begged me earnestly not to repeat the offence, for fear of compromising him, as well as myself, in case such a letter fell into other hands. And when I came home, I found a fragment of my 'long interesting letter,' as Valerie laughingly informed me, with a scent-bottle stopper wrapped up in it."

At this moment Leo noisily entered the room, exclaiming—

"Mamma, grandpapa has the doctor with him, and he says I may come and sit with you a——"

But he stopped short with surprise when he caught sight of his father, and his eyes opened wide with astonishment, for he had never before seen him in the room.

"Papa, what are you doing here in the blue room?" he asked, with the jealousy of a child at a stranger's occupying the place where he had hitherto been sole master.

His father's face flushed, as, pushing the boy gently towards his wife, he said—

"Go, dear lad, and put your arms round mamma's neck—she won't let me advance a step towards her—and ask her to have a little patience with you, and also with me, till we are separated."

"I am going too, papa!" cried the child, springing joyfully on Liane's neck.

"Mamma always promised to take me with her to see Uncle Magnus and Aunt Ulrike, when she goes to Rudisdorf."

"What! How do you know she is going there?" asked Raoul, surprised.

"I heard the Duchess and the Court Chaplain speaking about it in the game-keeper's cottage. They were whispering, but the prince and I listened. You will take me mamma, won't you?"

"Perhaps if you beg papa very prettily he will let you come and visit us," she answered, in a soft but distinct voice, as she played caressingly with the boy's curls without looking up.

"We will see about that," answered his father, curtly. "There, Juliane, just see, your amiable declaration of this afternoon has already produced electric sparks; and to-morrow the sparrows on the roofs of the

houses in town will relate that His Holiness in Rome has got to answer for the separation of two people who on no account could live together. H'm—I suppose, naturally, you won't go till I have started?"

"I will do just as you like in that matter. If it pleases you I will wait, and not leave Schönwerth till twenty-four hours after your departure."

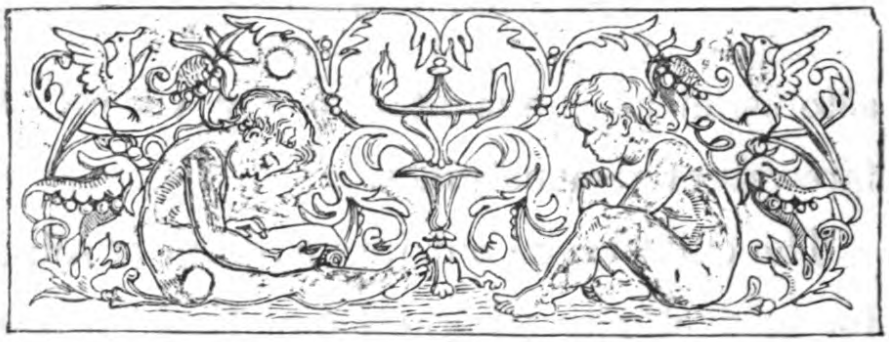
He assented by a nod of his head, then walked quickly to the table, took up the letter to Ulrike, folded it, and putting it in his pocket-book, said—

"I have still a right to confiscate what I will. This letter I shall keep; it belongs to me."

And with a deep, low, but ironical bow, as if he were taking leave of a princess, he left the room before Liane could recover her

astonishment sufficiently to say a word of farewell or remonstrance.

The child broke out into a storm of sobs, for he instinctively knew now that he was about to lose the good angel of his young life.



## CHAPTER IX.

IN the large kitchen at Schönwerth Castle it began to be whispered from one to the other that the Baroness was going on a "visit" to Rudisdorf during the absence of the young master. The footmen confidently said that they had prophesied this "visit" would be paid from the moment the new mistress arrived, for the Hofmarschall had hesitated as to whether he should receive the bride on

the door step or not, and the result of this hesitation was, she had to descend from the carriage alone; the lady's maid openly declared she was glad that her mistress was going, "for," she added, as she took a hot iron off the stove, "it goes against my conscience to wait on a lady whose husband does not admire her, and who only wears simple muslin things;" and the red-headed kitchen-maid sighed as she wiped the plates and muttered that the master "Was a born enemy to fair-haired women; that upstairs in his room all the pictures had brown or dark hair—his first wife too—and that he must have taken this second one without even looking on her."

But upstairs in the invalid's apartments the news seemed to have produced sunshine. The floor was rarely touched with the Hofmarschall's thick stick; little Leo

had a present of a set of stables full of harnessed horses, and the valet received a coat which was not quite so threadbare as usual, and "stupid!" "fool!" "block-head!" were words that for days had not once been vociferated at the head of the unfortunate man who waited on him, but instead a "Now, my man," or "That's a good fellow," and this because the young mistress "had broken her neck by her own folly."

The old man had not mentioned the subject of Liane's departure to his nephew as yet; it was not necessary. Raoul had brought his Protestant dowerless wife to the castle without in any way consulting him or studying his wishes, and the natural result had followed, as he prophesied it would; that was quite enough for the Hofmarschall, who chuckled in secret at the

pass at which matters had arrived, though he knew that he himself was largely to blame for the discord which existed between the young couple.

There was no outward change in the arrangements of the household; Liane presided at the table as formerly, poured out the tea each evening, and taught little Leo his lessons just as if nothing had happened; but she studiously avoided every chance of being alone with the Hofmarschall. He soon remarked this avoidance of his society; and when, one evening, in arranging the cups on the tea-tray she accidentally touched his hand and drew back as if it had stung her like a viper, he smiled diabolically in her face, and uttered a few cutting words about the time when such contact would become impossible.

In the mean time the journey of the

young baron was delayed in consequence of his desire to look after some property he owned at Wolskershausen, and go over the accounts, which were not quite in order.

Such matters ought to be put straight before starting on a long journey involving an absence of many months, he explained to the Hofmarschall, who was overcome with astonishment and wonder at his nephew's energy and interest, where formerly he had always been negligent and careless to a degree. The new trunks were put in an empty room for a time, because the smell of the leather was "unpleasant," and the brilliant farewell dinner which Raoul intended giving at the largest hotel in town to the men of his club was indefinitely postponed. In short, everything happened in such a way as to give the

scandal-mongers in town plenty to talk about; even the Duchess, in her inexhaustible kindness, added zest to the various rumours flying about, by expressing a wish that the Baroness Mainau would appear at Court, if only once, "before she set out on her visit to her old home." *She* knew best the truth about the affair, and could afford to be gracious.

Liane made no objection; it would be "the first and last time," and so it came to pass that one evening "the extremely fair Trachenberg, in a becoming blue silk dress," as the lady in waiting sarcastically remarked, made her appearance in the palace drawing-room for half an hour, "in order to carry with her to secluded Rudisdorf at least one brilliant recollection of town life."

Now that Liane was so soon going back

to Rudisdorf, she did not think it worth while to send the packet containing the jewel and dried plants by post; and the painting, which was to be sold to defray her mother's journey to the Baths, her husband had locked away, saying that he did not wish "the stain on the honour of his family to be brought before the public again in that form." In spite of his new business habits and constant visits to Wolskershausen, Raoul generally managed to appear at the tea-table and take his part in the conversation. He did not seem to notice that the priest was always there too; that, in fact, he was staying at the castle for a few weeks to recruit his "shattered nerves" with the fresh, pure air of "dear Schönwerth." For some time past it had been his habit to walk or drive out to the castle two or three days in the

week, and give little Leo lessons in religion, but lately he had obtained his royal mistress's half-unwilling consent to absent himself from the Court and stay with the Hofmarschall on a visit.

Occupied as he was with his own affairs, Mainau did not observe the priest's movements, till one evening the latter proposed hearing Leo read his Catechism in the child's own room instead of in the Hofmarschall's, as he had hitherto always done, alleging, as a reason, that the old gentleman grew nervous at the boy's monotonous tone. Raoul's face clouded as he heard this proposition, and he said, in a compressed voice, as if his throat was being held in a vice—

"I think, Sir Priest, that the catechism may as well be read *here*. Downstairs the apartments are occupied by the Baroness,

and it would be unreasonable to expect her to take an interest in *that* lesson."

The priest looked confused, but said nothing in reply, contenting himself with a slight inclination of his head in token of acquiescence.

The time soon came when Raoul's entire presence in Wolskershausen was needed, and one afternoon he started. At a window upstairs the Hofmarschall with the priest stood watching him depart. Both saw him mount his horse just as Liane came forward with Leo to say good-bye. He stooped down and gave his hand to the boy, but not to his wife, and the four eager eyes upstairs noticed that his face did not soften or change once, as with a dark, threatening brow he leant over the horse's neck, and in a smothered voice said to his wife—

"I hope I shall find you as good a Protestant when I come back as you are now, Juliane."

She turned away disappointed and vexed, while he put spurs to his horse and dashed through the courtyard.

The next morning a note arrived from the young baron at Wolkershausen addressed to his uncle, in which he earnestly begged to know what his little son was doing, and if all were well. The Hofmarschall laughed aloud as he read this request, and wondered what would be the next move of this capricious individual, who thought nothing of being absent for months from his home without making any effort to inquire into the welfare of wife or child, and now was unexpectedly assuming the rôle of an affectionate and tender parent.

He answered the note in his usual mock-

ing, off-hand style, but was not a little surprised to receive a second the following day containing the same request. This went on for nearly a week, when one morning the messenger who brought these notes from Wolkershausen, after delivering a letter to the Hofmarschall, descended the stairs, and knocking at Liane's door, put into her hands a sealed envelope.

She opened it. Inside she found a number of closely-written sheets and one of her husband's cards, on the back of which he explained that the accompanying pages were the commencement of a manuscript he was writing after the wearisome business of the day was finished, to while away the long hours of the evening, and he begged to have her candid opinion of their merit.

It was with a mixed feeling of surprise

and trembling timidity that she held these folded sheets in her hand. This silent appeal to her sympathy and judgment from the man whom she would shortly leave for ever, startled her as much as if she had unknowingly placed her foot on a forbidden foreign soil, and her fingers shook with emotion as she replied in a few short words that she was intending to pass the afternoon with Leo at the forester's house, and that there, in the stillness and silence of the dense wood, she would read the manuscript he had sent her.

She had told him herself that she conjectured he had a talent for writing; but when she opened the pages and began reading the letter from Norway addressed to "Juliane," she held her breath with surprise and admiration. The strong, powerful expressions did not appear to halt or

hesitate once; one after the other brilliant descriptions, charming pictures, and rich imagery followed each other in rapid succession, and the young wife, as she read on, forgot *who* had written the lines, forgot that the spoilt drawing-room favourite, with the sarcastic smile and blasé, nonchalant manner, was the man who penned the words, so rapt was her delight at the thrilling interest of the manuscript before her eyes. Here the brilliant courtly trappings were stripped from the hunter, who, with feverish excitement and cautious movement, tracked the bear across the snow-drift mountains to his lair, and who for weeks revelled in the glorious wild charm of the forest land, where he drank in peace of mind and strength of body, among the simple, rude inhabitants of the north, whose only worldly attractions were pure habits, and modest, chaste women.

And as she read these descriptions Liane's heart bitterly reproached her for judging him who could write so powerfully as one who cared for naught else but the pomps and vanities, and ease and indolence of a fashionable drawing-room.

It was close to the forester's cottage that Liane had read yesterday her husband's manuscript, and again to-day the leaves were open before her.

This cottage, or house, was not one of the modern coquettishly ornamented Swiss houses which are built everywhere now in the interior of the forest. It was, on the contrary, an old-fashioned building, with slanting, crooked walls, and irregular windows, behind which latter the white curtains netted by the forester's wife appeared to be half ashamed to show themselves. Neither tiles nor slates covered the

roof, but instead a good strong straw thatch surmounted the walls, from the summit of which rose a chimney, so large and massive, that down in the kitchen there would have been room to cook for a whole regiment of soldiers. A rather low paling surrounded the pathway leading to the house-door, which was generally open, showing the sand-covered floors within, and in one corner of the tiny garden in front of the house was placed a wooden bench under the shade of a thick pear-tree, with a wild mass of overgrown hops clinging around the trunk.

Here it was that Liane sat, a table, covered with a clean white cloth, at her side, which the forester's wife was arranging for her coffee.

The old house was built in the very centre of the forest, and surrounded en

tirely by thick trees, so that it was impossible to see into the distance at all; only, perhaps, if one mounted to the roof, or climbed up to the pigeons' cote under the chimney, one might be able to have a peep upwards beyond the trees, or even catch a glimpse of the grey turrets of Schönwerth Castle through the foliage. Bright-coloured verbenas and dahlias bloomed in the little garden, and close to the house-door was planted, in a pail, a beautiful oleander; but not ten steps away, the ground was one mass of blue-bells, and in the shade of the moist earth the sweet lily-of-the-valley drooped her delicate head, and away in the darkness under the trees the white heads of a thousand mushrooms and other fungi gleamed like fairy lights everywhere about.

Here, in the midst of the stillness and silence around her, the young wife forgot

for an hour all her sorrows and trials, and felt peaceful and happy.

The forester's wife flitted in and out of her queer old house, attending to her domestic duties, but keeping a respectful distance from the noble lady, who was busy reading.

Her husband was away with the dogs and his men; so there was not a sound to disturb the silence of the thatch-roofed cottage, save the cooing of the pigeons in the loft, and now and then a monotonous lowing from the cow in the stable.

The young wife, in her simple muslin dress, might well have passed for the forester's daughter, she looked so girlish, and graceful, and pleasant. The cat from the old house had half pulled her straw hat from where Liane had laid it on the bench at her side, and lay stretched at her

ease in its place; and on the table before her stood a brass coffee-machine, a loaf of black bread, and some exquisite fresh butter, cool and hard from the cellar, and in a bright tin basket lay a few ripe, yellow pears, only a few minutes before gathered from the tree.

This charmingly rural picture was presently broken in upon by little Leo, who had found a late-growing strawberry-flower, and wished, with "mamma's" help, to dry and press it for his own collection of plants. His curly brown locks were close to Liane's face, and his cheeks were bright and rosy with the glow of youth and health, and the excitement of his wonderful discovery.

"Papa!" suddenly screamed the child, as he joyously dashed across the narrow pathway, and flung himself into the arms

of Baron Mainau, who, in a light-brown summer coat, and stick in hand, was just emerging from the thick shade of the trees.

Liane looked up in amazement, and rising from her seat, went towards him, saying, as he kissed his child and put him down on the ground again—

"Have you come through the dense forest, Raoul—and on foot too?"

"Why not? I was weary with the everlasting roads, so I descended from the carriage and came through the forest, leaving it at the road-side house."

"But from there here is a good long walk."

He shrugged his shoulders, and laughed.

"What won't one do when one—has not seen one's boy for so long! I gathered from your note yesterday that if I went on

to the castle I should find it empty at this hour; so I came——"

Then, as he went to the table and sat down on the bench, he said, with a pleased expression in his eyes—

"How dainty and refreshing this all looks!"

The cat would only move a very little bit; for the seat was her place, and she indignantly refused to give up her right of possession to a new comer.

Liane disappeared for a moment; but presently returned, bearing in her hands a jug of hot water, which she poured into the coffee urn, and lighting the flame under the machine, a rich cup of fresh coffee was soon made. Then, holding the large black loaf against her bosom, she began cutting slices of bread and butter for her husband, with a readiness and quickness as if she were

really the forester's daughter, and was only occupied with her daily work.

"No, no, my boy; that place belongs to mamma," said Raoul, as he gently lifted little Leo off the bench, where he had just clambered to sit by his father; and with a smile and a wave of the hand, he invited his wife to take the vacant place.

Liane trembled and hesitated.

He might just as well have driven away the cat, for the vacant place was very small; but he did not disturb her. However, just then the forester's wife appeared with a cane-chair, and the difficulty ended by Liane lifting Leo to the side of his father, and sitting down herself in the more comfortable seat; and, with a light sigh of relief, she poured out the coffee, and handed a steaming cup of the refreshing beverage to the weary pedestrian.

Raoul took off his hat with a frown, and threw it on the greensward at his feet, and as he drew his fingers through his brown curly hair, nodded in an absent manner to the woman in answer to her greeting.

"Now I have seen with my own eyes what a miserable match that is," said the forester's wife to her servant, when she went inside. "God bless us all! there they are, not even sitting by each other; and he is making a face as if the dear, gentle lady had poured vinegar into his cup instead of coffee. What beautiful white hands she do have, to be sure! It's far best for such as him to have an angry devil of a wife, like his first was. Ah! if there was only one man as he ought to be!"

The shadow on the young man's forehead soon passed away. He drank his coffee,

and leaning back on the iron rail of the hop-plants, the cool leaves fanned his hot face, while he lazily and slowly glanced around him with a satisfied air.

"This is like a scene out of the 'Vicar of Wakefield,'" he said presently, with a smile. "I had no idea that we possessed such a delicious bit of sylvan scenery so near home. The forester is always begging to have his roof altered; but he may now beg in vain; that straw thatch shall remain." He sipped his coffee, and added, "It's really pleasant to suddenly come upon a table like this in the middle of the forest, after a long dusty drive and a tolerably good walk."

"Ah! don't I know that," broke in Liane, with a merry laugh, "when I have been out botanizing with Magnus, and returned tired and hungry, with hands

and feet burning, and caught sight of the fountain at the end of the avenue! You know it, don't you? We used to see from afar the white-covered table behind the glass door of the garden drawing-room—which you also know, and the dear old ugly arm-chair—and just as Ulrike recognized us, up would flash the little blue flame under the tea-urn; and then we knew that all was waiting for us. Such a return home is delightful, isn't it?—especially if, as sometimes happened, we were caught in a storm, and had to run for our lives, and only just reached home in time to enjoy the pleasant feeling that we were under shelter when the thunder growled and the rain poured in torrents."

"And it's for such a delightful return home that you have been longing ever since you came to Schönwerth?"

She clasped her hands tight across her bosom, and her eyes beamed brightly as the answering "yes" trembled on her lips; but she did not utter it, and with a smile, which showed her pearl-white teeth, she went on, taking no notice of the question—

"Mamma always says that the last of the Trachenbergs are degenerated—almost extinct. To live a peaceful quiet life, to make those around us happy, and to find one's own joy and pleasure within the narrow circle of those we love, may be, as mamma declares, too 'home-baked;' it is the fault she grumbles at and laments over in Magnus; but it is this, and this alone, which gave us strength to bear up against the terrible change of circumstances which mamma has sunk under. Otherwise, I can assure you we are not like the house-snakes, liking to hide away

in a corner, and shrinking from open contact with the outward world. On the contrary, I think we possess restless inquiring heads, which rather enjoy hard work, or anything that is exciting or leads onwards. I dare say you will laugh when I tell you that we went without sugar in our coffee, and butter on our bread, to buy books and instruments for our improvement, and to have the newspapers, which otherwise we should rarely, or perhaps never, have seen. That kind of life is, I can assure you, a very happy one. And yet since I have read your descriptions from Norway I can't understand. . . . Ah, they are beautifully written — perfectly charming!" she exclaimed, interrupting herself, and putting her hand caressingly on the little packet which lay on the table.

"If you only could make up your mind to have them publicly——"

"Hush! not a word more, Juliane!" he cried, the colour fading from his face, which her first enthusiastic exclamation had brought there. "Don't conjure the evil spirit back again which I hope is dead, which you attacked with your two-edged sword." He laid his hand on his breast-pocket, as he added—"I took your letter with me to Wolkershausen; it is well written, Juliane—so well and movingly written that it will act as an anathema against any masculine conceit and self-consciousness that may henceforth crop up in me. You have a clear, reasoning head, and I think you are right in many things, only I won't acknowledge that it is necessary to be poor to find out that a peaceful home-life is in itself

the sweetest happiness one could wish for."

As he spoke he absently turned over the leaves of his manuscript, from which two or three loose sheets fluttered to the ground. He picked them up quickly, and exclaimed—

"Why, what have we here?"

"Ah, just imagine," replied Liane, glancing at the pages and laughing; "your charming descriptions had such an effect on me, that I involuntarily seized my pencil, and began illustrating them."

"What a sure hand you have, Juliane; they are beautifully drawn! It is really wonderful. You have realized the scenes as well as if you had written a description of them, and not I, and your pencil has faithfully followed me in every movement, even to the smallest detail; and such a

splendid conception of the various minutiæ of my descriptions renders you my superior." He spoke acidly, as if vexed, and with a regretful tone in his voice. "What do you say to our becoming partners, Juliane? That is, I write and you illustrate?" he added in a brighter tone.

"Very willingly indeed — send me as many notes of your travels as you like——"

"Send them to a wife who is separated from me?"

She started at this unexpected interruption. In her heart she longed to reply, "Our intercourse here in Schönwerth is abnormal; we ought to share each others joys and sorrows, and have perfect confidence one in the other. You ought to be my protector, and yet you let me be wounded and insulted at every turn, without making the slightest effort to interfere

for my welfare. That relationship is to me unnatural, and I prefer withdrawing from it, and risking what the world may choose to say about it;" but she kept those thoughts to herself, and said gently—

"I am quite sure that he who writes, and she who illustrates his writing, can very easily make each other understand all that is necessary to be done by means of letters. Besides, then no one can accuse us of separating on terms of deadly enmity, especially if we thus keep up a kind of friendly intercourse between us, and——"

"How can you dare imagine, or propose such a thing to me? I tell you I *won't* have your friendship," he cried furiously, as he sprang from his chair. "Very well —my castle in the air has been knocked down, and I have had to drink a deep draught of bitterness; but I belong to

those who would fifty times rather starve than beg."

Perhaps the forester's wife heard his raised voice through her open window, and feared a stormy scene was about to ensue between the young couple, for she appeared at the cottage door at that moment, and in a loud whisper called and beckoned to little Leo to come to her, she wanted to show him the foal at the back of the house. She pitied the child almost more than the father and his wife.

Raoul took a turn up and down the pathway, and gazed for a few moments at the yellow flowers edging a cabbage-bed, before he slowly walked back to the table, where his young wife sat with her trembling hands clasped together on the packet of papers.

"Has everything gone on all right at

the castle during my absence?" he asked, forcing himself to outward calmness, and tapping the plates as he spoke with his fingers.

"I have nothing of any importance to tell you; all is the same, except that Gabriel is always in tears at his speedy departure, and Frau Löhn seems in sad trouble about it too, and very excited."

"Löhn? What has she to do with it? And what on earth makes you have an idea that anything could excite that woman? What a strange way you have, Juliane, of looking upon the least thing that happens here in Schönwerth! As to Löhn—the unwomanly hard-hearted stock—she has no nerves, and I daresay thanks God every hour of the day that she is to be rid of the boy at last——"

"I won't believe that for one moment."

"Ah! you think she has a soft, sensitive nature, just as you imagine that that sleepy idle boy has the genius of a Michael Angelo, or some such worthy."

She shrunk from his cold, sneering manner, and his utter indifference at causing her pain; but she was determined not to be tempted into quarrelling with him.

"I have no recollection of comparing Gabriel to any of the great masters," she answered, raising her eyes earnestly to his face; "I only said that I was sure he has a great talent for painting, and that I repeat now, for it is my firm conviction that the boy has marvellous artistic powers."

"Bah! Who will stifle them then? If it is as you say, then the very best place for him is the cloister. Painters have

often had their ranks swelled by renowned monks. Besides, what the devil does it matter? Neither I nor my uncle have decided on a religious calling for the lad; we only follow faithfully the last will and wish of a dying man."

"Have you really read and carefully examined the will?"

He started, and his eyes glowed with fire, as, looking into her face, he held up his finger, and said in a compressed voice,

"Take care, Juliane, take care! It seems to me as if you are insinuating a stain on the honour of the house you are turning your back on; as if you would like to say, 'I allow that the sequestration of our lands and goods is a flaw on the shield of the present generation of Trachenbergs, but over there, in Castle Schönwerth, with

all their riches and pride, there is a dark secret lurking behind, and all is not as it should be.' And to this thought I reply, 'My uncle is miserly; he is as haughty and arrogant as the devil; has his little private weaknesses towards those who work for him, but with his prudent, far-seeing head, and his passionless nature, which has never known the torments of desiring that which was forbidden, he has ever been one of the most honourable men possible: in that respect I would trust him blindly and unconditionally, and look upon any one who suggested he was likely to even *tolerate* a dishonourable action as wishing to insult my own personal honour; and as to falsifying or tampering with a dying man's last written wishes——' I warn you, Juliane, to be careful."

Then after a moment's pause, he added, lightly,

"And now I think it's time we went home. The rustling up there over head is ominous; it is so hot that, although we are in September, a storm might overtake us. Our return home, Juliane, won't be as bright and so full of welcome as you have been describing to me about Rudisdorf; but what does that matter, eh? One must start thither some time. Come, let us go."

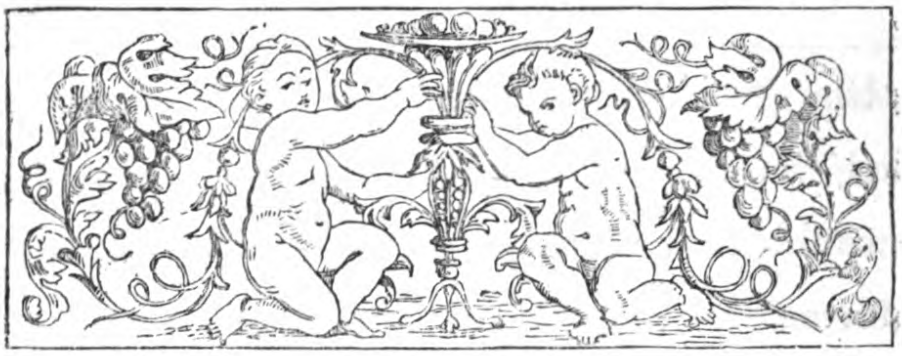
She turned silently away and entered the house to call Leo. Her whole nature rebelled at the cruel sneering tone he adopted towards her, and her frame shook with suppressed feeling.

"Liane, he is a horror!" Ulrike had cried out on her wedding-day, in the agony of parting with her young sister.

What would she say now, if she could hear him speak in that mocking, cold voice, and see the indifferent gesture and manner he always employed when with her? and yet—yet, strange to say, she felt wounded and sorrowful, more for *his* sake than for her own, and she felt deeply moved at the injustice of his accusation; but now that she had read his manuscript, and knew the man's nature was deep and earnest, it pained her that he should assume an outward tone of indifference; it wronged himself.

Unless she had thought this, how could she have had the courage to offer him her friendship, have expressed a wish to hear from him when she had separated herself from him, perhaps for ever? And she hid her glowing face in her hands, as the remembrance crossed her that this friend-

ship he had repulsed and refused, and in angry tones informed her that he would *never* accept it from her on any terms.



## CHAPTER X.

DARK, heavy clouds gloomed overhead as the little party left the forest, and approached the gamekeeper's cottage. Raoul, who had gone on ahead without speaking, now expressed his opinion that they had all better tarry in the cottage till the storm was over; but his wife urged their proceeding homewards at once, as the Hofmarschall would be anxious on Leo's account; so with hurried steps

they walked through the garden, and when they reached the fruit plantation, the wind was dashing the leaves about in wild confusion, and the fruit off the trees to the ground.

When they neared the Castle, they met one of the stable-boys, and Raoul stamped his foot with impatience, as the boy informed him that the Duchess, with one of her ladies, was up at the house, where she had sought shelter from the overhanging storm, and that the horses had been sent to the stables.

"Now shan't I have a sweet 'home-coming'? Could it be possible to have a more agreeable or more delightful welcome?" asked Raoul, mockingly, as bending towards his wife, he pointed to the broad flight of steps not far off.

The Duchess had just hastily come out

through the glass-door, the wind violently tossing about her long black hair, and tearing at the white ostrich feather in her hat. She wore a dark blue riding-habit, the skirt of which fell in heavy folds around her feet, as she clung with both hands to the balustrade, and stared with such wondering, doubtful eyes, at the advancing pair, that she seemed to forget to acknowledge Baron Mainau's low bow. Drawing herself proudly to her full height, she turned quickly, and re-entered the room, where, a few minutes later, the newly-arrived couple found her leaning back comfortably in an arm-chair, talking to her Court Chaplain and the Hofmarschall.

The clouds hung so low and heavy outside that the large spacious room was gloomy and dark; the pictures on the walls shook and trembled as the wind swept

round the terrace, and the gypse ornaments paled like ghosts in the fast-increasing obscurity; but still paler and more gloomy was the face of the royal lady, with its scornful thin lips; and her eyes, which shone like blazing coals from under her green felt hat, made the dying light of the apartment appear darker and drearier by contrast. She returned Liane's graceful bow by a haughty inclination of her head.

"What next whim will you indulge in, Raoul?" cried the Hofmarschall angrily, as his nephew approached. "To leave your horses and carriage to chance, for a sentimental walk through the forest! Do you know that a serious accident has very nearly happened by your carelessness? How could you do such a stupid thing as leave those wild Wolkershausen horses in the hands of that donkey André! They

ran off with him, and he arrived home here more dead than alive with fright."

"Ridiculous! he has had them a thousand times before under his charge. I dare say they shied at the mill-stone again. Besides, allow me to observe that my return through the forest had nothing to do with any 'sentimental nonsense.' I had no desire for a sunstroke seated up there on the coach-box, so I strolled through the shade under the trees."

"And you, my dear young lady, did your best to spend the afternoon *alone*, walking to that forester's house you pretend such an affection for," said the old man in a cutting, sneering tone to Liane, without taking the trouble to turn his head towards her. "But I must beg that you don't consider my grandchild as Trachenberg property, to be disposed of according

to *your* wish and will. I have been anxious about him for hours."

"I am very sorry for that, Herr Hofmarschall," replied Liane quietly, taking no notice of the old gentleman's impertinent remark.

The Duchess seemed suddenly to become brighter. She drew Leo close to her and kissed him.

"But he has come back all right, my dear Herr von Mainau," she said soothingly.

Leo dragged himself away from the "prince's mamma," whom he "could not bear," as he had once declared, and going to a table in front of her, he took up her riding-whip and began playing with it. The knob at the top was an exquisite shaped tiger's head, in gold, with brilliants for eyes.

"This whip is the same as the one in the picture that papa has on his table," cried the child, referring to the large photograph of the Duchess that his father had once shown Liane; "but it's not there any longer I know," and he switched the whip through the air; "all the other pictures are gone, too, and where they hung the wall is still clean and red, a beautiful red; and that ugly blue shoe is also gone——"

"Ah, ha! Baron Mainau, have you had tabula rasa?" asked the Duchess, gasping for breath. "Have you put away all these reminiscences of your youth into *one* corner?" The unbending, indomitable pride of the reigning princess was marked in her bearing; but in her half-whispered voice there sounded a world of fear, and anxiety, and excited tension.

She knew Baron Mainau's private room

very well, for in the time of the late wife she had often passed through the suite of apartments when honouring with her presence their various entertainments.

He stood near her, with a quiet, half-amused expression beaming from his eyes as he met her passionate gaze.

"I can assure your highness that they are all very carefully packed away," he said; "I am going on a long journey, and had no wish to leave these 'reminiscences' to be covered with dust and consigned to the careless hands of servants."

"But, papa, you have put *my* picture in the place where the old shoe stood," remarked Leo, persistently; "and over it hangs the beautiful new picture mamma painted."

Not at the Duchess, not at his uncle, did Raoul look as the child uttered these

words ; but with a swift, sudden movement he turned his head and glanced at his young wife with a pained, angry expression in his countenance, that *she* should have heard what little Leo had said.

"So you took possession of the picture, Raoul ?" cried his uncle good-humouredly. "I must confess that I rather doubted your wife's assertion that she had not taken the picture back again ; I beg your pardon, madam, for the doubt." He nodded with mocking politeness towards Liane. "Well, as far as I am concerned I am glad you have it, Raoul. Let it remain in that window-corner ! But do you know the price the artist valued it at herself ? Forty thalers——"

"I must beg very distinctly, uncle, that you allow me to value the compensation," interrupted Raoul, angrily, at which the

old man frowned, for he feared his nephew when he spoke in that determined voice and manner.

The Duchess and her lady sat silent during this interchange of sharp words between the two men; but the Priest rose, and leaning against the back of his chair, folded his arms and stared with a deep demoniacal evil glare at the younger baron, as if he could detect and discover some fearful hidden mystery in his every word and movement.

"Good gracious, Raoul!" cried the old man at last; "don't be vexed about nothing. Why should you put yourself out like that? I only wanted justice to be done."

Raoul looked at his uncle steadily for a moment as he replied :—

"That I believe; only you have some-

times a strange way of expressing it. No one would swear to your sense of honour sooner than I would. You are the only living Mainau in whom I firmly and implicitly believe; with all the pride of the honour of our house. *A propos*, talking of that, would you let me have a look at the papers Uncle Gisbert wrote when he was ill and could not speak? I was constantly reminded of him in Wolkershausen by that oil-painting of him there. It is in a shamefully dirty condition, and I mean to have it restored; and by means of those papers he can still speak to us."

"Yes; I will give them to you; you don't wish for them now, do you?"

"They are in the rococo cabinet there, are they not?" He pointed to the piece of furniture as he spoke. "If you would kindly open the——"

The Hofmarschall rose and slowly crept across the room, then opening the costly carved drawer where the Countess Trachenberg's note was lying, he took the pink bit of paper daintily between his fingers, and with a fiendish laugh, held it before the Duchess, saying :—

"A charming souvenir, your highness ; a mere rosy remembrance—nothing more—yet it is worth thousands to me !"

He cast it back in its place, and taking a thick roll of papers tied round with a black tape, he said, as he handed it to his nephew :—

"There, my boy !"

The young man unfastened the tape and the papers fell loose on the table.

"Ah ! here is the document referring to Gabriel," he said, as he took out a small folded strip from inside the packet. "I

suppose it was the last written wish of the dying man respecting the boy ?"

"It was his last will," replied the Hofmarschall, embarrassed, as he hobbled back to his chair.

Raoul sorted several of the papers, and laying them side by side on the table, he remarked :—

"It is really wonderful! Look here, this last document was written, I have been told, only two or three hours before his death, and yet it is the same prim crabbed handwriting as the others—not a bit changed or shaky, every comma and stop as clear and correct as in all the rest—the grip of death certainly had no power to alter the firmness of his hand. It is well it was so, otherwise this document, written without any witnesses to prove its identity, might easily have been doubted."

The Duchess's curiosity was roused. She took the paper from Raoul's hand, and examined it carefully.

"A characteristic hand, but very difficult to decipher," she said. "'I have destined the boy Gabriel expressly for a religious life; he must pray in a cloister for his deeply-erring mother,'" she read aloud, slowly.

"Would you not like to look at this very interesting document, Juliane, written by the hand of a dying man?" asked Raoul naturally of his young wife, who was leaning against the back of a chair a little apart from the rest of the group.

She would not look at him; she knew he was doing his best to shame her for the question she asked him in the forest. Not one amongst those round the table could possibly divine that each word of

this scene was accomplishing her husband's purpose, and cutting into her soul like a red-hot knife. . Why, why had she been so rash as to put forth her hand and draw aside the curtain Frau Löhn had for years discreetly kept drawn ?

He held the two papers before her, which she mechanically took, and began examining with studied attention. They were, indeed, both alike, similar in every respect ; the same letters, the same flourish at the ending of the words, and the writing itself was too peculiar, too characteristic, for any one to dream of falsifying it, and yet . . . .

A servant entered the room, bearing in his hand a silver tray with a card on it, which he handed to the young Baron, and thus for a moment put an end to Liane's awkward embarrassment.

"Ah, to be sure!" cried the Hofmarschall, putting his hand to his forehead; "I quite forgot, Raoul. About an hour ago a carriage arrived, from which a young man alighted, with all the coolness and independence of a person who meant to remain. He announced that he had come according to your wish, and but for the unexpected honour of receiving her Highness, I should have sent for him to know what he really wanted."

"That I may as well tell you, uncle. He is Leo's new tutor," replied Raoul, indifferently, as he arranged the papers one on the other.

The Hofmarschall stooped forward as if he had not heard aright.

"My dear Raoul, I must have misunderstood you," he said, slowly emphasizing each word. "Did you really say Leo's

new tutor? Good God! have I, then, been asleep for months, or been ill with a fever, that I know nothing of this?"

Raoul's moustache curled sarcastically as he replied—

"The affair has not been arranged for months, uncle. The young man was long ago recommended to me, and now that I just happened to want him I sent for him. Happily he was free, and could undertake the work, and having nothing to do, he has arrived a couple of days sooner than I mentioned, for which I am vexed, as otherwise I should have announced his arrival in due form to you; at least the day before I expected him."

"It would not have altered my determination, and that is, that this young man does *not* remain here."

Raoul had arranged the papers, and was

about to put them back in their place, when his uncle made this highly impertinent remark. He stood still as if rooted to the spot, but the face he turned to the Hofmarschall was so white and drawn with anger, that the ladies looked at each other in fear and anxiety. But the old man was not daunted; he was too furious from the rage he was in himself to care for the effect his words might have on his nephew, and as he passed his white fingers restlessly in and out the purple silk handkerchief which lay on his knee, he added—

"And may I beg to know what was the motive which led you to this sudden step?"

"That you might know for yourself, uncle," replied Raoul, mastering his anger and speaking contemptuously. "I am going to travel for a year and a day. I am sure

that has been spoken of and discussed enough. The Baroness returns to Rudisdorf, so cannot teach Leo any longer." As these cold words fell slowly from his lips, the Duchess raised her head, and darted a cruel look of triumph across at Liane, who still stood quietly apart by the chair; "and what has perhaps decided me in this affair is, that I cannot possibly expect her Highness's Court Chaplain to come to and fro to Schönwerth in the winter to teach Leo religion."

"Bah! what nonsense! that I won't believe; and you know *that* had nothing to do with it. On the contrary, you know that the good, kind Chaplain begged to be allowed, only a short while ago, to undertake the entire education of the child."

"Ah, yes, I remember he did," replied Raoul, dryly; "but as you know my dis-

like to all that is false in nature and the world, you won't be astonished at my refusing to accept so much kindness and self-sacrifice."

"Herr Baron!" exclaimed the Chaplain.

"Well, Sir Priest?" asked Raoul, in return, as he shot a glance of defiance at the priest.

This was more than the passionate, black-robed man could endure. He darted forward with an impetuous movement, but the Hofmarschall held him back with both hands, and entreated him to resume his seat.

"Raoul, I don't understand you! How can you malign the chaplain in this way, and that too in the presence of her highness, the Duchess?" cried the old man, livid with rage.

"Malign? Have I then spoken of false

wills, or such things as that? I ask you yourself, is it possible for one in his position to teach things as *they are?* Would he not be obliged to obstinately deny many things that are as clear as daylight, that are as simple as that twice two make four, and ever will be so, if he adheres to his own basis? Wouldn't he have the heavenly bodies stand still, whom the Eternal Creator has ordained to go on? and all the great events of the earth, wouldn't he much rather attribute them to the influence of good and bad demons, than to the power and genius of man's mind? And doesn't he set a higher value on a procession or holy pilgrimage, than on the physician's science and skill, or on all the known means of healing? Yes, even above divine wisdom itself, inasmuch as he seeks to change to his own purpose the eternal laws of nature."

The Hofmarschall clasped his hands in speechless horror, and sank back in his chair.

"For God's sake stop, Raoul, I never heard you speak like this before."

"No," he answered, shrugging his shoulders, "you are right; I have never meddled much with these things; but one gets angry at the weak arguments and weaker weapons of an opponent who, in his distress, retires behind his shield with the device, 'With God nothing is impossible.' Besides, who would let himself be bothered with such black wasps buzzing in his ears, if he loved God's beautiful world, and wished to enjoy it? I have been slightly roused out of my apathy on these subjects, by the narrow escape my child ran of blindness, in that project of blowing up the witch of the Indian House. I have no confidence

in the religious teaching which allows such ideas to run riot in a child's mind, and I think that as there are so many older people on the face of the earth, who cannot be made better, it would be as well to begin early with the youngest head."

"But how unjust, Baron Mainau! And that's what you really think of saintly simplicity?" broke in the bigoted lady of honour. "You yourself once said that it was this same simplicity that you so admired in women, did you not?"

"Yes, and I say it again now, madame," he replied, in his usual mocking, frivolous tone. "A beautiful even, white forehead, which never ponders or speculates, ornamented with silky hair, and a soft, rosy mouth, which only utters sweet nothings. Ah! how delicious! Yes, indeed, such women I adore; but I can't say that I prefer them."

"And when the silky hair grows white, and the rosy, sweet mouth, has lost its beauty, then the plaything is put in the corner. Is it so, Baron Mainau?" asked the Duchess sharply, as with a graceful movement she slid the riding-whip across the table, and let the light shine on the brilliant eyes of the tiger head.

"Could it be otherwise with such women, madame?" he asked, with a smile.

"Ah, then is the time to call in the aid of Latin, botany, and the other studies which a girl is made to learn so unwillingly at school," replied the royal lady, laughing. "I have been told that I am somewhat quick and apt; perhaps the desire to acquire knowledge has developed itself each year—and— What should you say, Baron Mainau, if, when you return from your travels, I welcome you with a Latin

greeting, and invite you into my laboratory to show you all sorts of wonderful scientific experiments ?"

"God forbid ! A blue-stocking, with untidy toilette, and uncombed hair !" replied Raoul, joining in her merriment. "I have a horror of such women, Your Highness ; but I can imagine a woman looking earnestly into the wonders of nature, whose instinct prompts her, as it does some men, to study for herself the cause and wherefore of the mysteries of the earth and its surroundings, and yet she will not allow herself to be absorbed by her love of study, knowing that her duty as a woman is to guide the home life, fan the love of her household into a flame, and with gentle, caressing, but strong arms, hold together the peace and happiness of her family."

"My dear Baron Mainau, you might

perhaps find a renowned artist who could *paint* you such a woman," remarked the lady of honour, with a sarcastic titter, as the Duchess, with an impatient movement, rose from her seat.

When Raoul and the priest began speaking with warm words to each other, Liane put her arm round little Leo's shoulder, and led him aside to the bow window at the end of the room.

Outside, the heavy clouds had burst in one deluge of rain, and broad white streams of water poured in furious and noisy haste down the window panes. The trees in the distance looked like ghosts exorcised on the spot, endeavouring to fly away, so bent were their heads by the raging wind, and so dark and damp was the atmosphere through which they swayed to and fro, and everywhere on the pathways and gravel

walks, large pools of water had gathered, unable to sink into the ground, from the force with which the rain fell.

For some time now the lightning had ceased to enliven with its vivid flashes this damp, dreary landscape; but over there, at the table on which the young wife had turned her back, another storm seemed to be increasing. Could it be that this capricious man had really suddenly awoke to the responsibility of a guardianship he had hitherto silently ignored, because he preferred enjoying his life? Was it a caprice like that which had tempted him to marry a Protestant, fortuneless wife, or was it a decided conviction arising from some inward change?

Liane would not turn round, not even when she heard a chair violently pushed back, and the firm, commanding step of the

Court Chaplain directed towards the glass door, and not even when her husband shut down the rococo cabinet with a loud bang. At the same moment the rustling of a long skirt drew near, a sweet jonquil perfume—the favourite perfume of the Duchess—was wafted in the air around her, and suddenly an arm clasped the rounded waist of the young Baroness.

"You have a charming figure and manner, my beautiful Baroness," hissed the Duchess in her ear; "but don't take any trouble. . . I take that on me with these white, soft, but strong arms of mine. You *shall* succumb. Your hopes must founder on this inexorable journey."

The lips which spoke were white as death, and drawn tight together, with a fearful expression in the eyes, that made the face look like a Medusa's, and frightened the

young wife, till she turned cold as a stone.

"Let mamma alone, you are hurting her," exclaimed Leo, pushing himself close to Liane; but the Duchess had already drawn back.

"Ah, take care, my little man. How could I find it in my heart to do such a thing?" she said, laughing aloud as she walked across to the pier-glass on the other side of the large room, and putting back her hat, fastened her hair more securely, that its rich luxuriance might not be exposed to the heavy wind and rain. Her lady went over and offered her help, but it was not accepted.

Liane slowly left the window-niche and walked into the middle of the room, her pulse beating fast and her step uncertain from the effects of the fright the strange

hissing words of the Duchess had given her.

"Don't you let that woman touch you—I forbid it," said her husband, in a stifled voice, as he came near her.

No one else heard what he whispered but his wife, and she involuntarily stood still and looked at him.

"Good heavens! what weather!" exclaimed the Duchess, who had her back turned to the room; but her face frowned darkly as she looked through the glass. "My Arminius will have to remain here all night—and—will you have the kindness to lend me a carriage, Baron Mainau? I *must* go back; it is already getting very late."

"Certainly; I will drive Your Highness myself," replied Raoul. "I dare not trust my dapple-grey horses in any other hands,

they are so intractable," he added, as he begged her highness to excuse him a moment, while he went to welcome his son's new tutor.

Just as if nothing had happened, the royal lady seated herself by the side of the Hofmarschall, and chatted pleasantly to him about various things, occasionally addressing the Chaplain, who was still in his place, till Raoul appeared, wrapped in a waterproof cloak, and announced that the carriage was waiting below at the steps, and that he was ready to drive her highness to the palace as soon as she felt inclined to start.

"Will you come too?" This to the priest, with a gracious smile.

But he excused himself on the ground that he had promised the Hofmarschall to play chess with him in the evening; and

he quietly drew back, as Raoul opened the glass-door at his elbow with considerable noise and clanging.

The beautiful princess bowed low her farewell, and gracefully swept from the room on Mainau's arm.

As soon as she was gone, the Hofmarschall crept back to his chair, and, in a surly, ungracious voice, said, as he sunk back among his pillows—

"Please shut that door, Herr Hofprediger. You ought not to have opened it at all, my dear friend. Of course, as the Duchess was there and did not seem to mind it, I could say nothing; but that cold, miserable air cuts me through and through like steel. I know I shall be ill to-morrow, from all the anger and rage which still clutches at my throat. Will you kindly push my chair into my warm

bedroom? and I will stay there and calm myself, till this room is warm after the stove has been lit. It feels to me bitterly cold. Come, Leo, you must go with me," he called out to the child, who was sitting on Liane's lap.

"I would rather stay with mamma; she is so lonely, grandpapa," replied the boy.

"Your mamma is never alone—she receives the 'spirits of nature,' and does not need us," insisted the old gentleman. "Come here, I tell you!"

And he seized the unwilling boy by the arm, and led him with him as the priest pushed his chair across the room and out at the door leading to the corridor.

## CHAPTER XI.

THE young wife returned to her position by the window. She could hear the faint sound of the wheels as the carriage rolled away in the distance—the same carriage with the white satin lining and dapple-grey horses which had conveyed her from the station to Schönwerth on her wedding day, but which now contained the beautiful Medusa-faced princess, who loved

Baron Mainau with a passionate intense longing, who for his sake laid aside her pride and royal dignity, and when in his presence seemed to forget everything else around her; but that she was a suffering adoring woman, full of hot and glowing jealousy.

Why had he brought the young girl from Rudisdorf and chained her to his side, when he would have been received with open welcoming arms by this higher-born lady? With her he might have been happy, for *she* was not indifferent to him; and as Liane's thoughts turned to the meeting in the forest on her wedding-day, she was unwillingly obliged to confess to herself that—there was a mystery about it that she did not understand.

"Your efforts will be wrecked in this inexorably fixed journey," the Duchess had

hissed in her ear. She could still feel the hot breath of the drawn lips tingling against her throat; but what efforts were to be wrecked? She had made every effort to fulfil her duties; but thank God! her pride was intact so far; she had not—no, not even by the movement of a finger—made the least effort to win her husband's *love;* on that point the royal lady had erred considerably. But she was right in her assertion, that this journey would completely dissever the knot that was already so loosely worn between them, even if Liane regretted her determination of quitting Schönwerth for ever. But still it was very precipitate! And if at the end of a year and a day he did return, by that time the outside world would have ceased to remember that a Countess Trachenberg

had once lived a few weeks in Schönwerth, and then gone away again in order to escape the daily sorrows and trials that were too heavy a burden for her to bear—and he? he too would have learned to forget this wretched episode in his life, and be willing at last to take the hand in his which was stretched out towards him with such burning longing.

Involuntarily the young wife clasped her hands together and pressed them against her heart. Why was it that she started with a sudden inexplicable pain? Was it so very terrible to be rejected for another? She thought of the moment when he had forbidden her to let the Duchess touch her again? What motive could he have had for so acting? Surely not jealousy, for he could not have envied her—his wife—such kindness. And she

hid her face in her hands as a miserable weakness crept over her.

Slowly she left the window, and walked across the room to go into her own apartment. As she passed the inlaid writing-table, she stood suddenly still, as if rooted to the spot, for in the drawer she noticed the key. Raoul had evidently forgotten to take it out, and the Hofmarschall, in "his anger and rage," had not given it a thought.

Liane's heart beat so loud she could hear it vibrating against her side, for inside that drawer was the paper on which Gabriel's fate and future depended, and she longed to take it out and read it again. She knew perfectly well that such documents often required more searching examination than the naked eye could give.

But the "costly cabinet" must be opened

if she wished to have the paper; it was not her property, and the key had been left there by inadvertence. Would it be dishonourable, under these circumstances, to take advantage of the opportunity, and extract the paper? No; had not her husband himself spoken of these papers, and begged her to look at them again on purpose to inflict on her the pain of proving their genuineness?

With a sudden impulse she opened the drawer; the first thing her hand touched was the rosy delicate note from her mother, which the Hofmarschall valued beyond price; and, as if a viper had stung her, she drew back for a moment; then, seizing one paper from the packet fastened round with tape, she saw at a glance it was the one she sought, and, hastily thrusting it into her pocket, she closed the writing-

table, and breathlessly flew from the room into her own apartments.

Once there, she took out her microscope —the faithful friend of her botanical studies —and put the paper under its truth-telling glass. She gave one glance, and then started back trembling all over with excitement, for there before her eyes lay revealed a glaring and terrible fraud.

Each letter had been first carefully written with a pencil, but what the naked eye could not see, was, that each thick stroke of the pen had a kind of shadow by its side, and where the ink stroke was light, the pencil mark underneath shone clearly and distinctly through. It must have been a work requiring great patience, for the forger had been obliged to add letters copied from other papers of the

same handwriting to form the words he wanted to use.

Who had done it? and why? The paper had been written without any proper witnesses, consequently the motive for its falsification must have been merely to add a moral weight and force to the only voice who had any right to command in the matter, and that voice was—Raoul's. He had told her himself once that at first he had decidedly taken the boy's side. Was it a question of mere money and land, or had religious fanaticism anything to do with it? . . . There stood the words, "She *must* and *ought* to be baptised for the salvation of her soul."

With a throbbing head, feverish hands, and a nervous shiver in every limb, Liane threw herself on the couch to grow calm and think before she ran the risk of meet-

ing any one of the household. Raoul's was, however, such a noble nature, to shake his righteous conviction one would have to employ a little ruse; but to make him do an *actual* wrong, it would be necessary to approach him with a mask.

The paper must first be put back in its place, for she could only make use of her discovery if she took it from the drawer *before* his eyes; and the corners of her mouth worked convulsively as she thought that he would rather suspect her, the new comer, the one who had dared insinuate a doubt of its genuineness, than believe that such things could take place within his castle, where honour, uprightness, and integrity had ever been enthroned.

She rose from her recumbent attitude, and lightly and swiftly returned to the drawing-room. There the heavy damask

curtains were closed which hung in front of the window-niche, and the glass-door was hidden behind thick oak folding-shutters, which completely kept out the cold.

The tea-table was arranged for the evening meal. In the centre of the table, covered with a pure white cloth, the lamp burned under a soft green shade, throwing rather a sombre light over the room and its cushioned furniture; but in the corner where the stove stood, the logs of wood burned brightly in the open oven, and cast a red, blazing light on the floor and carpet around.

Liane gave a shy, quick glance over the room, to assure herself that she was alone, and then quietly went over to the inlaid cabinet, opened the lid, and was just putting the paper into the middle of those she had taken it from, when her hand was

suddenly seized as it lay in the drawer, and held fast.

She had not strength to cry out; the blood rushed so fast to her heart, she thought she should die from fright; and, terrified out of her senses, she looked up and saw, standing close to her—the priest!

Before she had time to recover from her terror at his unexpected appearance, he put his arm round her waist, drew her half-fainting form to his breast, and covered the hand he still held in his with burning, passionate kisses.

"Don't be frightened, dear lady! I alone saw the act; there is no one else in the room," he whispered, soothingly, in her ear.

But his voice roused her, and brought her to herself. She wrenched herself from

his grasp, and flinging his hand away, in a wavering, hoarse voice, demanded—

"What have you seen?" Then, drawing up her figure, she added, proudly, "Do these drawers contain gold, or silver, or precious stones? Did you think I was—stealing?"

"How could I imagine such a thought would arise behind that queenly brow? Sooner would I sully the memory of my mother with such an unworthy thought as your pure, heavenly soul—believe me! Perhaps you will hardly understand or credit what I say—as, but for your filial affection, you would not be here. Who would reproach you for wishing to annihilate the little note which caused you so much pain and humiliation the other day?"

He took the letter from its case, and added—

"Together let us burn this rosy proof of your mother's error!"

Quick as lightning, she snatched the letter from his hand and flung it back in its place.

"Is not *that* stealing? Is it addressed to me?" she cried, angrily. "It remains where it is. I cannot efface my mother's error by a wrong."

She stepped away from where she stood, and went round to the other side of the table, to put as much space as possible between her and the man who had dared to touch her with so much as a finger; and the green light from the lamp-shade fell on her noble, womanly profile, and made her face look, in its superb pride, as if it had been cut in a cameo; for had he not just endeavoured to put a yoke round her neck?

But for her energy—but for that sudden daring movement of hers in snatching the letter away from his hand, she would irretrievably have lost her honour; and, with a bitter look of contempt, she said, as she fixed her eyes on him—

"How have you the face to tempt me to such a dastardly act?"

"You mistake my motives, and oppose yourself to me whenever you can," he replied, in bitter disappointment. And the tone of his voice had a genuine ring of deep feeling in it, that even Liane could not help acknowledging to herself was not assumed, as he added, after a moment—"And yet you have no truer friend on earth than I am."

"I have two friends—my brother and sister—and I desire no other friendship," she returned.

He clasped his two hands on his breast as if he had been shot, as these cold, repulsing words fell on his ear, and stepping nearer towards her, his eyes strangely gleaming, he said, in a hoarse voice—

"Here in Schönwerth, madam, you ought not to utter such proud, damaging words. Here, where you have not taken root; where you are as a ball tossed about by each breath of wind-——"

"But, thank God, not a hair's-breadth of my inward convictions has been altered!"

"But what will the world care about that? The world who will whisper and smile at such humiliating facts as your peculiar position in this house, and the reason for your becoming Baroness von Mainau!"

The colour fled from her cheek, and she was still paler than before, as she asked, in a trembling voice—

"Why do you tell me that? But, never mind, I know very well 'the reason' I am here: that I may be a mother to Leo and mistress in this bereaved house—a position which is in no wise unworthy of my womanly feelings," she added, with a proud, haughty bearing, and tranquil manner.

Her calmness irritated and embittered him.

"If you only held the position in reality!" he replied, rashly. "But, unfortunately, the absence of a mistress in this castle is very rarely perceived. The events of the last few years, and the honourable manners of the Hofmarschall, have made the presence of a dame d'hon-

neur at his entertainments perfectly unnecessary. He understands the control and expenditure of the household better, perhaps, than a lady ; and Leo is destined for the army, and will naturally have to leave Schönwerth and the protection of his mother very early. So that the reasons you state could hardly have been taken into consideration when Baron Mainau determined to marry again. No, madam ; rather let me tell you the reason. It was from a motive of *revenge*—pure, burning revenge. I don't know if the sensibility of a woman can be hurt by informing her that she has been married for the sole and only reason of punishing another, that that other might suffer torture in a form and manner that only a woman's more refined and cruel nature could devise."

Liane's large grey eyes stared at the

priest as if she were deprived of her senses; but this very look, in its unconcealed terror, only made the man feel more embittered, and he went on recklessly—

"All who know Baron Mainau are aware that everything he does, everything he says, is done or said for effect. Now listen, and you shall hear how he went to work here! When he was quite a young man, he passionately loved a lady of very high rank, and she returned his love with just as much warmth and fire; however, by the influence of her relations, she was forced to renounce him and accept the hand of the man who had the highest rank in the land. Perhaps Baron Mainau was not so very wrong when he called this guilty faithlessness; but every one else was pleased to say that it was a terrible self-sacrifice for duty's sake. Well, death

stepped in a few years after, and made the lady—who had never loved her husband—a free woman again. And one fine morning this poor sufferer, in ermine and purple, rose from her bed, determined to throw aside all her royal grandeur, and at the last hour become a loving and beloved wife, and—be happy; but who would think of counting on the purpose and design of Baron Mainau? During the term of this high-born lady's mourning, he had been amiable, and pleasant, and unconstrained in all his relations with her—even devilishly allowing himself to encourage all her hopes—till the moment arrived when, full of burning love and sacred hope, she awaited his demand for her hand; and then, in the presence of her whole court, in cold blood, he announced to her that he was engaged to—

Juliane, Countess von Trachenberg. There was a splendid unheard-of effect! it was more—it was a Satanic triumph!"

While the black-robed priest was speaking, Liane pressed her hands together on the top of the writing-table, and leant her forehead on her clasped fingers. She longed to sink down into the earth and hide herself from the unsympathising presence of this man who wounded so terribly her family pride, her wifely dignity, and—yes, even her heart.

"What was to follow the comedy he had played, was perfectly indifferent to him," continued the priest in a rapid utterance, as if he coveted every flying moment that found him alone in the presence of this girl—alone without witnesses and without any protection. "As to any ideas of duty, this man had none in his soul, as

he proved by his disgraceful neglect of his first wife—a charming, loving, noble woman—" Liane raised her head now; he lied, this priest. She could not have been a *noble* woman, for she stamped her feet at the slightest contradiction, and threw knives and scissors at those who vexed her—" and he married her, took her to his bosom simply to show to the royal lady that he did not grieve over her faithlessness. But even her position was enviable in contrast to yours, dear madam, for though you both were sacrificed to his scandalous conceit, yet whereas she—the first wife—had her father to protect her, you—the second—have the Hofmarschall against you; nay, more, he is your direst enemy, for although he does not know that the consecration of this hated second marriage was the sealing of an unparalleled

act of revenge, he does know that the royal lady would move heaven and earth to be able *yet* to conquer and satisfy her love—to this end he is her sternest and warmest ally—for the genealogical table of the Mainaus would be crowned with glory if it could be written thereon that one of its descendants had allied himself to a royal lady."

"And I ask you again, why do you tell me all this?" she interrupted suddenly, with the same haughty tone and mien as before. "I am going away of my own free will, as every one knows. I shall not interfere with, or trouble the Duchess and her 'warmest ally;' but so long as I retain the name of Mainau, I will *not* allow the man to whom I am married to be defamed and slandered in my hearing, however guilty or in the wrong he may be. I must

beg you to remember that, reverend sir. Besides, I should be sorry to have to decide which was most open to censure—the thoughtlessness of the man of the world, or the levity of the priest, who, knowing as he did the mischief that was being done, could vehemently pray that the blessing of heaven might descend on such an unworthy act—the one was playing with women's hearts, as is often the habit with those of his class; but the other blasphemed God, inasmuch as he degraded the altar into a stage, and under the sanctity of his priestly office, performed the part of a successful actor." In her excitement and indignation she forgot all prudence, all thought of herself, as she continued in a heightened tone—"And this castle is as a precipice, near which, to my husband's honour be it said, he walks in

all unconsciousness, performing deeds of which he knows not the importance; he is even quite ignorant that the document by which he holds these lands, and in which he has firm faith, is a forgery——"

She ceased terrified, for the priest darted forward with an expressive gesture, as if something had suddenly struck him, and opening the inlaid cabinet as quick as lightning, he took the paper Liane had laid there not a quarter of an hour ago, and holding it to the light of the lamp, said—

"You mean *this* document, madame? I suppose the very learned reasoning lady put it under her microscope and found out——"

"That it was written in the first instance with a pencil," she added firmly.

"Quite right; each letter was carefully traced first with a pencil at the window-

pane, and then gone over with ink," he explained calmly and quietly. "I know exactly how it was done, and what a tedious troublesome work it was, for it was *I*—I myself—who composed and wrote that document. Oh! don't shudder like that with abhorrence, dear lady! Do you count it as nothing—does it not move you in the least—that I thus humble myself and acknowledge my work openly before you? You can touch this hand of mine without hesitation, and assure yourself that not for gold or lands, not for Indian wealth or power, did it lend itself to that work, but from a far higher and grander motive. Could I not just as successfully have added money or lands to my order when I was forging that document? Baron Mainau believes in the genuineness of that paper, and he would not have doubted such a

deposition if it had been written there. And the old gentleman, the Hofmarschall —well, for very good reasons he would have been *obliged* to believe it. But such a robbery was not my intention; I only desired possession of two souls—that the heathen mother's might be baptised, and the boy's be under control for the mission work. It is the fashion now to hate and persecute this noiseless resignation of a passionate man's heart and soul for the priestly calling, and to call it fanaticism, not remembering that iron bars to a fire-place cause the flames to mount upwards, and——"

"And burn heretics," broke in Liane, in an icy tone, as she turned away.

He crushed the paper in his hand as he murmured in a choked voice—

"They are not burned now." Then, as

if struggling with some inward emotion, he continued: "Not the most fervent prayer, nor the most desperate self-chastisement and mortification of the flesh, would induce them to begin that again; but I am consumed with another fire." He stretched out his hand, and held the crushed paper towards her. "You may accuse me of this forgery, dear lady; two words from your lips, and with this damning document in your hand, you can free Gabriel, and drag me down from the high office I hold, snatching from me all the power and influence I have in high places—do it! I will not resist, not even so much as by a winking of my eyelid. You may set upon me every one of my numerous enemies, only grant me one mercy, and that is, that when you quit Schönwerth, I may be allowed to live near you."

Liane looked at the priest as if petrified. "Was he mad?" she asked herself, as she drew her graceful, beautiful figure to its full height, and said—

"You forget, reverend sir, that although my brother is patron of the living of Rudisdorf, he only dare give it to a *Protestant* minister." Her voice was slightly trembling, and she smiled coldly from over her shoulder.

"The physiologist is right in saying that women, with that mass of glory on their heads, are capable of the coolest cruelty," he hissed from between his lips. "You are prudent and haughty, madam; more so, even, than is usual with those of noble birth, with the blood of princes running in their veins, and you think with a movement of your beautiful head to keep those in their place who belong to the dust

at your feet. You can do as you will with others, but not with *me*. I shall follow you step by step—be at your heels whichever way you turn, and not one inch will I draw back the hand I have stretched out to you; no, not even if I ruin you too. Repulse me, tread me under your feet, I will be patient, silent, defenceless; but you will not succeed in throwing me off. My Church expects that her priests watch and fast continually, that they never cease employing every power to the fulfilment of a purpose, burrowing under the earth like a mole in one place, and raising bridges in another; how much more, then—a thousand times more—would I not employ this cultivated patience and resignation until I accomplish my present hope and aim, and—you are *mine*."

She shuddered from head to foot as the

priest uttered these bold words. It was not her soul, then, that he wished to secure within the folds of his Church, but—herself; the woman whom he, perjured man as he was, dared to *love*. This sudden unexpected revelation sent the blood boiling to her head, to recede again as quickly, and leave her trembling with cold and horror; and yet, as is sometimes the case with terrible wrong-doing, the very intensity of the man's passion, the eloquence of the words which laid bare the suffering and sorrow and inward struggle of his soul, while it repulsed her, and made her turn from him in sickening terror, at the same time half-magnetized her, for never before had she heard such deep, passionate language from a man's lips.

Did he read in the expression of the sweet, ashy pale face the young wife turned

towards him this mixture of aversion and momentary half-unconscious admiration?

Suddenly, with an impassioned movement of his head, the Chaplain stretched out his arms and stepped towards her, bending low as if to clasp her knees in supplication. The green light from the shaded lamp fell fully on the pale oval of his face, and over the lifeless grey spot in the centre of the dark curly mass of hair, and appeared to her to point with a stern, invisible finger to this spot, as if it had been the mark of Cain. With a gesture of shrinking horror she flung her hands towards the kneeling form of the man at her feet, and cried out, in a voice almost inarticulate from emotion and agony—

"Forger! I would rather drown myself in the lake, than let you touch with a finger so much as the hem of my dress."

Then, drawing in her hands, she pressed

them close to her bosom, and seemed to hug herself together like a child who fears some terrible misfortune, yet dares not move from the spot. So long as that document remained in his hands she would not, dared not, go.

The priest slowly rose from off his knees, and in the sudden, breathless pause which followed the young wife's indignant cry, the rolling of carriage wheels was heard approaching, and almost immediately the hoofs of the dapple-grey horses resounded on the gravel. If Raoul was already back, he must have driven the animals at their topmost speed. When the priest recognized the sound outside, he stamped his foot and ground his teeth with rage, and turned his head towards the closed window, with an expression on his face that showed plainly that if it had been in his power, he

would have seized the first heavy implement at hand, and crushed the carriage and its occupant to atoms.

Liane heaved a deep sigh; she knew there was not a moment to be lost.

"I entreat you, Sir Priest, to put that document back in its place," she said, trying in vain to give her voice a ring of firmness as she spoke.

"Do you imagine that I shall really be guilty of such a stupid act of good-nature?" he cried, with a hoarse laugh. "You think that your victim is wounded to death, and has no more strength to defend himself; but I can still work my brain, and I will tell you what you counted upon. You came here to take possession of this important secret, and then, with microscope in hand, you would have gone to your husband and the Hofmarschall, and proved to

them that a terrible deception had been enacted with reference to the inheritance. Naturally you would not have been allowed to return to Rudisdorf with such a secret in your possession, and you would be entreated to remain here. But if so, what good would it do you? what would you gain by it? Baron Mainau does not love you, and never will, my beautiful lady; his heart belongs for ever and ever to the Duchess; he loves her, *not* you. Now you are simply indifferent to him; but after your avowal of this deception, he will *hate* you. And look here, *my* love is so unselfish, that—see, I will prevent that——"

And before she had time to grasp the meaning of his words, he snatched the Countess Trachenberg's delicate pink note from the drawer, and threw both papers into the fire.

She darted forward with an agonized cry, and clung with both hands to the arm of the man who was not to touch so much as the hem of her dress; but it was too late—letter and document both curled and blackened in the sparkling flames of the fire, and were very soon a mere thimble-full of ashes.

"You may denounce me now as soon as you like, my dear madam! He who seeks the paper, will discover that the precious scented note is gone likewise, and that *I* burned that dainty epistle no one will believe," he said, calmly, holding his left hand close to the brass door of the fire, although there was not a shred of charred paper to be seen.

The young wife let her hands fall loosely by her side, as her face assumed a sad and pained expression. The pure, innocent,

girlish mind had hardly been able to fathom the depth of the priest's artful cunning; and as she stood close to him, in the bloom of her grace and tender beauty, with her frightened eyes staring into the glow of the fire, and her white, broad forehead almost touching the man's shoulder, it seemed as if it would only require one of his quick, energetic movements, to overpower her completely, so helpless and paralyzed was her whole appearance; and as a trembling sigh escaped her lips, and just fanned the cheek of the Chaplain, he cried out, his face pale as death, his whole frame quivering with passion and excitement,

"There is still time, noble lady. Only be merciful and tender to me, and I will immediately go to the master of Schönwerth, and inform him of my fault."

Starting back and measuring him with a

haughty look from head to foot, she replied, cuttingly,—

"That is entirely your own affair; you can act as you please." Then, after a moment's hesitation, she continued, "I wished of all things to save Gabriel, and perhaps to this end I might have entreated the Duchess—who has been badly influenced—but to act with a—Jesuit—no, never, that I decline; I can do the boy no good now, so he must fulfil his cruel destiny. But truly Germany is right to uproot from her soil this society of Jesus, and it is well that she at last seizes the rod, in order to strike on the head this cruel opposer and enemy to all patriotic feeling, this priestly power and unnatural influence in the confessional. Those are my last words to you, reverend sir. Now go, and carry out your design respecting that little

intrigue—a design as refined and incomparably secret as is worthy even of a disciple of Loyola!"

She turned from him, and was hurrying from the room, when a side door suddenly opened on her path, and the Hofmarschall appeared, leaning on his stick.

"Where are you, my worthy friend?" he cried, his eyes wandering through the room. "Good heavens! does it require such a length of time to lock a cabinet?"

Liane stood quite still as the old gentleman entered, and turned her pale face towards him; but the priest did not move from his position by the stove, holding his white, well-formed hands to the flames, as if he were cold, and wished to warm himself.

The Hofmarschall hobbled inside, quite forgetting, in his astonishment at the ap-

pearance of the room and its occupants, to shut the door behind him.

"Ah! you here already, madam?" he said, knocking his stick on the floor. "Surely you have not remained all this long time in this half-lighted room—you, who, according to your usual, old-fashioned habits, never waste a second in idleness?"

Then suddenly, as if foreboding something wrong, he turned his head towards the inlaid cabinet, and discovered the open lid, hanging so wide open that it looked as if each moment it must fall to the ground.

A long, deep-drawn "Ah!" escaped the lips of the poor old Hofmarschall.

"What, my fair lady, have you been—rummaging?" he asked, after a moment, with a sneering smile. Then, shaking his small fine head thoughtfully, he added, "Impossible! what am I saying? Those

lovely hands—those aristocratic hands—belonging to a lady who has the honour of calling herself granddaughter to the Princess Thurgan, such high-born hands, I repeat, would *never* condescend to meddle with the property of other people—*fi donc*—pardon me, my noble lady; I was only joking."

He managed to limp over to the writing-table, and supporting himself on his stick with one hand, with the other he carefully examined the papers in the drawer. Liane clasped her arms in despair across her bosom. She knew that a terrible scene would soon follow. The tall, black-robed priest still stood by the fire-stove warming his hands and peering into the flames, as if he had not heard a word of what was passing behind his back; he was thinking of his plan of campaign.

The Hofmarschall dragged himself round and showed his face, as white as snow, as he said with a forced smile :—

"You are also having your little joke, my dear madam, and are wanting to play me a practical trick ; only fair, I dare say, as I was somewhat indiscreet this afternoon when the Duchess was here ; but in future I will be more amiable—I promise you I will—and now please, *please* give me back my delicious little note ; you know I prize it with my heart's blood ! What ! you deny having it ? I think I could swear that I see my dear, rose-tinted little letter peeping out of your pocket. No ? Then I ask where is the Countess Trachenberg's letter ?" he suddenly added, changing his tone to his usual hard, angry growl, and so far forgetting himself in his fury as to raise his stick in a threatening attitude.

"Ask the Court Chaplain!" answered the young wife, with cheeks as pale as death.

"The Court Chaplain? My dear, is the Countess Trachenberg his mother? Hm—much more likely he was a witness to your bold confiscation of my property; and you are pleased to appeal to his knightly aid and Christian mildness; but that won't help you in the least, madam. I choose to hear from your own lips where that letter is."

Liane pointed to the fire.

"It is burnt," she said, in a firm but scarcely audible voice.

As she spoke the priest turned his head slightly round, and shot a troubled, half-frantic glance at the girl, who had not dreamed of denying the truth, as the Hof-marschall, with a loud groan of rage and

fury, sank into the nearest chair, for his weak legs refused to hold him up any longer.

"And you were a witness, venerable sir? You quietly let her commit such an infamy?" he hissed from between his teeth.

"I cannot answer you as you wish just now, Herr Hofmarschall; you must grow calmer first. But let me assure you that the thing is not as you imagine," replied the priest unhesitatingly, as he left his place by the stove, and with somewhat uncertain steps drew nearer.

"That was all that was wanting, for you also to avoid a direct answer. Can that heretic girl there with the red hair make every man do her will and become rebellious? It is long since I believed in Raoul——" but he suddenly stopped and bit his lip; those last words had been

uttered without premeditation, and were more than he meant to say; but their effect on the priest was as if he had received a blow on his cheek. He darted an angry, startled look at Liane as he quickly raised his hand, and seemed inclined to lay it on the imprudent mouth of the furious old gentleman.

"I do not understand you, Herr Hofmarschall," he said, marking each word and speaking in a threatening, warning tone.

"Good God! I was referring to his good Catholic belief," replied the Hofmarschall, angrily.

The man whose "belief" was thus questioned was just at this moment mounting the broad, Byzantine-carpeted staircase. From where Liane stood opposite the open door, she could see across the wide corridor to the staircase, which was brilliantly lit

from below. On the top step stood her husband, with his dark waterproof cloak still wrapped around him. For a moment he seemed to hesitate—perhaps he had caught sight of his wife in her light-coloured dress standing in the middle of the dimly-lighted drawing-room—this decided him, and instead of going straight to his own apartments, he walked quickly through the corridor towards the drawing-room.

"Ah, ha! here he comes! very *àpropos!*" said the Hofmarschall, evidently pleased at the near approach of the well-known step, for he raised himself with an effort from his chair, and rubbed his dry, withered hands together, as he indulged in a chuckle of satisfaction.

"I must beg you, sir, to try and be prudent—and silent," remarked the priest in a strange, entreating, half-loud whisper,

in the tone of which could be detected his inward anxiety.

But there Raoul stood at the open door.

"Ought I not to know it, reverend sir?" he asked in a cutting, sneering tone, for his sharp, suspicious ears had caught the entreaty; and his flaming eyes roamed questioningly from the tall, black-robed priest to the face of his young wife, as he continued, "So there is a secret—a secret between the Court Chaplain and—my wife, that you, uncle, ought not to betray? Well, I must confess that it interests me tremendously. A secret between a strict Roman Catholic priest and a heretic must be piquant! Charming efforts at conversion — have I guessed aright, uncle?"

"Don't imagine any such thing, Raoul. Our dear friend there is far too sensible and

has enough tact to know that it would be only throwing pearls before swine, for the Baroness is not even a good Protestant. No, my friend, the secret is confined to her ladyship alone, and the priest, who unwillingly discovered it, is too honourable and Christian to denounce her. And I, too, would willingly have been silent—by Jove I am, and always hope to remain, a gentleman—but what am I to say to you now? My brain is too old and rusty to invent some good-natured story——"

"The fact, uncle!" cried Raoul in a hard, stern voice, his face working with impatience and his eyes flaming with his vain efforts to keep calm.

"Very well, the thing is soon told. You left the key in the writing-cabinet, where in one of the drawers was folded the Countess Trachenberg's letter. I may as

well confess that I teased the Baroness a little too openly about this interesting bit of paper, and I suppose she came to the conclusion that it would be better to have the thing disappear for ever. She happened to be here alone in the room, so she took advantage of her opportunity and threw my treasure, my beautiful rose-tinted letter, in the fire. What do you say to that? It was a grand pity I did not miss the key sooner; but when I did the Herr Chaplain was good enough to propose fetching it—and that was how he came to be an unintentional witness of the *auto-da-fé*. And then, when I got uneasy about his long absence and followed him to the room, as I entered rather suddenly, I saw my worthy friend evidently very much disturbed in mind, standing by the stove—and—the Baroness made an ineffectual attempt to

escape from my presence. Look there! The open lid to the writing-table speaks for itself——"

Liane, who knew now that the storm she had seen gathering would break over her head, let the handkerchief she had held over her mouth slip to the ground, and stepped nearer to her husband with a face as pale and colourless as marble.

"Be quiet, Juliane!" he said coldly, moving away from her and holding up his right hand to command her silence; "uncle naturally represents the affair from his own point of view. That *you* have not touched the paper I am convinced; and woe be to the one who dares repeat such a disgraceful accusation! But I must express my astonishment at finding you here at this hour——"

"Ha, ha! we both start from the same

point," interrupted the Hofmarschall with a forced laugh.

"It is a long time to the tea-hour," Raoul continued, without paying any heed to the interruption, "and by this wretched light it would be impossible for you to do your embroidery; besides, I see no signs of your work-basket, and there is not even a book to prove you had any intention of reading here. As a rule you are generally the *first* to retire to your own apartments, and the *last* to reappear, so I gather from all this that your appearance here in this room is to be explained in only one way, and that is that some powerful motive prompted you to come, and you obeyed it. Juliane, the bird which is caught by the head in the net is lost, hopelessly lost. You are fettered by a hand which, without your consent, and to your dismay and

terror, had done you the kindness to destroy the compromising letter. You are not ruined yet; but circumstances are against you. Why did you come here?"

"What's the meaning of this, Raoul? What nonsense are you talking now?" cried the Hofmarschall, dumbfounded.

Raoul laughed such a bitter, mocking, hollow laugh, that the walls seemed to echo back the sound.

"Ask the Chaplain to explain it to you, uncle. He has for so long been accustomed to drive big, fat carp into the wide Romish fishing net, that he would have no objection for once to angle on his own account and catch and keep for himself a lovely, slender, little goldfish. Reverend sir, in these modern times your holy order denies the oft-cited expression that 'the end justifies the means;' but perhaps while from motives

of prudence the motto is not openly acknowledged, it is all the more earnestly employed as the whispered watchword for private action; and allow me to compliment you on the satisfaction you must feel in making use of this means for your own personal interests, or do you really only desire the beautiful lips over there to mutter prayers on a rosary?"

"You must allow me to remark that I do not in the least know what you mean, Herr Baron," replied the priest in a natural, unembarrassed manner. He had had time to assume an outward quiet, even injured bearing, though the revengeful eyes flaming from his pale, drooping face told of anything but calmness and forbearance within.

"For the life of me, I can't see what you are driving at, Raoul," said his uncle, rocking impatiently to and fro in his chair.

"I know, Raoul," murmured his young wife, as if paralyzed, for her consciousness of all that had passed was burning into her very soul, as with a sudden speechless movement she raised her hands in appeal towards heaven.

"What acting!" said the Hofmarschall in his growling voice, as he shook his head indignantly; but the priest, with a firm, resounding step walked over to him, and with a warning look, but in an entreating voice, said:—

"Don't commit yourself, Herr Hofmarschall! This poor, tortured young lady is under my protection. I will not suffer the heavenly purity of her soul to——"

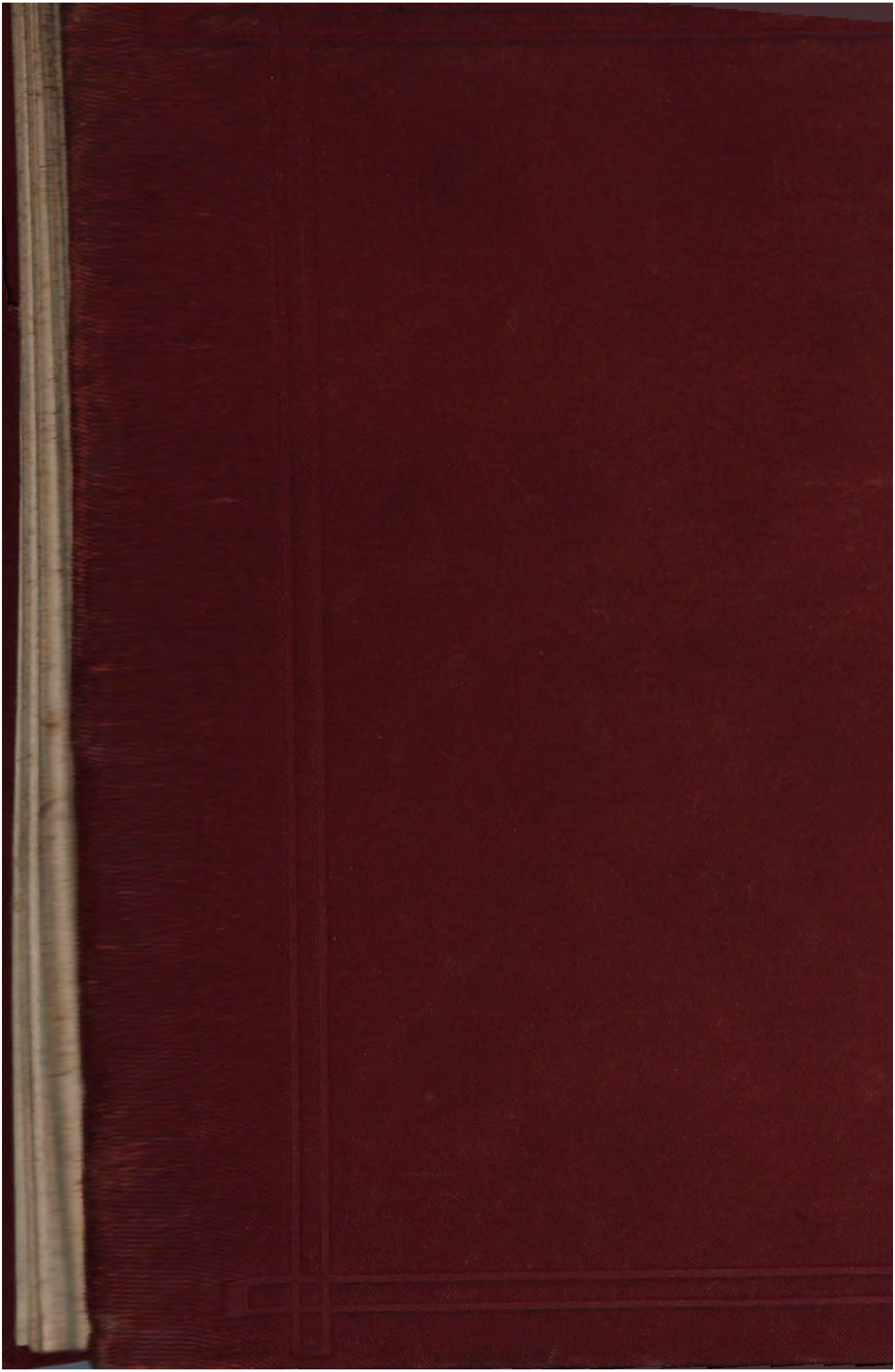
"Not another word, Sir Priest!" cried Liane excitedly, her eyes flashing with wrath; "you know that by a movement of my head I can keep those in their place

who belong to the dust at my feet. You know that I am more haughty than is usual with those of my rank who have the blood of princes running in their veins—your own words, Sir Priest!—and yet you venture—sacrifice yourself unasked, to defend me? Didn't you yourself say that the Countess Trachenberg would not only not suffer such importunity, but would fling it back with scorn? There stands the actor—a master in his art—without equal, Herr Hofmarschall!" and she pointed to the black-robed priest with outstretched hands. "If you wish to know more, let him tell you what went on here in this room before you entered, or not, just as you both like. For myself, I consider it would be useless trouble—and beneath me in every way—to even open my lips to defend myself to you." Then turning quickly, she stood face to face

with her husband. "I shall go now at once, Raoul," she said; but in her voice there was a kind of sob, although she had hitherto spoken quickly and firmly. "Only a few days ago I would have left Schönwerth without caring to defend my honour even to you; but since I have had a glimpse into your inner nature I feel I owe you more. And although in this painful moment I am obliged unwillingly to acknowledge to myself how weak and deluded you can be, and how poisoned your judgment is, yet I am sure that it is only the sin itself of another that you have a horror of. Personally I will not explain the facts to you either by word of mouth or in writing; but I have a sister and a brother, from them you shall hear the truth."

And she walked across the room to the door.

"For God's sake, Raoul, don't allow such a scandal; you won't believe that accomplished intriguante? By the memory of your father I beg—entreat you—not to let yourself be influenced against this trusty, faithful friend of our family! Oh, God! Good, dear chaplain, help me, lead me back to my bed-room. I feel very, very ill," cried the Hofmarschall in frightened accents as Liane opened the door and left the room. And he, too, was a very good actor! for this suddenly feigned illness was the flag under which his "good, dear" friend was saved by the Hofmarschall in the shelter of his bedroom, from a *tête-à-tête*, angry encounter with his nephew.

END OF VOL. II.

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