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CHORDS AND DISCORDS

A STORY OF SOULS ASTRAY

ENGLISH VERSION OF

OSSIP SCHUBIN'S

"Woher tönt dieser Misslang durch die Welt?"

BY

A. H. L.

IN TWO PARTS—PART ONE

ued Semi-Monthly. Entered at the Post-Office at New York as second-class matter.
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CHORDS AND DISCORDS.

"Life is neither a jest, nor is it a game and play. Life is a heavy task; and man should not live for the realization of his thoughts and speculations, however noble, but for the fulfillment of his duty."—TURGENIEFF.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

HE was seated at his writing-table with a pencil in his hand and a note-book before him. At his right hand was a book entitled "Italy in Sixty Days"; at his left, a "Traveler's Guide Book." He was scribbling all sorts of important memoranda in the note-book, and his countenance, all the while, wore a quite serious expression, not unmingled with high gratification.

His godfather had presented him with a lottery ticket as a birthday present; and this ticket had drawn a prize of some hundreds of dollars; and, as a result of the extremely promising qualities and talents which he had displayed at the Military Academy, he had been granted

a two months' leave of absence, to enable him to extend his knowledge of languages.

It was his purpose to apply both these opportunities—the dollars and the leave of absence—in making a journey to Italy. And he was filled with joy at the prospect before him; a joy compounded of intellectual enthusiasm and pure child-like feeling, as might be expected from his mental constitution. For he was a sort of duplex being: son of a North-German father, and of a mother who was a native of the Rhine country. His head was, consequently, heavily laden with reflections on every imaginable kind of philosophical problems; while the sheer joy of living and longing for pleasure, which pervade the people of the Rhenish country, was felt by him in his every vein. His temperament and being were, so to speak, a compound of North-German cloudland and Rhenish sunshine.

The chamber in which we find him was in Dorothea Street. It was not particularly large, but the air gave you no sense of closeness. It was the dwelling-room of a young fellow hardened against both extremes, of cold and heat alike, and who slept with his window open in summer and winter.

His bed was in an alcove; a simple iron bed it was, with very little covering, and with one small and obviously quite hard pillow.

The front part of the room was of not quite such Spartan baldness. The furniture was of the ordinary tasteless kind invariably found

in furnished lodgings; but there were, about the apartment, a few signs that its occupant required something more in the way of decoration and ornament to satisfy him. One of the walls was hung all over with photographs of famous pictures and buildings. There was a Michael Angelo's "Last Judgment," Titian's "Assunta," and the "Colosseum," conspicuous and large, challenging the observer's attention at once. This lieutenant of the guard was, evidently, an enthusiast for art, and had studied it deeply, so far as his life of military routine and limited circumstances permitted. He had also given no little of his time to the study of Italian history and life.

His choice of photographs, while giving evidence of the limitation of his pecuniary means, indicated in him a preference for those achievements in art which had for a long time been stamped with public recognition, as masterpieces and models. And this choice suggests to us that the young fellow was of modest disposition, and inclined to defer to authority.

Above the writing-table of our lieutenant hung the portrait of his deceased father, which much resembled Karl Maria von Weber. All his family were exceedingly proud of this likeness to the eminent composer.

Unfortunately, this resemblance consisted principally in a very large nose, and in the two small curls which curved down from his temples to coalesce with his whiskers; though, perhaps, it was fortified by a very high cravat

and the immense roll of the collar of his bottle-green coat. It is quite certain that the old Baron Schlitzing had never written any opera like the Freischütz, or any other, in fact. Indeed, he had never been famous for any sort of high achievement whatever. But this did not prevent his son from entertaining the firm conviction that his capacity for all sorts of wonderful performances knew no limit, and that it was only his unfortunate circumstances that prevented these high talents from bearing their appropriate fruit.

But, if the young man had been required to specify just how these circumstances had operated to hinder this development in his father, he would have found it difficult to do so. For Werner's father had, in fact, inherited considerable property, and had entered life under most favorable auspices and in a position that left nothing to be desired. And the simple truth is, that the father was an expensive theorist, always trying to give effect to plans which were excellent in principle and admirable on paper; but in his efforts to put these theories to practice, he simply blundered away his money until he was reduced to poverty. He had been an idealist in the old-fashioned sense of the word; that is to say, an entirely unpractical person. As for the rest, he had been irreproachable in character.

He cannot be said to have inflicted any irreparable injury on his family by his proceedings. He left no debts which were not easily dis-

charged out of the remnants of his estate; and he died soon after sustaining the principal losses which so altered his position.

The portrait of him we have been referring to, was in oil, and below it there was a water-color portrait of his wife, taken when she was in the first bloom of her wedded youth. This lady's face did *not* put you in mind of any celebrity; but that was not at all necessary to enlist the sympathy and interest of those who examined it. If the picture was really a correct rendering of her face, she must have been not only a consummate beauty, but of bewitching charm, too; such life and fire and intellect was there in the large significant eyes, and such an expression of roguishness and spirit in the beautiful lips and mouth.

Above the young man's bed, a little in shadow, and aside from everything else, as though deemed specially sacred, there hung another portrait of the same lady. Thirty years had passed over her head from the date of the earlier picture. In this second rendering of her, she was quite an old woman; old as no woman is at sixty, unless she has had to contend with illness and wearing anxieties. This later picture shows an aged lady in a black silk dress, the reverse of picturesque, and with smooth, gray bands of hair, covered by a small black lace cap.

Her beauty had disappeared; but there was still some reflection of the earlier spirit and joyousness playing about the eyes and mouth, and relieving the furrows and wrinkles traced

on the fine face by the hardness of her lot. And there was something about the countenance which seemed as though it were exclaiming pleasantly to Destiny: "Here I am, alive still; you've not been able to put me down, in spite of all your efforts!"

The young lieutenant would have been puzzled to say which of the two pictures was the dearer to him; each of them lent a deeper significance to the other.

Perhaps, at the bottom of his heart, the dearer image to him was that of the deeply tried, broken, and yet still courageous old woman. Scarcely ever did he gaze at it without having to wipe away some moisture from his eyes; while he murmured gently: "Dear, sweet little mother!"

He held his father's memory in honor, first, because he had been his father, and the feeling was all the softer because of the father's comparatively early death. His sentiments toward the dead man were all that might be expected of a young German, well brought up, and of somewhat antique temper. But, as for his living mother, her he simply worshiped. His feeling for his father was quite unqualified by any tendency to unfilial criticism, but it had not the true warmth of the deepest affection of the heart. There was something prescriptive, official, about it. But, while his feeling for his mother was not of the blind devotion that can neither see nor imagine fault, it was full of warmth, came from the depths of his heart,

and was animated by enthusiastic approval of nearly all she was and did.

In considering his father's character, he had never, consciously to himself, put his finger on any decided fault or failing. But, as to his mother, he allowed himself to perceive her little failings quite clearly. His love for her was too great and fixed to be at all affected by the little unevennesses in her character and ways which he could not help observing. And these little defects, if defects they could indeed be called, seemed only, in his eyes, to set off the great virtues of the old lady, and to make him feel more tenderly toward her than he would had she been a quite flawless creature.

And it may be truly said that his devotion to his mother was the best and most sacred of all the feelings of his young heart. He was, every inch, her son, so far as his personal appearance went. There were the same finely chiseled features, the same dark hair and the same fresh vitality and liveliness about the mouth. Only the expression of energy and decision which was so marked on the countenance of the woman was, unhappily, wanting in that of the man.

It was wanting in the lips, which, though showing spirit, were too soft; it was wanting in the eyes, which, in strong contrast to the mother's, had in them a searching, plaintive element, an almost obtrusive languor. His eyes were also different from the mother's in their color. Hers were brown and full of light, his were gray and somewhat veiled.

Werner was young and a lieutenant in the guards. And he was fully capable of sharing the enjoyments and amusements of his age and position. But, in the main, he was a dreamer, a speculator, one of those who strove to fathom the unfathomable. A keen observer might conclude that he was one of those whose object in life would finally be attained not in pursuing one direct, straightforward, invariable course, but only after traversing circuitous by-ways; and that he would not find and maintain his moral equilibrium without many preliminary stumbles and troubles.

And there he sat between his two printed helps to travel, busily, and with a little pedantic precision, determining and noting down the various stopping places of his journey. Four hundred dollars do not make a large sum; but it is sufficient to take a young sturdy German, not afraid of some little discomforts, as far as Rome and back. And Rome he decidedly must see. On this point he had long made up his mind, and the little privations which he would have to put up with to attain this ideal end and aim of his journey did not deter him in the least. What did it matter if his meals were of inferior quality, or if he had to encounter even more serious discomforts? All that was a matter of complete indifference. It would be quite otherwise for a lady, of course; but as to himself, a young man . . . ! Certainly, as long as he wore his emperor's uniform he owed it certain respects which limited his discretion; but, when in civil

costume, he was quite ready to submit to anything second-rate and cheap, as long as it was respectable—from riding in a third-class carriage to anything above or below that proceeding, as it might happen to turn out. As to his meals, they were always, at this period, more or less a burden and a bore to him; he regarded them as only necessary inflictions to be got over anyhow, mere occasions for renewing his forces, which it would be absurd to think too much about. He was as yet almost incredibly free from all sorts of material pretensions or needs. Fine cookery, sleeping on a spring mattress in a large commodious bed, comfortably dandling on red velvet cushions in a railroad carriage—all such things were of no interest to him whatever. All he thought of or wanted was to go, to go forward, go quickly. His whole soul was wrapped up in the idea of seeing beautiful scenery, familiarizing himself with the art-treasures of Italy, with all that the human spirit had produced of the greatest and most glorious.

He was of the most artless, naive recepivetness; indeed, it is not often that one encounters a nature so favorably constituted for the appreciation and enjoyment of beautiful things. Enthusiasm, as yet, could produce quite a fever in his blood. How long was that to last?

Once more, and now for the last time, he read through and thought over again the route he had projected for his journey. Dresden—a day not

to be followed by bed and sleep—Munich, Innsbruck, Verona; the very names sent a thrill of delight through him; Bologna, Florence—oh, Florence!! Impossible to describe his sensations! Siena — the mere name was music. Rome! His mouth became dry. Rome, Rome, Rome!! He repeated the name thrice to himself. Something told him that Rome was destined to play an exceptional part in his life. A shiver ran through his frame, made up of longing for what was indefinable to his soul, of a presentiment of something which would be full of poetry, of danger, of intoxication. And out of all this cloud of confused phantasy there merged the lines of some feminine figure. He caught himself in the very act of giving to this figure determinate form and being, and was so struck with the absurdity of the attempt that he suddenly burst out into laughter. The feminine "element" had hitherto played quite a subordinate part in his career. "Shall I fall in love when in Rome, or can it be that I am threatened with an engagement to marry there?" he asked himself. "Oh, it's too stupid for anything!" he added. And then he seized his cigarette-case, which was rather valuable and was adorned with the Schlitzing arms, and formed somewhat of a contrast with the rest of his modest surroundings. He lighted a cigarette and surrendered himself to dreamy reflections. How beautiful life was! What glorious things awaited him in his immediate future! It was long since anything had given him such un-

qualified delight as the prospect of this journey to Italy.

He leaned back in his chair and stretched his limbs to their full length. All of a sudden he felt something curious mingling in the comfortable satisfaction pervading him, a sensation as though he had been allowing himself to indulge in some unwarrantable laxity. He laughed; it was the sensation of being without his uniform. He had already donned the gray tourist dress which he had had made for Italy. The civilian costume was comfortable, that could not be denied. But at the same time he could not help feeling that, in wearing it, he was without a kind of support to which he had become habituated.

CHAPTER II.

THERE was a ring at the bell. His servant, a young man with a rather grotesque countenance, brought him a letter.

He examined the address and the post-mark —Schlangenbad. His mother was in Schlangenbad at the time, but the letter was not from her. His mother's handwriting was formed with slanting letters, and had a character of modesty and unpretentiousness about it: it seemed to be, as it were, in a hurry to meet the person to whom it addressed itself, with the single purpose of saying what had to be said. But the address

on the letter in his hand was in writing strongly contrasted with that of the old Baroness Schlitzing. It showed bold, quite upright letters, which seemed determined to assert an originality all their own. He turned the letter round. It was adorned with a monogram in gold and a coronet with nine projecting points. And it was redolent of perfume, obtrusively so.

"Ah!" The young man divined from whom it came. It was one of his aunts, the one who had presented him with his pretty cigarette-case; the youngest sister of his father, and the only person in the family who had managed to get on in the world and feather her nest well.

He broke open the letter hastily, and read:

"DEAR WERNER!—It is much to be hoped that this letter will find you still in Berlin. As I hear, you are planning a journey to Italy. My purpose in writing is to induce you to deviate from that direction, at all events for a while, and direct your steps elsewhere.

"When I arrived here two days ago, I found your mother by no means in such good case as I could have wished. And I have it very much at heart to confer with you as to her further medical treatment, and, generally, what ought to be done for her. I make it, therefore, my special request that you will take Schlangenbad on your way to Italy. You need not stay here long, however. Perhaps you will not think your mother's condition such as to give room

for anxiety. But you know I am myself always prone to feel anxiety; and when the matter concerns a person so very near my heart as my dear Rosa! She has not the least idea that I am writing to you, the dear, good soul. The idea that you are being deprived of any pleasure would so disturb her that it would more than counterbalance for ill any slight good which the treatment here at Schlangenbad is doing her.

"Perhaps I'm only spinning cobwebs out of my own brain. It is for you to decide.

"For the rest, Schlangenbad is charming: an idyll, my love, a pure idyll. One doesn't see many serious invalids; but there are lots of badly dressed Englishwomen; which more than makes up for *that*. And there are plenty of 'impossible' creatures. But these don't trouble us. They only form, so to say, a background for our little society. We are enjoying ourselves famously. Come and see! All sorts of affectionate greeting from your old aunt,

"MALVINA."

His first feeling as his eyes went rapidly over the letter was one of great disturbance. He could not help thinking that if he was summoned suddenly like that to Schlangenbad, there must be serious reasons for it. Italy went out of his thoughts directly, and he seized the railway guide to look out for the train that would take him the quickest to Frankfurt, and from that point to Schlangen-

bad. The most available train started late in the afternoon, arriving next morning at Frankfurt. He had still six clear hours before him to worry in before he could stir from the spot. He took up his aunt's letter again, hurriedly.

He observed a few words which adorned the last page, the only words there, indeed.

"Don't forget to bring a white flannel suit. Lawn tennis and white flannel are obligatory here!"

This sentence sounded strangely to him. How could it come there, he asked himself. It did not seem quite in keeping with such a letter as this. It was most likely that his aunt had, in her hurry, taken a sheet of writing paper on which these words had been already written.

But no; on the preceding page he had noticed, under his aunt's signature, the letters T. O., for turning the leaf. And now he read the letter through a second time, and found that it did not produce anything like the strong anxiety it had at first. For a moment the thought crossed his mind that his aunt was alleging this solicitude about his mother only as a pretext for alluring him to Schlangenbad. But the thought passed away at once without leaving any impression. As is the case with all unspoiled, radically fine natures, any sort of mistrust was repulsive to him.

He read the letter through a third time, and perceived that it was a very mixed-up, confused document, indeed. He asked himself whether it

would not be best to telegraph to Schlangenbad to his sister, who was with his mother. From her he would get information about his mother which he could rely on. He knew his sister well. She was not precisely a lovable creature, but she was quite honorable and truthful. And she would not willfully keep anything from him. And yet—no—it would not do! In the first place, by some accident the telegram might come to his mother's hands—and then—then, well, he suddenly felt quite ashamed of himself for making such a difficulty of postponing his journey a few days, and at its being necessary, as it would seem, for him to be dragged by main force to his mother's side. "I do believe that I am the most selfish creature on God's earth," he said to himself, penitently; and he further reflected: "If my mother is really ill the whole blessed business of the journey will be no pleasure to me, and, if she's all right, I'll just stay a few days in Schlangenbad, and then go on."

What was first and foremost in his mind was the hope that he should find his mother in her usual health. And his aunt's postscript was, in this respect, a very encouraging one to him.

He smiled at the notion of his taking with him a white flannel suit; as though he had half-a-dozen or so of such articles. How in the world should *he* have white flannel suits? But his aunt belonged to the class of "aristocratic" people who cannot possibly conceive of certain things as being otherwise than in a certain way

—things which, as she would put it, are *de rigueur*.

He reflected for a few moments more and then composed the following telegram to his aunt Malve.

"Any immediate danger?"

Four hours later came the answer.

"No immediate danger, but your presence urgently desired."

He breathed more freely: he had plenty of time then to arrange matters thoroughly before starting. Anything like excessive haste had always been extremely repugnant to him. He started on the following evening.

As he had arrived at the full conviction, after receiving his aunt's telegram, that it would not matter whether he reached Schlangenbad a few hours sooner or later, he stopped off at Frankfurt. He could not resist the temptation of lounging about a little in a city which, from his earliest years, had been stamped upon his thoughts as something of exceptional beauty and interest, and which he had all his life so longed to see.

But now that he was here, he was by no means so gratified as he had expected. The streets, broad and kept beautifully clean, were inviting enough, but there was too much brilliance and modernity about them; they wanted the peculiar aroma of history, those traces and landmarks of the past which make the very stones eloquent with memories of the dead. The tiniest little city on the banks of the Rhine

had more romantic sentiment about it than this splendid metropolis of His Majesty Mammon. As he stalked along in the principal thoroughfares and looked at the fascinating displays in the shop windows, he could not help feeling vexed that he had no money to spend on purchases; and to take his revenge on Frankfurt, he dubbed it a breeding place for golden calves.

Well, golden calves flourish in Berlin, too; that could not be denied. But here and there among them you will find, in the larger city, a well-to-do Chimæra also. Or, to speak without parables, ambition, there, *does* every now and then set before itself some aim that is not merely hard, practical, and material.

Then a smile stole over his features; it occurred to him that every German owed a certain debt of pious regard to Frankfurt, that, after all, it was not only the home of the Rothschilds, but of Goethe and the Brentanos, too.

He laughed at himself for his one-sidedness; and, after refreshing himself with a good breakfast at the "Englischer Hof"—the traditional stopping place of his mother's family—he decided that he would divide the time that he had left between an inspection of the Rothschild collection and a visit to the Goethe house.

The Rothschild museum was open for the day; and, oddly enough, when he presented himself quite naively at the door of the elegant modern building, which contains the

treasures, without a special permit, he was allowed to pass in.

The inspection did not take him long. His artistic understanding had been too little trained and developed for him to be able to summon up a correct interest in all the splendid things which were offered to his gaze. It bored him to see so many little snuff-boxes at one time. And then all the rest of the wonderful paraphernalia! Distributed over some dwelling-place of living creatures, and thus fulfilling the object for which they were created, they would have thoroughly charmed him. But, as he saw them now, standing against the wall in their glass cases, they seemed to him like things in prison, shut away from all sympathetic and living surroundings, and condemned to vegetate henceforward in a wretched way.

It was with a feeling of joy that, fleeing from all this splendor of curious and rare things, he found himself in the midst of the antique, world-forgetting, world-forgotten interests attaching to the house of Goethe. Here he was in his own real element. Although everything and everybody that had given its special interest to all that was here belonged irretrievably to the dead past, yet the air that had breathed on these passed-away persons and events of the earlier time seemed to be the same that he was now himself respiring; and he took in long draughts of this atmosphere, made up of musty smell, ancient wood, and immortal memories,

with reverential delight. Every one of the stiff-legged old chairs seemed to carry with it its own special chapter of Goethe's famous autobiography. He went into a very revel of enthusiasm over it all; remained standing in one window recess after another for more time than he took any count of; took a long look out from each of them, and then suddenly closed his eyes, in order to give free, unchecked play to his imagination, and spent such a time over all this that—he was too late for his train.

Then he traversed some of the principal streets again, and, succumbing to the fascination of the "astonishing low prices" of the goods displayed in the windows, went into one of the shops. Partly out of kindness, and partly because he was so dreadfully bored, he made up his mind to buy something to take with him for his mother and sister. But, when he came to examine a little more narrowly these "astonishingly cheap" objects, he found that they were not at all to his taste, while he was much startled at the prices of the things which pleased him better. But he did not like to leave the shop without accomplishing his purpose, and, to tell the truth, could not help being flattered at the praise of his good taste conferred on him by the exceedingly pretty young lady who served him. And, as he felt he must do something to justify these encomiums, he finally purchased a couple of ladies' work-baskets, although very much in the dark as to the object of the various articles they contained. However, he was assured by

the young lady in question that what he took was not only "quite exceptionally lovely," but also "admirably practical." And all this being completed, he betook himself to the railroad station, where he had to wait some time for his train; there was no help for it.

When he went to the ticket-office to arrange as to his further progress, he was startled by the void in his purse. The budget of expenses for the Italian journey, as he had settled it, was quite disarranged. How could he possibly have got rid of so much money? This problem he brooded over in some disturbance of mind while the train was bearing him along through the rich green landscape. Well; there had been a little expenditure on the railroad tickets, a breakfast, a something for cab hire, some fees to waiters, and so forth; and, after all, what was the use of dwelling on it? The money was gone. That was always so with him; he never could properly regulate such things, he could not economize; but it was some compensation, on the other hand, to think that he could, when the case demanded it, go without his meals with the most perfect equanimity. And it had frequently been his lot to exercise this talent at Berlin. He never incurred any debts. And as to taking anything from his relations, or squeezing from his mother a single cent more than she gave him, these were things that he could not possibly find it in his heart to do.

Yes; a fine character he certainly was, but unpractical almost beyond conception. His

watch always went wrong, and, when he came to count his pocket-handkerchiefs, there were always some wanting to make up a round dozen.

CHAPTER III.

ELTVILLE! The shadows had already begun to lengthen when he reached the place.

There was no evening post from this point to Schlangenbad. It seemed too expensive a measure to hire a carriage. He resolved that he would proceed to Schlangenbad on foot; this would help to save something. But he would, after all, not be able to hunt up his mother that evening; and the old-fashioned little Rhenish town took such strong hold of his fancy that he could not make up his mind to leave it without a little further examination. It reminded him of his childhood, the sunniest and most joyous part of which had been spent in the country on an estate belonging to a rich relation of his mother. It reminded him also of some illustrations of German popular tales and songs, the mere looking at which sent him back at once by a sort of magic to child-age and child-land.

There was something inexpressibly dreamy and poetical in the place. It seemed sunk in a sort of sleep, world-forgetting and world-forgotten. Indescribable, too, was the poetic quietism of the small crooked streets, the houses

with their gables and small-paned windows and projecting upper stories. Here and there was a flower-pot with white flowering Hortensias in the windows; in another window were red geraniums. Such a thing as a human being was scarcely to be seen. It seemed like a city of the dead, and this solitude much enhanced the fairy-like legendary atmosphere that brooded over the place. But there was one building that towered above the others—one not only much higher, but of much greater size every way, which bore the stamp of a somewhat grim, historical grandeur and significance. It produced on the observer the impression of a forsaken old palace, now, in the course of the centuries, devoted to a different and a disagreeable purpose—perhaps a nunnery, perhaps a prison, or, peradventure, a lunatic asylum. The windows were furnished with a projecting black iron grating. On the two pillars of the gate which closed the courtyard of the mansion were two beasts, very chipped and damaged, which had formerly held the coat-of-arms of the family. These were stretching out their paws to each other as of yore, but it was a long time since they had held anything in them.

Werner examined the courtyard, looking through the closed gates. It had a lawn with a few poplar trees. The August sun had so scorched the neglected grass that it looked quite rusty here and there, and the poplars looked so dark and gloomy that they might almost have been taken for cypresses.

A wolf-hound, white with age, lay in front of a kennel with a small empty dish beside him. When he caught sight of Werner he gave a low, hoarse growl and lifted a corner of his lip, showing his old yellow teeth. From one of the windows there came the sound of prayer uttered in a single, unvarying monotone.

The place seemed to be oppressed by a dull, dead joylessness, as though all life and activity had long since departed from it. There was something almost uncanny about its dry dullness that repelled and yet fascinated the observer. Werner would much have liked to find out to whom the mansion belonged, and what purposes it was now applied to; but he could not see any one about in the street to address any inquiries to.

He turned his back upon this mysterious, enigmatic edifice, and went wandering on among the odorous shadows of the deepening twilight.

And, again, just as in the Goethe house at Frankfurt, he plunged deeply, or soared high—as you will—in a very intoxication of poetic and romantic enthusiasm. Stanzas of Goethe, of Heine, of Justinus Kerner, went whirring and buzzing through his head. In his ears resounded melodies of Schumann; and these he heard just as plainly as if some one were actually singing the songs at his elbow. "What drives me from the haunts of men? Dead joys that will not live again." And then, again: "In Augsburg stands a lofty house, near its great house of God!" Then the melodies died

away, and nothing was left but words, these words: "Die love and joy, die love and joy!" which he went on repeating mechanically to himself, until, all of a sudden, a peculiar sound turned his thoughts in another direction—a kind of deep, cool rustling, which, though it grew louder and louder, yet remained low and masked, so to speak, and seemed to be uttering, with its soft, tranquilizing, melancholy note, a sort of lullaby to the hot summer day going to its repose.

Werner turned sharp to the left, as though in obedience to an appealing cry.

And there — steel-blue, and flooded by the golden light of the setting sun—the sacred stream spread itself out before him. The Rhenish blood in his young veins cried aloud, at first, with exultation at the glorious sight, and then almost stood still with the overpowering sense of veneration. How wonderful it was, how beautiful, this Rhine, this river so dear to Germany and Germans.

Sunk in his reflections, he went along the alleys of lime trees, planted four deep by the river banks. And there, by his side, flowed the stream, broad, glorious, bearing on its bosom, in its course, the rich gold of the sunset. The light of that gold went out slowly, slowly.

Some little way above where he stood, the silhouette of a village, with its houses and trees, stood out in its monotone of brown against the topaz yellow and pale green of the horizon above

the sunken sun. And above the sunset long streaks of cloud, suffused with red light, rose almost to the zenith. The sultriness of the day lasted long before the coolness of evening set in. But from the water a damp, cool mist arose.

Werner's attention was suddenly withdrawn from this exquisite charm of the landscape surrounding him, withdrawn suddenly and sharply.

The pier, a dam of wood which lined the stream, projected forward into it at one point for a considerable distance, and on this pier there was standing a solitary female figure, remarkably slender and delicate. Her features were not distinguishable in the fading light, but he saw quite plainly that she was a very young creature.

She was standing dangerously near to the edge of the pier; so much so that the moment he caught sight of her he had a presentiment of calamity. He went toward her with hurried steps. But before he could reach the spot where she was she had bent forward—there was a great splash—she had disappeared in the water!

With the speed of lightning he threw off coat and waistcoat and sprang in after her. He was famous for his swimming and diving, and she had not had time to sink very deep. He succeeded in getting hold of her with comparatively little difficulty. The most awkward part of it was getting her up from the stream on to the bank; but this, too, he happily accomplished.

He got with her safely to the shore and went on holding her close and tight as though she

were a sick child. Her form was so excessively slender and supple that she seemed almost to melt away in his arms. Nevertheless, her limbs were round and soft, the lines of her bosom indescribably sweet, and every subtle movement of her frame was clearly to be seen under the summer dress, which, wetted thoroughly as it was, clung closely to her young body. The small face—he could see it plainly enough in the gray evening light—had a something on it original and peculiar. There was a tenderness in it that suggested a foreign origin; but even in these unfavorable circumstances, drenched with water and with the eyes closed, it was a face of inexpressible charm and beauty. It was deadly pale; but that, of course, was attributable to the terrible thing that had just occurred. The eyebrows and eyelashes were dark, the nose small and straight; the lips were so formed as to suggest that the girl was capricious and somewhat mutinous. They were full, the underlip especially. The cheekbones were a little too prominent. Her hair curled naturally, and the locks still retained their spiral shape in spite of the water. Werner was quite at a loss to know what to do with her; whether to lay her down, rub her hands and feet, breathe air into her, or what?

Indescribable compassion for her took hold of him. Hardly realizing what he was doing, he held her close and tight with a caressing clasp, as one does a child whom one wants to comfort and console.

All of a sudden she gave a deep shudder as

she lay in his arms, and at the same moment he felt her frame grow warmer through her cold, damp clothes. She raised herself quite upright and pushed him away from her, put her two small fists to her eyes as though to rub them dry, and then opened them wide and looked up at him.

"What right had you to interfere with me?" she cried. Her voice was deep, almost like a boy's voice, but with something in it warm and vibrating which the voice of a boy never has.

"The right that any one has to prevent a mad person from doing himself a mischief," he replied.

" I am not mad," she rejoined, with a gloomy look; "my head never was so clear as—"

She did not finish the sentence, but turned with an impatient movement toward the river. He clutched involuntarily at her wet garments, as if to hold her back.

She shook him off. "That is not necessary," she said; "one has not courage for that sort of thing twice over—at all events, not without waiting a while." Then, suddenly stamping with her foot, she exclaimed: "But why did you prevent my doing what I wanted. If you had not interfered all would have been over by now I should have got through with it."

"Oh, merciful Father!" He fixed her with that sincere deep gaze of his which had now a startled expression. And over his speculative soul there came for a single instant a sort of doubt whether he really had any right to inter-

fere thus decisively with her fate. "My God!" he repeated; "surely there can be no reason for the dreadful thing you've been doing, beyond some passing fit of melancholy. Young and beautiful . . . and—and—" he examined her from head to foot—"obviously of good family," he stammered. "Life is all before you." Suddenly he stopped short. "Unless—" he murmured, almost inaudibly.

"Unless—" she repeated. She gave him a sharp glance, then blushed deeply, and added in a lower tone: "Unless I—I have made life impossible to myself. Oh, I understand you perfectly."

"Oh, forgive me, I—I—" He reddened suddenly, even more deeply than she had done, and was so confused that he scarcely knew what to do.

His perplexity seemed to turn the current of her thoughts in a direction somewhat more favorable to him. But he could not help observing—and it pained him—that his random supposition had not wounded her as such an idea might be expected to wound a young girl standing in the usual relations and circumstances of girlhood. It had evidently not seemed to her, as it should have done, something unthinkable, monstrous. That she was not a married woman he had felt quite sure from the first moment. And all this perplexed him.

"I have nothing to forgive," she replied. "I don't wonder at your conjecture; it appears

that there is only one possible reason which can induce girls of good family to lay violent hands on themselves. But that's not the case with me. There's no love-story in my life, innocent or other."

His compassion for her became more active and warmer with every moment, but he could not find a single word to express it with. Everything that did take verbal shape within him he put aside at once as being either obtrusive or perhaps showing mere curiosity. And his compassion suddenly took the shape of anxiety for the girl's health under all this. He looked round for his coat, which he had flung off when rescuing her, and tried to wrap it round her shoulders.

"Now do, please, make haste and get home and dry and warm yourself," he said.

"Oh, I shall not catch cold," she replied, putting the coat away from her, "and *if*—well, I do think you needn't grudge me a *natural* death."

"But I do. I grudge you any and every and all sorts of death!" he cried, excitedly.

She shrugged her shoulders and laughed. Yes: she was made so. Barely five minutes had passed since she had tried to take her own life, and she laughed—not very merrily certainly, but still—laughed.

"You'd better put the coat on yourself," said she, "otherwise I cannot allow you to escort me to my home, and I'm sure you want to do

so—to make yourself quite sure that I don't repeat this late performance."

He had quite forgotten the strangeness of his costume, and now he gave his person quite a startled glance. He put on his coat in a confused, hurried way.

She went on, and he followed her. He had a presentiment as to where she would direct her steps.

She went up from the little harbor, turned to the left. Yes, exactly as he had expected. She stopped short at the old mansion and stood facing him in a niche where there was a small, scarcely observable, door let into the wall by the side of the great gates, which were shut—always kept shut, he could not but believe.

Her pure slender figure produced a singular impression, seen as it was in the deep shadow of this recess.

"Good-night," said she, turning to go within.

He hesitated. Then, placing his large warm hand on hers, which had already fastened itself on the handle of the door, he stammered out:

"Ah, if one only knew—if only one could be of some service to you!"

"There is nothing to know, and there is no way in which any soul can be of service to me," replied she, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Is there nothing I can do for you, nothing?" he asked warmly.

She shook her head and was about to turn the handle of the door.

He said to himself that, only one second more

and she would vanish utterly from his life. He held her back. "Yes, there is something else, there is one thing more," he said, imploringly. Promise me that you will never again, never try to--to—make away with yourself."

"I cannot promise that," she said, decisively.

"I implore you, do, do try to live!"

She was silent for a moment and then said. "Be it so: I will try. We will compromise the matter. I'll try for at least a year."

"A year! I won't agree to any such thing!" he cried. "Five years!" By this time the conversation had so moved him, and he was so devoured by anxiety for her that he had taken hold of both her hands, and was looking full at her with those kind sincere eyes of his.

He felt that her hands quivered slightly, very slightly, in his. If kind Heaven would only grant that the girl might see that life, under some circumstances, might still so shape itself for her as to satisfy all her cravings for happiness! He felt that some change had come over her; but that he had contributed to this—or could, otherwise than by his earnest exhortations or entreaties—it did not occur to him for a moment to think. It did not enter into his thoughts that there might be something contagious in his own state of exaltation. Indeed, he did not at all realize how warm and excited he himself was.

"Well, have it as you will; I'll promise," she said in low tones. "Five years, five long years!"

"Your word of honor?"

"Yes, on my word of honor. They say that that doesn't mean much in a woman's mouth; but you can rely on what I say, indeed you can. There may be a good deal amiss in me as a girl, but if you view me as a human being, I assure you I'm the soul of honor."

And now everything had been said that they could have to say to one another; but he still did not go.

"My name is Werner Schlitzing, and I am a lieutenant in the guards. If ever you have any need of me, I'll come from the very ends of the world," he murmured, and drew her hand to his lips.

"Good-night," she said; and then something strange, indeed, occurred. She was standing on a step, and her head was, therefore, somewhat higher than his. With a sudden, quick movement she placed her hands on his shoulders, drew him toward her, and kissed him on the forehead.

Before he could quite realize the extraordinary thing she had done, she had thrust him with some little violence from her, the little door had opened and been closed again. And he stood there quite alone, before the gloomy, sinister courtyard which had swallowed her up.

Everything about him seemed to turn round. He asked himself whether the whole thing was not a dream. His wet clothes assured him of the contrary. No, it was no dream! It was reality! It was the one hour in his young life

which, in its sweetness and rich significance, surpassed all that the hours previous had ever afforded him. Yes, it was that, all that; and it was past, and could never come again!

CHAPTER IV.

THE prosaic side of life immediately asserted its claims and would take no ideal. However, he was in no danger of taking cold; the summer heat was too great for that. But the weight of his wet clothes was very uncomfortable, and he wanted to rid himself of them before they dried on his person. He repaired to the station, where he had left his baggage, and asked them to tell him of some good inn. They named one; but whether it was the "Red Lion," or "The Faunus," or "The Grapevine," he could not for the life of him have told a little later. However, he went to the place, was shown to a room, and changed his clothes. By this time he was quite hungry, and he demanded a ham sandwich and a glass of beer.

Then, in a casual sort of way, he asked the waiter who brought him this frugal refection if he happened to know to whom the mansion belonged which had armorial bearings in front of a courtyard.

The waiter reflected for a moment; he did not quite know what the young gentleman meant.

"It is the house that stands in a street that

descends sharply from the side of the hill in the direction of the river. It has big iron gratings before the windows, and looks as if it might be a monastery or even a lunatic asylum," explained Werner.

Now the waiter understood.

"Ah, h'm!" he said, "I know what the baron means."

It was Werner's fate to be addressed invariably as "Baron" by all waiters and commercial people, even when he had ordered nothing better than a ham sandwich. Protests were unavailing, he knew that from experience; and, as it seemed to please the waiters, he let them have their own way. He was not the sort of person to whom any one would impute complicity in such a thing.

"Yes, yes, I know what the baron means; the mansion belongs to the Countess Haidenheim, a very pious lady, indeed. She has been living there just a year, and has very few servants—she is very poor."

"And the young girl who is staying with her there is her grandchild?" asked Werner, who did his best to put the question in as unconcerned a way as he could.

The waiter made no reply for a moment, and then said: "People conjecture so."

"But that's a thing which people must know, if it is so," cried Werner, with some vexation.

"There are some cases," said the waiter, with some stress on his words, spreading out his fingers as far as they would go and laying

that hand on his heart—"there are some cases in which a guess at the rights of the situation, . . ." He pronounced it "sitiwation."

"Well, what do you happen to have guessed or made out?" asked Werner, somewhat roughly.

The fact is, that he felt he was giving way to curiosity in a manner not quite consistent with good taste; and he visited this on the waiter.

"Well, we believe . . . of course we can't get anything clear out of the old waiting-woman who is with the Countess. Whenever one says anything to her about our ideas she just shakes her head, and all we can get out of her is, 'I say nothing;' but we believe that things were not quite right with the Countess's daughter, and that the young lady is the result—"

At this point, some other guest of the hotel required the waiter's services, and he left Werner, saying, "I'll come again, directly."

When Werner called him back, in a little while, to pay for what he had had, the waiter asked:

"H'm! Has the baron seen the young lady?"

"Yes," replied Werner, "just for a moment. I passed her in the street."

"Charming, baron, quite charming, isn't she?" said the waiter, enthusiastically, blinking with a sort of insipid impertinence.

The blinking, as well as the enthusiasm, seemed unwarrantable to Werner. He was put out by the man's manner, was angry on

the sweet, unknown girl's account. He vouchsafed no further reply to the man's remarks, gave him a fee, and rose to go.

The waiter grinned "Many thanks, sir," but evidently could not make up his mind to leave the subject. "What a pity it is, baron, what a dreadful pity! Such a charming young lady! And so kind she is, too; a little hot-tempered, certainly; doesn't get on with the Countess at all, but the poor and the sick just worship her. And so beautiful, too. Looks like a princess, and has no name; is called nothing but Mademoiselle Lena. How can she ever marry! Whatever she is herself, it's a stain, a stain. . ."

Werner could stand no more of it. It was as much as he could do to restrain himself from throwing something at the man's head. He drew himself up to his full height, plunged his hands in the pockets of his jacket, and, without vouchsafing the too eloquent waiter another glance, stalked out of the wine-room.

At the door of the inn was the landlord, to whom he handed payment for the use of the room in which he had changed his clothes, and gave directions that his baggage should be sent on as early as possible the next day to the "Court of Nassau," at Schlangenbad.

The landlord expressed his modest astonishment that the "Baron" had not thought it desirable to remain at Eltville till the next day. But Werner cut him quite short and stepped out valiantly into the night air, which, at that sea-

son and place, was laden with sweet scents. The landlord looked after him and tapped his forehead. There could be no mistake about it, none whatever: "Something is wrong with that gentleman—quite wrong!"

Well, the fact is, that there was something wrong with Werner, though not in the extreme sense of the landlord. All his veins were throbbing with agitation and excitement such as he had never before experienced. He was in a condition which would have made it unendurable to be shut up in one of the small rooms of that inn, perhaps within any four walls.

The road out of the little town lay quite unmistakably before him. A fine high-road it was, and he went tramping along it in the direction of Schlangenbad. Whether the way to that place was long or short was nothing to him. He was in the infantry, unfortunately yes! But, after all, that had made him a first-rate pedestrian. Still, he would so much have preferred to serve in the cavalry; but that had been quite out of the question in their circumstances. The mother had had quite as much as she could manage to put him in the guards instead of the line. However, he had good hopes of the best of advancement. There was quite a prospect of his being promoted to the General Staff.

Altogether, he was quite satisfied with his lot. His conscience was pure, his health sound, his talents were considerable, his occupation interested him—the military vocation

was one that suited him and made him happy. There was more than one Prince of the blood with whom he would have declined to make an exchange.

How then did it come about that he was so suddenly oppressed by a feeling of discomfort? why did his pulses beat so feverishly? why did he feel so painfully depressed? Could it be anxiety about his sick mother? Hardly. He had to confess to himself—and could not help blushing as he did so—that he had not given his mother a thought in these last hours. Certainly, her condition was not such as to occasion any immediate anxiety. Still, he was almost minded to reproach himself for the lounging carelessness which had caused this postponement of his meeting with her. Under the circumstances, however, he could not do so. But for those careless ways of his as to his comings and goings he would not have had it in his power to save a human life.

Then, all of a sudden, the questioning thought flashed across his mind; had he really done a good deed—or was it for eventual good at all—in thus forcing that young creature back to life? What sort of existence could there be in store for one so situated as he feared she was?

This view of the matter, however, he put aside at once as an unconscientious abuse of his conscience. It was a clear, plain, fixed principle and duty that human beings should mutually force one another to put up with life; the world could not go on if that principle were to be im-

paired. If the impulse or desire to live became too weak in any given person, then it was the duty of fellow creatures to fortify and supplement that weakness out of their own strength.

But, for all this, when he tried to picture to himself the future of the young girl nothing satisfactory presented itself to him. He could not resist a vague feeling that the girl's spiritual constitution was disturbed by some radical want of harmony among its various elements. To his fancy, the girl seemed to have upon her some stamp or sign or mark indicating that she was reserved for an exceptional and, perhaps, too troubled existence. Indeed, what else could be expected in view of the present unhappy conditions of her life, which had been sufficiently disclosed to him to warrant his passing judgment on her case? He could not help dwelling on that kiss which she had pressed upon his forehead when they parted. This sweet precipitation of hers, this proof of her deep gratitude; this caress so simple, so spontaneous, so warm, and yet so exquisitely chaste, had, at the moment, so transported him, that he had been almost fain to sink at the feet of the dear, silly, enchanting thing and place himself at her service—devote himself absolutely to her, for life and death.

But now, when he came to think it over, there was something in the occurrence which disturbed him. Of course, what she did had been quite sweet and lovable. But what well brought up girl would ever have thought of such a thing? There was no getting over it. That kiss did

betray something of that undue and dangerous exaltation—something of that intoxication of the heart, dominating reflection and moral principle alike, to which the poor girl owed her own existence altogether.

He asked himself, with some vexation, why he had not thought of all this before? And, then, he reproached himself bitterly. What a pitiful, small Philistine he was, after all, to apply these petty little rules of minor morals and etiquettes to this creature, so deserving of compassionate regard! What was he made of, that such thoughts came up in his mind only after he had had some intimation of the stain—if such there was—attaching to her origin?

Did he seriously mean to make her personally responsible for that misfortune? Why, there was no logic in it at all. And, worse than that, such an idea was unbecoming a gentleman. And there was no doubt of one thing, anyhow; she was a most charming creature. Then the thought flashed across him, "Oh, that girl! How she *could* love!" And a slight shiver ran through him from head to foot.

Then the words of the waiter recurred to him, "Who in the world will marry her?"

Marry, indeed! He began to laugh heartily at himself for letting his thoughts wander afield in that fashion. Marry! Who thought of anything like that? Absurdity! He laughed; but he did not recover his cheerfulness.

His little adventure had unhinged him; that was clear; he felt it. He felt a difficulty in re-

covering his mental equilibrium. And yet—and yet, it had been very sweet, very lovely! What a pity that it was only one short, closed chapter; no continuation possible!

And so he went thinking and walking on. By his side went old Rhine, in all his majesty; broad and cool. A transparent mist, which seemed made up of vapor and moonshine, hovered over the stream and spread itself slowly and widely over the landscape, over the road, and penetrated into the dark forest. All earth seemed to have vanished, and the scene to be one of moving clouds alone.

After a while the road diverged from the river bank. And the voice of the great stream sank lower and lower, until it ceased to reach his ear at all. All that he now heard was the sound of his own footsteps and the rustlings in the forest. His walk was quite varied. Now he found himself in a little valley, with heights at his right and left, that shut in all views beyond. Presently one of these heights by the road gradually sank and sank with a quiet descent, mantled by an ample growth of underwood. And here the view was opened, taking in the rich, fruitful level country, with here and there a white cottage rising conspicuously out of it. In the far distance the noble river was visible again, a stream of silver touched with shimmering blue. And the quivering veil of mist was spread over it all, as though it were the ruling spirit of the scene.

There was sufficient light for him to be able

to read the writing on the finger-posts. He traversed several villages, the houses and cottages in which were all asleep, with a strange gleam upon their small window-panes. He was not sensible of the slightest bodily fatigue, but became sleepy; in fact, it was the uniformity and monotony of his gait, as he went along, that seemed to have a soporific effect on him. The road was longer than he had supposed it would be. He asked himself what in the world he would do if he reached Schlangenbad on foot, and at about two in the morning. It occurred to him that he would upset and exasperate all the landlords of all the hotels in the place. Then the romantic notion occurred to him that it would be a fine thing to spend the whole night in the forest.

Soldier as he was, there was nothing in the idea of sleeping in the open air to deter him. He went deeper and deeper into the forest, and, selecting a spot where the moss was thickest, and the forest air seemed most laden with perfume, he lay down, resting his head against the roots of a tree. Then, in that last stage of wakefulness, the mysterious eyes of the girl whom he had forced back to life held his soul with their strange gleam, and, in his imagination, he all but folded again in his arms the wet form, and felt it gathering warmth again in his embrace.

Then there came upon his half sleeping brain the memory of an old legend which tells of a water-witch, with cold blood in her veins, and how she was warmed into the fullness of woman-

ly human life by the embraces of a mortal man. And, all the while, there was in his ears that fragment of song, mingled with the rustling of the forest leaves: "Die, love and joy! Die!" And then—he was fast asleep.

CHAPTER V.

"MADAME THE BARONESS is breakfasting, at this moment, with mademoiselle—with her daughter—in the open air, at the small open space as you turn to the right from the Nassau alley."

Such was the information imparted by the waiter to Werner, when, on his arrival at Schlangenbad—at about eight o'clock in the morning—he inquired after his mother.

The night in the open air had done him a great deal of good. His eyes were clear and his lips were fresh, and his long form as erect and rigid as a young fir-tree. He had taken the precaution of having himself well brushed down in the last village he had passed through; but, for all that, there was more than one shred of moss adhering to his clothes. And there was something about his whole person that suggested the odors of the forest.

"There, to the right of the Nassau alley, going by the covered walk," the waiter repeated his explanation, adding, "Madame always breakfasts in the open air."

"Is that so? Hum! well, God be praised, the mother can't have very much the matter with her!" thought Werner, hastening with long steps along the walk pointed out by the waiter, which was thickly covered with luxurious rose-bushes. After that came a bridge; and when he had crossed that, he caught sight of his mother at once. She had on a very old-fashioned, brown round straw hat, fastened under her chin with broad ribbons; and the hat threw a shadow over her beautifully chiseled old face, which had an extraordinary expression of amiability and penetrating sagacity. Her dress was a black silk, every little fold of which was well known to Werner; and she had some sort of wrapper over her shoulders, and covering a great part of her person. She was one of those who entertain a very strong opinion that no woman, after reaching sixty years, should let her waist be seen when it could possibly be avoided.

By her side sat her stepdaughter, who was considerably older than Werner. The young woman—she could still be called so, but not for long—looked extremely stiff, extremely pale, and extremely unamiable. In features and form she took after her father.

Although the mother's face was not turned in Werner's direction as he advanced, she felt rather than saw who it was quicker than his sister, whose eyes were, so to speak, looking full into his coming face. The old lady turned slowly round, and her dark, deeply intelligent eyes, which seemed to be all alive with life and spirit,

began to shine with strange gleams. She looked as though a beam of sunshine had suddenly come to light up her countenance. "Is it possible! Werner, my boy—my precious boy!" She jumped up at once. He was as much moved as might have been expected from what we have seen of him. He stooped to her, took her in his arms, and kissed her on the forehead. She had fallen away somewhat from her earlier stature, under the pressure of the years, and he had shot up to an unconscionable height. She stroked him with soft, warm hands—aged and wrinkled hands they were, but as soft and warm as ever—and repeated again and again, "My precious boy! my noble boy!" And then her old face began suddenly to quiver, in the midst of her excitement and delight, with a little convulsion which looked as if laughter and pain were contending for the mastery.

"What's the matter, mammy?" he asked, stooping down to her in some anxiety.

"Oh, it's nothing—nothing at all! It's only that I got up too quickly, and came down too heavily on my feet. There's that broken leg, you know, which has only just got right; and when I tread too heavily on that foot, it is afraid I shall forget all about it, I suppose, and makes a point of reminding me of its existence. You know, I'm more or less lame; else, what should bring me to Schlangenbad. But I forgot all about it in the delight of seeing you." She drew him down to the bench by her side. "He looks well, doesn't he, Thilda—what do you

say?" turning to her stepdaughter, who now did her part—not very enthusiastically, it must be confessed—in welcoming her brother. "He's handsomer than ever, isn't he?"

"Oh! I say, mammy—mammy!" remonstrated Werner. He couldn't help laughing.

"The people are all turning round to look at you both," observed Thilda, in tones indicating very little satisfaction.

"Let them look, and turn and look as much as they like! I don't wonder they turn to look at my boy; it only proves what good taste they have!" the old lady cried, in some vexation. "What next, I wonder? *Now*, I'm not even to give way to my happiness at having my boy with me, Thilda! What do you take for breakfast, Werner—tea or coffee? The coffee is very good here. We'll tell them to bring coffee for one. Thilda and I always divide coffee for one between us. They're quite amiable about this, here in Schlangenbad, and one needn't put any restraint upon one's self for the waiters. The people don't expect us to order two portions when one is enough for two. And that's a good thing for my purse; it's more of an invalid than I am."

"Mamma! mamma!" said Thilda, speaking in as low a tone as her agitation would allow. "*Must* you scream all that out so loud, for all the world to hear? Why should we tell everybody that we are not well off? People can see it for themselves plainly enough, without our helping them!"

Werner laughed. His mother shrugged her

shoulders with a vexed expression; and the waiter appeared, fortunately, at that moment to put an end to the little scene which really looked as though it might develop into a quarrel.

"But how in the world is it that you are here? Tell me, my boy—tell me!" urged the mother, as soon as she had ordered her son's breakfast. "Why, I thought you were half way to Italy by this time. Your last letters were full of nothing but traveling projects."

"I could not make up my mind to go on without coming to see after you," Werner explained, in some perplexity.

"Is that so? Is that really the only reason why you are here?" said the old woman. She put her head on one side and blinked up at him in a curious, observant way. "Is *that* why you have cut off a portion of your short leave of absence, and spent some of your money, little as it was in all conscience?"

"The money again! the money again!" murmured Thilda, who was on pins and needles.

The old lady did not, or would not, hear.

"Well, as to the money, that I can replace, Werner, my boy; but the time—the time! It is more than I can understand!"

"There is nothing to understand about it," said Werner, as re-assuringly as he could. "It's all plain enough; it's a delight to me to have you, and it's a delight to you to have me"—he drew her hand to his lips—"and that is surely enough to account for my coming."

"Oh, don't tell me!" cried the old Madame

von Schlitzing, giving him a little slap. "You would have got along quite well without this sight of me. And a really good mother ought to know how to dispense with her children's presence when their happiness requires it. If I had received some letters from Italy full of your pleasure at being there, it would have been enough for me, child. But, if the truth be known, you've been worrying yourself about my health. Malvina is bothering me about it all the time."

"Who is it that is talking about Malvina?" was heard at this juncture; it was a woman's voice, and one that suggested that its owner took pains to keep it in a state of nicety and refinement. "Why, Werner! *You* here! What a surprise!"

He looked up, and saw his Aunt Warsberg holding out her right hand to him, for which purpose she did not take off the pale gray kid glove in which it was clad.

She was a lady of somewhat large proportions, and, considering her age, of a remarkably fine figure; stout rather than lean. Her face had at one time been decidedly handsome, but its features were now somewhat dislocated from their pristine symmetry. The probability was that they had been tired out by the grimacing expression of excessive amiability which she had always obliged them to wear. Her eyelids were not quite under control; one of them, in fact, was apt to fall over the eye of its own accord, if she did not mind very much what she was about.

The mouth was a little awry. She had at one time been famous for her complexion; now that complexion was—rouge.

She was dressed with the accurately careful simplicity proper to a morning toilet. There was a dark cloth cloak over all, a sort of loose mantle; and, immediately under it, the swelling folds of a fine cambric blouse. She had on a small black straw hat, the left side of which was adorned by a bird's wing of gray color. Her toilet was completed by a very long parasol, on which she supported herself as she came along, just as though it were a big walking-stick. There was much dignity in her bearing, and her glance, as she addressed her fellow creatures, had far too much politeness in it to be satisfied with one interlocutor, and, accordingly, took in habitually all the people who were present with a semi-circular movement of her still handsome head. All her gestures were carefully measured for gracious effect, and when she spoke her articulation was deliberately round and modulated. Altogether, the effect was that of the part of the "dignified gentlewoman" of a court theater. She was absolutely without that which is the specific stamp of the true great lady—perfect naturalness, a total absence of artificiality. It was quite unmistakable; the very first glance told you that between this lady and her sister-in-law there could not be any closely sympathetic relations. But Aunt Malvina was the most influential member of the family. So she had to be treated with some consideration.

Werner kissed her hand, and she seated herself in an amiably condescending manner on the chair which he offered her.

"How is it with you to-day, dearest Rose?" This to her sister-in-law.

"You know that I can't bear having that question put to me," said Madame Schlitzing, who was obviously much put out by this addition to the group. She would much have preferred having her boy all to herself a little while longer. Then she repented of her little bit of unamiability at once, and tried to make up for it. "Won't you breakfast with us, Malvina?"

"Thanks—no! I always breakfast in my room," replied Countess Warsberg. "But your coffee seems good—very good indeed. The butter is not much to boast of, but one must not be too critical. A la guerre comme à la guère—one mustn't be too particular when campaigning. By what train did you get here, then, Werner?"

"Yes; I was just thinking of putting the same question myself," interposed his mother.

"I? By the evening train, as far as Eltville; and from that place I came on foot."

"Why, where did you sleep?" asked the countess.

"In the forest," he replied, merrily.

"Ah! how romantic!" cried the countess.

His mother was horrified. "But it might give you an attack of rheumatism, you foolish boy, you!"

"In such hot weather as this?" laughed Werner; "no danger, mother. The only thing to be

apprehended was that a lizard or a spider might perhaps creep over my face; but if anything of the sort did happen, I don't know anything about it. It was glorious! so fresh, and with a perfume! I declare it made me feel that one would never shut one's self up in a bedroom again. But, for all that, I do want to change my clothes a bit now, and I ought to see whether I can have a room in this hotel. My baggage must have got here by this time."

"If no room is vacant, tell them to take you to mine, if you want to have a wash," cried the old lady after Werner, as he was hurrying away.

"Mention my name if there's any difficulty with the landlord," said Countess Warsberg, with importance. Then, looking after him as he went off, she murmured: "A handsome fellow, Werner, really; pity that he doesn't patronize a better tailor."

Countess Malvina, the youngest sister of Kurt von Schlitzing, started in her career as a very poor young lady, and as companion to some gentlewoman. In her thirtieth year she married a rich elderly man, who had promoted her to widowhood not long before this, leaving her brilliantly provided for in his will.

In her own set she was usually called the model-countess. In fact, everything about her was calculated to convey the idea of a pattern or model. It pervaded her style of dress, her housekeeping, her deportment, her reputation—even her views and opinions about life in general. These she kept carefully in a praiseworthy

middle region, between narrow religiosity and dangerously free speculation. As to her political opinions, they were apt to change with every change of ministry; and her views of literature were as carefully regulated for respectability and effect as the rest of her make-up. She read quite enough of books which set forth advanced and emancipated opinions to enable her to discuss them with men, and to shudder over them with women. She showed herself so far liberal as to be able to pay the requisite flatteries to scholars and artists, while remaining exclusive enough for the prejudices of her own higher circle.

In this way, trimming her sails to the wind all the time, she had valiantly fought her way upward in society now for thirty years, obtaining really remarkable social promotion. And, as there was plenty of kindness and good will at the bottom of her character, and she had nothing else particular to do in the world, at the time we meet her she made it her business, as much as possible, to give her poor relations a hoist up the social ladder.

But, speaking generally, her hand had not been happy in what it had set itself to do in this latter regard. Werner's eldest brother, Kuno, had been her favorite, and she had got him a commission in the Uhlans of the guard to flatter her own vanity. But the young man had spent so much money that she got tired, at last, of paying his debts. He had, in other respects also, so irretrievably damaged his reputation,

that it could not be otherwise than satisfactory to all parties when he met with a comparatively creditable exit from the world by falling in a duel, closing thus a career of which he had made nothing but a miserable mess.

However, this did not deter Countess Warsberg from her course of patronage. She continued indefatigably her efforts at playing Providence for her family, endeavoring especially to give their thoughts and actions such direction as would bring them closer to aristocratic circles and interests. The only difference was that she did not now put her hand in her own pocket to carry out her purposes, as she had done in the case of her eldest nephew.

Just at present, it was Werner whom she was making the subject of her more or less kindly experiments. But the aunt and nephew did not exactly hit it off together. The truth is that the young man's perfect contentment, in the midst of very moderate resources and circumstances, left her very discontented indeed.

However, all that was to be changed now, must and should be changed. She nursed all sorts of great projects for the young man's benefit.

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The morning was now considerably advanced. The sun was quite high when Werner, with the lounging bearing of a person absolutely free from any calls on his time, passed the little bridge which leads almost directly from the hotel to the celebrated Nassau Alley. He had gos-

siped with his mother so long and fully that, for the moment, they had nothing further to say to each other. And his mother and sister had now gone for their bath. So he had to set about the task of killing time as best he could. Italy was in his thoughts; but these soon merged in reveries about—Eltville.

"Why, you've come in the very nick of time!" exclaimed his Aunt Malvina. He looked up. There she was, seated at the same small open space where he had breakfasted with his mother. The breakfast things had been cleared away, and, in their place, there lay an immense selection of colored wools on the table. Countess Malvina was busy with tapestry work. "I was beginning to feel dreadfully bored, Werner. Do sit down and bear me company a while."

"With pleasure," replied Werner, very courteously, and sat down.

"Well, what do you think of your mother's condition?" asked the countess, drawing a very long green thread out of the piece of tapestry she was at work on.

"Cheerful and happy beyond my most sanguine expectations," replied Werner.

"Oh! you can't rely on that sort of thing at all—not at all!" said the countess, in very discouraging tones. "She was excited by your arrival, and the delight it gave her made her very lively for a little bit. But the truth is she is very weak and feeble. I think she is very much run down indeed."

"Really?" asked Werner; and his counte-

nance took on such an expression of disturbance and pain that the model-countess was sorry for him.

"Perhaps I am too anxious," she sighed; "there certainly is no fear of any immediate bad turn."

"Who is attending mother here?" asked Werner.

"Doctor Martini. Why do you ask?"

"Because I should like to hear what he has to say about mother's condition," he replied.

"Oh, dear me! I have just told you that, for the present, there was nothing we need give ourselves any special anxiety about," the countess insisted; "besides, that man is a regular optimist—my very opposite. It's quite a fault with me. I'm always loading myself with anxieties of one kind or other—always seeing things too dark. And when it's about people I'm fond of I lose my head altogether. I suppose you're vexed at my bringing you here," she continued; "perhaps it was premature, useless."

"Well, perhaps there was no need of alarming me, as you did," said Werner. "But, considering all things, I am grateful to you for putting it into my head to come here."

"Really! with that delightful journey to Italy before you?"

"Oh! what will it matter if I postpone that a little while?" answered Werner. "I assure you that, now I come to think of it all, I consider it was quite stupid of me that I did not plan to spend a portion of my leave with the

mother. Indeed, I'm quite glad to be here, not sorry at all, not at all. And it was quite a delightful surprise to find her so much better than I expected."

He blushed deeply—like a mere school-boy—as he said this; his voice partly failed him and he trembled a little. One hair-breadth further and he would have made himself quite ridiculous; but he remained on the right side of the line and challenged only sympathy.

Countess Warsburg was sensible of this herself. She looked him over from head to foot with pride and tenderness. "Werner," she exclaimed, "you are a splendid fellow! What a pity that you are not in the cavalry."

"Perhaps so, aunt," cried Werner, with a little irony in his voice; "only just think, circumstances might have obliged me to serve in the line, and that would have been ever so much worse!"

The countess shuddered. "I would never have consented to such a dreadful thing," said she, positively.

Werner kept pulling at his very soft brown mustache. All sorts of strange ideas about his Aunt Malvina and her doings frequently came into his head, whether he would or no. So it was now.

"Aunt," he began, after a short pause, "wasn't there something else besides my mother's health? Hadn't you some reason besides, for summoning me hither?"

"Nay, Werner, my dear Werner, what other

reason could I possibly have had? There was none, none at all," she assured him warmly; "only—" here she cleared her throat with a little air of perplexity, "only, as you *are* here, I am very glad, very glad indeed—h'm!—to have the opportunity of fully discussing with you some points in the circumstances of the family which leave much to be desired. Perhaps we can do something together to remedy them."

"Family circumstances! Leave much to be desired!" repeated Werner, anxiously. "I don't know of anything that should be spoken of in that way, now that poor Kuno is dead. Has some other creditor turned up?"

"Oh! no, no; all that has been settled and done with some time now. I have in my mind quite other matters, things that touch us quite nearly, much more so than those old troubles —things that just now are really quite disturbing and disquieting. For example—" and here the model-countess let her embroidery fall into her lap, and folded her hands with an expression of the most graceful horror—"for example, there is your mother's hat."

Werner's eyes opened as far as they could go, and he stared at his aunt. What *did* it mean? Had she suddenly gone crazy?

"My mother's hat!" he repeated, "do you put that in the category of family misfortunes? Really, aunt?"

"Don't laugh, Werner!" said she, in grandiose tones. "Unfortunately you have no idea of the

important part trifles like that play in real life. Hat, indeed! Of course a hat is a mere detail, but the one she's wearing here is only too unfortunately characteristic of your dear mother. Then there's Thilda, with her grass-green barège and her mosaic brooch with its picture of St. Peter's — a scarecrow, my dear Werner, positively a scarecrow! It makes me feel quite uncomfortable with my friends who are staying here at Schlangenbad. What is the consequence? I have not been able to bring them together with my little circle here. People point them out to one another as the standing jokes of the season at this watering-place. I do entreat you, Werner, just see if you can't—Ah, good-morning, Else!"

The countess shifted the expression of her countenance quite suddenly and skillfully. A fascinating smile replaced, more rapidly than might have been thought possible, the care-worn look proper to deep anxiety for the imperiled family fortunes. She sprang up and held out her hand to a young lady who apparently had no idea except of hurrying past her with a courteous bow. Werner, of course, rose too, and took a look at the young person—and his eyes met the prettiest, most joyous, most absolutely sincere pair of blue eyes that he had ever seen in his whole life.

"Allow me to present my nephew: Lieutenant von Schlitzing—Mademoiselle Else von Ried."

Werner made a formally polite bow. Mdlle. von Ried gave him a short, careless nod. She

seemed in a mighty hurry, and, quite obviously, was not at all minded to stay more than a very little while with the countess and her nephew.

"Where are you off to?" asked the countess, holding the young girl tightly by the arm.

"To lawn-tennis," replied Mdlle. von Ried.

"You're too late for lawn-tennis, my dear child. Half an hour ago—more than that—I was walking with Marie Glynka in the Nassau Alley, and the lawn-tennis ground was entirely occupied."

"Occupied!" cried the young girl, with vexation. "Why, I told Edmund Linden expressly to keep the lawn-tennis ground for me. Did you happen to see Edmund there? I mean at the lawn-tennis ground?"

"Certainly! I saw Count Linden there with the two Sytzows and another gentleman, a stranger," replied the countess; "a regular gentleman's game."

"Gentleman's game? Why, it's my game. That's the match I'm going to play!" cried the young girl, with great vivacity.

Countess Warsberg laughed somewhat forcedly. "Else, my dear little Else, you are divine! You play lawn-tennis with four young gentlemen! But that's impossible—quite impossible, I do assure you!"

"Why, I should like to know?" asked Else, contracting her brows. "The gentlemen make no objection. I'm not the least in their way. I can play just as well as they do."

"Great Heavens! She is a child—a child!"

exclaimed the model-countess, blinking over Else's shoulder at her nephew, who, while this was going on, had politely retired a little into the background. "She is charming, charming; but a child—a mere child." As she said the words the model-countess gave the young girl a maternal tap on the shoulder, and blinked at her nephew more energetically than before, with those eyes of hers that could not keep step with one another. She had it quite plainly at heart to draw his particular attention to the girl.

Such efforts on her part were quite superfluous; were more likely, indeed, to hinder than promote her purpose. Werner's eyes wanted no prompting in the matter; they were already quite sufficiently occupied with the young woman.

She was strikingly pretty; she had all the beauty of the choicest and most favored product of earth, something that had ripened under the happiest circumstances of soil, climate, and cultivation. Else von Ried was one of those girls that no man passes without turning round to have another look at.

She was a true child of the district, so favored by Divine Providence, in which she had had her birth, and out of whose soil she seemed, as it were, to have grown. The fire of the Rhenish vintage darted in every fiber of her body, which was exquisitely formed, with a decided tendency to luxurious fullness. No one could look at her for a moment without seeing that she was of good family; but she had not yet acquired those final touches of perfection which make the "great

lady." Nor, on the other hand, could she properly be termed provincial; that word did not apply to her at all. But she gave the impression of one whose intellectual and social horizon was not by any means extensive, though its limitations might have been due to protective rather than to prohibitory influences.

A person of even much less power in reading character and understanding people than Werner possessed would have seen quickly, as did he, that from the first hour of her life to the present she had reigned as undisputed queen in the little circle to which she belonged. She was, obviously, full of self-will, excitable, quite unused to any sort of opposition; but just as plainly, if indeed the excess was not on this side, her heart overflowed with goodness.

In Werner's view she was a little too self-confident in her words and bearing, and so far he was right; but he fancied he saw in her some trace of arrogance, and in that he was quite mistaken. There was one thing, however, which there was no denying: pretty she was—extraordinarily pretty. One would have had to travel long and far to find any object more charming than this young girl in her light-colored tennis costume and her sailor-hat with its white ribbon.

"She is a child, a child!" repeated Countess Warsberg, working her eyes more and more energetically for Werner's benefit. Werner smiled vaguely, and the countess went on: "That the gentlemen are delighted to have you for a partner in their game I don't doubt for a moment,

you dear, charming little Else; but—now don't be offended with me, you enchanting little spoiled thing!—it is not a proper thing for a young girl to amuse herself with four young gentlemen and nobody else there."

"I should very much like to know why?" cried Else now, seriously exasperated. "Why shouldn't it be just as proper as with four young girls? I assure you, countess, that there's not nearly so much harm in gossiping with four young gentlemen as there is with young ladies. The gentlemen never tell one anything about their love adventures, and the young girls, when they are by themselves, never talk of anything else."

This time Werner found her quite irresistible, and burst into hearty laughter. Else just gave him a look, short, but straight in the eyes, with her own pretty blue orbs, and then turned her head away from him.

The countess, however, smiled as nicely as she could. "Is that so, indeed? That's all the young girls talk about, is it?" she lisped. "And I suppose you manage to keep step, at least, with them in that?"

"In *what ?*" asked Else, among whose sweet peculiarities it was to forget, now and then, what charming nonsense she had made herself responsible for the last time she opened her pretty mouth.

"Well, in giving a full, true and particular report of *your* little love adventures."

"I declare, I don't know what I *could* say

about such things, if I were driven to it ever so," replied Else, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Why, couldn't you boast a little of your numerous conquests?" said the countess in a coaxing, flattering way.

"Oh, *dear* me! If there's one thing that bores me more than another, it's those conquests," said Else, with great decision; "there's nothing in the whole world so stupid and tiresome as these everlasting 'conquests,' as people choose to call them."

"Can any one keep out of them very well, Else, especially if she plays lawn-tennis often with young gentlemen alone?"

"Certainly they can, if they've seriously made up their mind to do so; they can, quite easily. I can, I know. My friends know that I can't stand any one making up to me in that way; so they don't try my patience with it. I do think there's nothing so stupid and tiresome as that eternal love-making; it just spoils all sport and sets everything upside down."

"Oh, how amusing she is!" cried the countess; then, threatening the young girl with her finger, she said: "Else, you'd better not repeat that too often, for the time *will* come when—"

"Oh! I'm very sorry, but I really can't keep the boys waiting any longer," said Else, rather shortly and sharply; the conversation had taken a turn that was decidedly disagreeable to her. "Besides, they really won't know what has become of me."

But the model-countess was not to be so easily shaken off. She smiled as if much amused, and following the young girl's rather mannish way of putting it, said: "No, no—quite right, we won't let the boys pine any longer. But, if you'll allow it, Else, we'll go with you a little bit of the way." So saying, the countess stuffed away her work in a violet plush bag which she had on her arm, and asked: "Are you coming with us, Werner?".

For a moment he hesitated, and was obviously searching for some excuse for going in the opposite direction, but could not succeed, and so joined the ladies.

Else had observed this hesitation on his part, and also that there was something about her which a little displeased him. Such an occurrence was quite out of the range of her experience. It was a matter of course that, after she had issued her sovereign commands to that effect, no one should presume to pay her those particular attentions she so decidedly objected to. But that any man should permit himself to look at her in the judicial, scrutinizing fashion which Werner had obviously done seemed to her something unprecedented, monstrous. She boiled over with inward rage, and made up her mind absolutely that she would not vouchsafe him any further notice; he should be completely ignored, now and forever. Two minutes afterward she addressed him with the following question: "Have you been here long, Baron von Lützing?"

"Schlitzing, if you have no objection," replied

Werner, the corners of whose mouth were twitching with amusement.

"Oh, pray excuse me! I find it so difficult to get right hold of the new names," said Else, who was evidenty taking pains to be a little high and mighty. Didn't he deserve it?

"Stupid little thing!" said Werner to himself, with those corners at the mouth twitching even more severely. "That I can prefectly well understand, mademoiselle—perfectly."

But Countess Warsberg did not take the silly, thoughtless little speech of the young girl anything like so quietly as her nephew did. "Schlitzing a new name! What can you be thinking about?" she cried, exasperated.

"Oh! I didn't mean it like that, I didn't indeed; I only meant that it was new to me," said Else deprecatingly. She was a little vexed.

"But it ought not to be new to you," said the countess, a little pompously, and by no means mollified. "It's a sign of something wanting in a person of culture—positively it is—not to know that the Schlitzings are one of the oldest families in the country.

"Most certainly," explained Werner, in tones of great solemnity. "The herioc achievements of the Schlitzings reach back into the earliest and grayest of ancient days. Why, long before there was any such thing as a Margrave of Brandenberg, a Schlitzing was strung up for horse-stealing."

"Werner, that is a wretched joke—an exceedingly wretched joke!" said the countess, with

excitement. "You know that I cannot endure things being turned into a jest like that. The least approach to sarcasm is quite repulsive to me."

That was undoubtedly the case. In fact, the intellectual food on which the countess lived had no salt or proper condiment whatever. "What you've just said shows a want of proper feeling, it does indeed," she added, quite angrily.

Werner smiled quietly to himself at this view of the matter; it was the first time in his life that any one had reproached him with a want of proper feeling; the truth being that, considering the temper of his century, he had a good deal more than is now to be found usually among educated people of that fine and noble superstition of the heart which is the safeguard of sanctuaries and institutions.

Else said nothing for a little while, then: "Don't you find Schlangenbad a frightful bore, Mr. von Schlitzing?"

"I haven't been here long enough to be bored by it as yet," replied he.

"Oh, you'll find a very little time will do for that," Else assured him; "for there cannot be two opinions about it, Schlangenbad is a killingly tiresome place!"

"Well, God be praised! if one may judge from yourself, mademoiselle, *you* don't seem to have had much killing performed on you; you and death seem to be about as far off from one another as well can be," said he with a smile, al-

lowing his eyes to wander over the blooming young girl's person.

"Oh, *I?* *I'm* not bored by it, if you come to that; not the least in the world. There are plenty of excellent friends of mine staying here, and some who are not staying take a run over to visit me. Then we either amuse ourselves with playing lawn-tennis, or in making fun of the people who are here for the season. Oh, dear me! what frightful guys some of them are, baron! Do you never get any fun out of your fellow creatures?"

"I'm afraid of trying it; I might be paid back too heavily in my own coin," said the young man.

"Oh, I don't feel the least fear of that!" said Else, carelessly.

"Probably such an idea has never crossed your mind," he replied, rather dryly.

Else bit her lips. He was insupportable, positively insupportable. "Oh! I didn't mean that," she tried to explain. "All I meant was that I don't care a fig if people make fun of me, for my part. Much good may it do them!"

Every moment the young girl longed, more and more, to make this abominable young man change his impassive and phlegmatic demeanor.

"And you may say what you like. Some of the people here this season are quite too absurd for anything. You'll soon have to agree with me in that. Has anybody pointed out to you that elderly Englishman? Everybody says that he has a most remarkable receipt for keeping his

limbs as elastic as when he was a young fellow. Every morning, before putting on his wig he turns a somersault and stands on his head three times—precisely three; never more, never less."

"I cannot say that the gentleman has so far been mentioned to me," said Werner, who could not help smiling.

"And those two old maids," continued Else, "between sixty and seventy, if an hour. Both of them have cotton wool in their ears, and long curls; oh, you know, just like the Van Dyck portraits of the English royal family! If ever by any chance the younger of the two gets into a conversation with a gentleman, her sister pulls her sleeve and says to her, in a sort of agitated half-whisper: 'Baby, for Heaven's sake, mind what you are about!' And, then, sixty-year old Baby sighs and embraces her sister and says, 'Oh, Amandine, you know what I am!' The story goes that some one, ages ago, shot himself for disappointed love of 'Baby,' and since then Amandine is always mortally afraid that 'Baby' may do somebody a mischief."

This time Werner laughed heartily; he really could not help it. His laughter had a pleasant sound, as is the case with all good and wholesome people.

Else was highly delighted with this success, and went on: "Then, there's an old woman, from some back part of Pomerania, or somewhere, who's always going on distractedly about the dearness of everything—only just think, in cheap Schlangenbad!—and totting up how much

the landlord makes out of every slice of roast beef. And there's a daughter, who's disgusted all the time at her mother's stinginess. Daughter is always in the seventh heaven about Italy, has ideals of her own, always wears a mosaic of St. Peter's as a brooch. But the grandest thing of all is the mother's hat—a brown hat of colossal proportions, tied under the chin with ribbons covering the ears—*such* a set-out—"

Else looked up, at this point of her narrative, at Schlitzing's face, to enjoy the delighted and approving expression which she was sure her picturesque narrative had brought upon it; but what she saw was a very heightened color, and eyes that were quite gloomy and threatening.

And, to save the situation, Countess Warsberg flung herself with desperate courage, so to speak, into the melée, with the following highly original observation: "The weather is very oppressive to-day, Else; frightfully hot—don't you think so, Else?"

Just then there burst a confused cry from several male throats.

"Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle Else! Princess Else! Else!" all aimed at the young girl.

They had reached the lawn-tennis ground by this time, and became aware of four youths in light-colored flannel pantaloons and sailor-hats, and shirt-sleeves rolled up to their elbows, who had evidently been waiting long and patiently for their "pearl of the Taunus country," as the girl was usually called in her circle.

These four different accosting cries, which we

have faithfully reported above, indicated the different degrees of intimacy upon which each of the four stood in regard to the girl.

The one who had addressed her, shortly, as Else, was a Rhenish man, an old friend and playmate of her earliest years, Edmund Count Linden, who was in the Hussars. His regiment was stationed at Wiesbaden, and, accordingly, he drove over nearly every day to Schlangenbad.

Although these young gentlemen abstained, in obedience to "her royal command," from paying their addresses—in the technical sense—to Princess Else, they were all, as anybody might see at the first glance, warmly in love with her. But the young Rhenish gentleman was, just as plainly, the one most absolutely devoted to her. For the rest, he was an old acquaintance of Werner Schlitzing, and, after he had paid his respects to Else, and reproached her for her unpunctuality, he cried to Werner: "Why, Schlitzing, what the deuce are you doing here, old boy?"

"I have come to visit my mother and sister," replied Werner, with a significant glance at Else. All the blood shot into the girl's cheeks. She was seized with a presentiment, a most unpleasant presentiment, that the young man with the beautiful gray eyes would turn out to be closely, but most undesirably, related to the old woman from "somewhere in Pomerania."

But who in the world could have imagined such a thing? How could any young man possibly combine the characters of nephew to the

model-countess, and son of this old woman? Well, anyhow, she had somehow wounded his feelings; that was clear enough.

And she had the feeling that it would be very agreeable to her if she could make it up to him somehow.

"Won't you have a game with us, Baron von Schlitzing?" she asked him.

"Thanks, no," he replied, very coldly. "I have had very little practice in lawn-tennis, or in making myself merry at the expense of my fellow creatures."

And, as he said the words, he gave a little sigh of shy perplexity, and gave her the military salute—that is to say, he put two fingers to the rim of his hat, forgetting for the moment that he was not in uniform, and turned to go.

"Won't you stay and look on a little while?" cried the model-countess.

"Thanks, no," answered Werner, with evident impatience, moving off.

The model-countess looked uncertainly, first at him and then at Else. "Well, then, I'll say adieu to you, dear child, for the moment. Amuse yourself well with your four cavaliers. Oh, don't run so, Werner!"

Werner stood still, and his aunt joined him.

For a little while they walked side by side in the deep shade of the Nassau Alley without saying a word to one another. Here and there, as they went, they traversed beams of the sunlight, which made their way with difficulty through the dense branches of the beech-trees. Then the

model-countess broke silence, almost weeping as she did so. "Didn't I tell you? Your mother's hat is a calamity—a calamity for the whole family!"

Werner said not a word.

"And how—er—how do you like my little Else Ried?"

This time Werner looked his aunt quietly and straight in the eyes, and then said with emphasis: "Of all the pretty, superficial, heartless geese I've ever met in my life, she's the prettiest, most superficial, and most heartless. She's a little monster!"

"You are too severe," his aunt answered, and for once in a way she was in the right. "My love, she is a spoiled child, that's all. I can quite understand your being displeased at her impertinences, but she really doesn't mean anything by them; it's just her way of saying first one thing, then another. She plumps out her speeches before anybody and everybody, without a moment's thought as to what may come of them, or whom they may affect."

"She has no right to chatter like that in mixed company!" cried Werner, with some heat; "just as little as any one has to fire off loaded pistols in a public garden. You may be firing at sparrows, and hitting human beings."

CHAPTER VI.

THE afternoon sun is striking sharply down on the white roof of the covered walk at the

Nassau Court Hotel. The climbing roses which grow over the cast-iron pillars supporting the roof droop slightly. What a luxurious abundance of roses! Waves upon waves of branches covered with the rich blooms, and twining themselves with one another superbly. A slight breeze comes up from the Nassau Alley to the rose-trees, and shows its presence by a slight shivering among them. The fountain in front of the house, where the waters are dispensed, with the lofty fir-trees and their peculiar pungent odor all about it, emits a sort of half sleepy sound with its falling waters; and the orchestra of the establishment, which runs the drinking waters and baths, is playing with the phlegmatic sentimentality which distinguishes the Schlangenbad orchestra from all the orchestras of all the season places of this habitable globe. That orchestra will render you—as will no other known to man—some fiery prestissimo of Verdi as a solemn andante. It is doing so at this very moment. And the visitors are sitting round in a circle and listening, positively listening; visitors of every sort and kind. There are a few really sick people, shriveled mummies with stiffened limbs, and eyes either dulled or restless with illness, looking out of pallid countenances—unfortunate beings, who, as the young people there put it, have come to Schlangenbad in order to beg of a kind Providence an extension of their leave of absence; invalids who seem to take no pleasure in anything except the uttering of perpetual complaints of their wretched health. In-

valids of a different stamp, who manage to console themselves by getting up one deceitful hope after another of recovery, and who, as fast as one illusion goes to pieces in their hands, contrive somehow to patch together another in their feverish desire to continue the enjoyment of life's fitful fever. Another class, of people in the rudest health, have come to the place for this or that reason, as they tell you; the only real one being that, for the moment, it suits them better to kill time there than anywhere else; people whose hearty laughter, the laughter of people entire in wind and limb, sounds like a personal insult to the disabled wrecks just now spoken of. But by far the greater majority of the people there are neither sick nor well precisely, just as they are neither very rich nor very poor, but persons who have not the least idea what to do with themselves from one year's end to another, and who have come on to spin out a little further their villainously tangled life's thread among the odorous forest heights and pleasant villas of the little watering-place. Old bachelors, some of these, whose flowering time was some twenty years before, and who have come to Schlangenbad to display their intellectual wares of one kind or another—plans for political and social reform, it may be, which nobody has time to pay the least attention to elsewhere. Old bachelors of another sort, again; persons, these, still as able as ever to enjoy the things of this world, and whose self-satisfaction has never abated one jot, who stalk about on moderate incomes, and with

carefully preserved persons, to see what female victims they may peradventure devour. Then there are the second-rate Russians, and the wealthy Russians; English and Americans of various patterns, and, among all these variegated and inferior personalities, a few odd human specimens, with something of the true stamp of nobility and poetic value upon them. Perhaps a few elderly ladies, celebrated beauties at one time, who have retired to the little dreamy place to wake once more in their souls the echoes and memories of those earlier days, to repeat to their own silent selves—in default of other listeners, alas!—the fairy tale of their youth, with its fairy Princes who came to woo. Others of this class, happier in this, that the fairy Princes are there too—now, also, themselves faded and worn—to talk over the old times together. All this one sees in Schlangenbad. Among the people, there, is much narrow provincialism, a tolerably ample representation of the superior classes, scarcely any at all of the people who, having means, must still be classed as "mob"; the general tone being one of a dull, monotonous uniformity that blunts every one of spirit; while over the whole place and all the people, after all, there breathes *something* of that genuine, true poetry of Germany and the Germans, in which there is never to be found conscious insincerity, and which never quite loses its antique, old-world perfume.

O Schlangenbad! Dear, dear little world-forgotten Schlangenbad! with your luxurious rose-bushes and phlegmatic orchestra, your delightful

air, your shabby, kind, zealous waiters; your modest prices, your abominable *table d'hôte*, and your incomparable coffee! Long, long may it be before the railways and shareholders get at you, and spoil you with the locomotive and the stock exchange!

The orchestra has just managed to screw itself up to something in three-four time, with decided accent and rhythm in it. Else is just walking down the Nassau Alley with that friend of her youth, Count Linden, after an extra hour of practice at lawn-tennis, and hears with astonishment this last extraordinary development of the eminent musicians.

"A waltz! a waltz, I declare! What *do* you say to that?" she exclaimed, stopping short in her walk, with surprise and amusement depicted on every feature.

"What do I say? Why, that I should like uncommonly to dance to it!" he said, in low tones.

"But what would the model-countess say to such a proceeding?" objects Else, holding up her hands with a horrified expression.

"Oh! never mind her. She has gone off to Schwalbach to-day," replied Linden. And, the next moment, they were revolving round one another as happily as you please down the whole length of the Nassau Alley.

There could not be a prettier spectacle than the two young creatures afforded, as they went circling away, their light frames shot with the beams of light penetrating the thick foliage of

the trees, and relieved by the white, moss-covered boles of the trees, as they went dancing over the lights at their feet, and taking desperate jumps over the roots of the trees, the stones, and other inequalities in their extemporized ball-room, and laughing more and more merrily as they came nearer and nearer to the music and the band.

At the same little table where they had taken their breakfast, Mme. von Schlitzing is again seated between her two children, taking her afternoon coffee. The excellent lady is just now in a state of agitated vexation at the enormity of the washing-bill, which has been sent in that day, and which she has brought down with her, in order to have a nice angry talk about it with her two young people.

"I declare, the people are unconscionable robbers!" she exclaimed, in exasperated tones, and, like most persons who spend most of their time entirely by themselves, much louder than was necessary. "Five groschen for a habit shirt! one mark fifty for a petticoat! It's enough to make one's hair stand on end, it is—"

"Mamma!" interrupted Thilda, quite angrily.

"I should like very much to know whether you have the face to disagree with me?" replied the old lady, in high dudgeon. "If you've a fancy for being extravagant, that is your own lookout, though where you're to get the money for it I can't quite see. I for my part—"

Here Werner put his hand on her arm. "Mammy, dear!" he said soothingly, "Thilda

didn't mean any harm; but she has a notion" —he smiled, but his voice sounded somewhat hoarse and constrained—"she has a notion that it's just as undesirable to examine one's clean linen as it is to wash one's dirty linen where other people are present. She does not think it necessary to afford impertinent, carping strangers an opportunity of knowing anything of our little money miseries. And in that—mammy dear, please don't take it amiss—in that I must say I agree with her." But his mood changed at once when he observed that, warmly as his mother had resented his sister's interference and advice, now that he spoke in a similar sense, her old head drooped directly, and her aged hand moved about the table in a tired, confused, uncertain way. He took this poor hand, with its veins starting out under the pressure of the years, in his own, lifted it reverently to his lips, and said: "But, mamma dear, if it gives you any satisfaction to speak your mind about the washing-bill, do so, dear—do so, in God's name! but don't let it worry you too much. And, as for the few groschen more or less, don't, for goodness' sake, trouble your heart so about them; Heaven be praised, that's really not necessary now. And *don't* let your coffee get cold—don't. Shall I give you a little more cream: there, is that right?"

"My boy, my dear, good, sweet boy!" murmurs the old woman. Her mouth trembled, and it was quite clear that her old heart was full, and speak it out she must, however difficult. So

she managed, at last, to get out, in broken sentences, and almost shedding tears:

"You mustn't take it amiss of me, children" —in a half shamefaced voice. "I put you out, I see I do. Well, it's no wonder. But, if you only knew—but young people forget so readily, at my time of life things stick to one more—if you only knew how often I've had to think and think, and plan and plan, to keep the wolf from the door for you—and he was prowling about quite close, I assure you, for many and many a long year and day—if you only knew how I had to look again and again, when by myself, at every penny, in order that you might not go without things you wanted, and how I pulled myself together when in your presence, that you might not notice my anxieties, and so, perhaps, not be able to swallow the bit of dry bread which was all I could scrape together for you sometimes! And then there was that constant craving, gnawing desire for some change for the better, some little bit of happiness and good fortune, not for myself—oh, no; but for the children! But no—but no! No change—none; always the same dreadful need and trouble, until I was almost beside myself. Oh! well, well, well! All that is past and gone—past and gone! It was the ruin of poor Kuno, certainly; but I've managed, God be praised! to lift you up out of it, Werner—yes, high out of it. And Thilda hasn't much to complain of in what I've done for her, either; and we've enough now to live quite comfortably, that's true enough. But I

don't realize that anxiety and such extreme care as to our expenditure are now quite unnecessary; it's too late for me to do so. And I suppose I shall go on putting myself out about a few halfpence more or less as long as I live. And you, children, mustn't be angry with me, indeed you mustn't; you must be patient with me."

Werner was much moved. He put his long arm round his mother's deeply bowed shoulders and murmured in her ear soothing words of fond, deep affection. And then a deep silence prevailed for a while at the little open place where they sat, a little apart from the others. Then, all of a sudden, a charming, happy, bright-looking creature burst in, so to speak, upon that silence.

Werner looked up. It was Else Ried. His amiable face assumed a dissatisfied expression at once, and he took no pains to conceal it. She might, perhaps, have heard a good deal more than he cared of his mother's words, and of the whole pitiful discussion. He searched her face with almost unwarrantable closeness. The girl's eyes were filled with tears.

She hesitated for one moment, and then came up a few steps nearer to him—*he* had risen to his feet, and bowed to her very stiffly indeed—and said to him, in a shy, beseeching way: "Be so very kind, Baron von Schlitzing, as to present me to the ladies."

He could hardly believe his ears. But he was by no means placated, or moved to forgive her; his feeling was simply that of increased vexation.

In the depths of his soul he could not help regarding this proceeding of Else as a piece of unwarrantable, condescending obtrusion. He was quite ready to believe that she wanted to repair the tactlessness which had led her into the blunder we have seen; but, in his view, she was trying to do it much too directly, and—he had almost said to himself—coarsely. However, he had no alternative but to comply with her request.

"Mademoiselle von Ried—my mother and sister."

Edmund Linden, whom Else seemed quite to have forgotten, made the regulation officer's bow, bringing his spurs sharply together, and then reminded the ladies that he had had the pleasure of making their acquaintance at an earlier date.

Before Werner could help or hinder, Else, with her white little tennis costume, and her sweet little peach-bloom face, had taken a seat at the elbow of old Mme. Schlitzing, and was flinging her smiles about, here, there and everywhere, and creating, so to speak, a little island of warm sunshine, within a given radius, all round her little person.

Linden remained standing. He was a little put out at Else's sudden impulse to enter into these close relations with the Schlitzing ladies. When old Mme. Schlitzing, meeting kindness with kindness, invited him also to take a chair, he excused himself with the pretext that it was now high time for him to return to Wiesbaden.

"When may I present myself again for a game?" he asked the young girl, as he took his leave.

"It can't be to-morrow; I have to go to Schwalbach. Day after to-morrow, if you like."

"If I like!" repeated Linden. "Why, you know—" Then he stopped short suddenly, and added: "Can I see to anything for you at Wiesbaden?"

"Yes, yes! if you'll be so kind! Please do ask the porter at our house if my gloves are washed by this time, and if so bring the parcel back with you."

"As your majesty pleases," said Linden, bowing ceremoniously over the right hand of the girl, and, pressing his lips to it, disappeared.

Then Else looked up in the old lady's face with that irresistible, frank expression of her own, asking: "*May* I have the privilege of taking my coffee in your company to-day?" The old lady looked just a little taken aback, and was, for a moment, unable to make any reply to this very unexpected proposal, and little Else drooped a little in the midst of that joyous kindliness and friendliness of hers which generally carried all before it, and murmured, "Oh, dear! I should be in your way! I oughtn't to have plumped out with such a request as that, all at once."

"Oh! my dear child, not at all—not at all; certainly, certainly," said the old lady most heartily, laying her hand on the young girl's arm.

"Oh, then, if I may—please, Baron Schlitz-

ing, go and order me some!" begged Else of the young man, who, while this had been going on, had been sitting by them a little sulkily. He still regarded the young girl's amiable proceedings as being no more than a piece of intolerable condescension—nothing but a piece of acting. For the rest, he was even less certain than before what to make of her, generally. Up to that moment he had regarded the little person as no more than a goose; now he was somewhat inclined to apply to her the more formidable title of fool.

She did not honor him with the least further attention, but devoted herself entirely to the old lady.

"I dare say you are surprised to see any one in such splendid health as I enjoy at this place?" said she, laughingly, to her new old friend.

"Well," said Mme. Schlitzing, "you do seem a little out of place among us old invalids."

"Papa has sent me here because just now he has no use for me at home. He is rebuilding our chateau again—the chateau on our estate of Krugenberg. It lies between Wiesbaden and Hamburg. Papa has some building done there every two years, at least. I'm always telling him that he'll build all my dowry into those stones and bricks and mortar. I don't believe there'll be a penny left." Else laughed.

"You are here with your mamma?" asked Mme. Schlitzing.

"Oh, no! I am sorry to say that I lost my mamma a long time ago; she died when I was quite a

little thing. For the present, I can't exactly say that I have any one with me here. I'm quite alone."

"Alone? At such a place as this!" said the old lady, with much surprise.

"Well, upon the visitors' register you'll find my name with the words 'and suite,'" replied Else, laughing. "And, in point of fact, when I did arrive here I came in quite regular, good, proper form, with companion and lady's maid, all as high-toned and fashionable as you please. The maid is with me still, but as for the companion—she is a Miss Fuhrwesen, a Viennese lady, and is appallingly musical, in all other respects she's a splendid creature. Just now she's staying in Sonderhausen, where she's bringing out an opera of hers. Only think of it! She actually has induced the management there to put her work upon the stage!" Here Else broke a roll in two with great satisfaction.

"Is there really such a thing as a lady who has written an opera?" said Mathilda, her eyes beaming with delight as she thus struck into the conversation.

"I should rather think so," said Else decisively; "and some of the numbers are very pretty indeed, and she made the libretto for it herself as well. It is 'Maria Stuart,' a sort of free version of Schiller; and she has set right all the historical dates in which the poet blundered.

"Great Heavens! what an awful woman she must be!" said Mme. Schlitzing.

"She isn't awful at all; she's only comical,"

said Else, in tones that indicated a humorous determination to stand up for her faithless guardian angel.

"As for me, Miss Fuhrwesen interests me in the highest degree," said Mathilda. "Judging from what you tell us, I should conclude that there must be a strong vein of genius in her composition. And I particularly love women endowed with any sort of genius."

"I can't say I do; as a rule they inspire me with mistrust," replied Mme. Schlitzing, dryly. "And, in this case, I think it a very unconscientious thing in the lady we are discussing to abandon her post of duty in the fashion she has done."

"Oh! great talents, great gifts cannot and will not be obstructed in their career by conventional scruples," said Mathilda, decisively. "It is an essential privilege of genius to indulge in a certain exalted and fervently aspiring egotism. Ah, Heavens! if one could but have the genius and privilege one's self!" Mathilda gazed upward with an expression of ecstasy. "But alas! we poor women, slaves to duty, have no help for it; we're obliged to let our talents go to rust and die out in the most wretched, miserable manner. Oh! if I were but free to act and live! Or if I had but the courage to seize on liberty for myself!" she groaned.

"Well, *what* then? I should be pleased to know what you would do under such circumstances?" asked the old lady.

"Devote myself to Art, live altogether for

painting, develop and enjoy my own individuality," said Mathilda, with enthusiasm.

"I wish you wouldn't talk such wretched rubbish," said Werner Schlitzing, exasperated at his sister's folly and hardness.

"If ever I express an opinion that runs counter to your *banal*, conventional views, you are sure to call it wretched rubbish," replied Thilda, who was very angry indeed.

"Well, I can't exactly call such views divine wisdom," replied Werner, greatly vexed.

Old Mme. Schlitzing shrugged her shoulders, and said: "Oh! let her be, Werner. We'll try if we can't manage to find some vent for this 'genius' of hers. When I return home, I dare say I shall manage to do very well without her care and attention, and Thilda can go and develop that 'individuality' of hers wherever she pleases. And I can't say that it is quite comfortable to have any one with me all the time who talks as if she wanted me to die off, that she may be independent. So far as I am concerned, Thilda, please consider yourself as free as air from this moment."

"Oh, mamma!" cried Mathilda, as if she was much hurt. "You are always so irritable. Directly one says a reasonable word, you take offense at it. I think the best thing I can do is to withdraw." She rose and left the table.

Werner frowned heavily. Collisions of this kind between his mother and sister were by no means infrequent, but they were not the less painful to him on that account. And they were

beyond measure disagreeable if any strangers happened to be present. And, in the present instance, he felt he had himself to blame for not having held himself in better. His intervention had made the matter worse than it need have been. It was very uncomfortable now for everybody.

Else was uncertain whether to remain or go. Fortunately, she decided to remain. "My dear lady," she asked Mme. Schlitzing, with sudden impetuosity, while the three were sitting there, with their tempers all more or less out of order, "my dear lady, was not your name Rosa von Bergheim before you were married?"

"Certainly it was!" cried the old lady; "but how did you come to know that, my dear child?"

"Oh! then I've been hearing a deal about you for a very long time," said Else, in high delight. "My father has often spoken so enthusiastically about you to me, and about your wonderfully fine voice. You were then at Schwalbach, with Princess Frederick Gunther. Have I got the name quite right?"

"Yes, my child."

"Papa has shown me a picture of you; it hangs in his room. He is always saying that there are no such beautiful girls now."

"Well, there he's quite wrong," said the old lady, smiling and taking hold of the young girl under the chin.

"And—and—he has told me that—that" (who had let the little witch into the secret that there's nothing which so quickly puts old women in a

good humor again as reminding them of their youthful triumphs?) "that—that—you sent him about his business, at last."

"Your father? Good gracious! Why what was his full name? I did not quite catch *your* name, my dear."

"Albert Ried."

"Why, yes, yes! now I remember," murmured the old woman. "Albert Ried! And a handsome fellow he was then! Oh, what a long time ago that seems now! My dear, I have no doubt that it seems a comical thing to you that I wouldn't have your father?"

"Comical? Not comical at all!" said Else, in her warm, affectionate way. "I think it's a great pity—that's all I think. Why, you might have been my mamma, and how delightful that would have been."

"Do you really think so, you little coaxing puss?"

"Yes! Oh, I must have a kiss!"

"You dear, sweet, silly little thing! you darling!" And the old lady drew the girl to her bosom.

Just at that moment Countess Warsberg, who had got back from her excursion to Schwalbach, and had some Italian prince with her, was crossing the little open place where Else and her new friends were.

The countess honored the little table, and three persons sitting at it, with one of her comprehensive semi-circular glances, decorated with a benevolent and condescending smile. The model-

countess belonged to that class of characters who know no medium; they are always in the attitude of condescending to somebody, except when they are ready to sink into the ground in worshipful admiration of some royal personage they may have the chance of talking with.

The countess gave them a wave of the hand and passed on. It was very rarely that she found time or opportunity to stop and talk with her sister-in-law, much as her pride was flattered when she was stalking about with her handsome nephew—although his tailor was so unsatisfactory.

She was quite pleased to find that Else was less repelled than herself by the old lady's faded and antiquated exterior. Only she could not possibly understand how the state of things she witnessed could have come about.

Later in the day she met her nephew when he was strolling along the Schwalbach high road, near the house in which he was lodging. They had not been able to give him a room at the Nassau Hotel, perhaps because he had omitted, very foolishly, to mention his Aunt Warsberg to them. Werner was plunged in reflection; and when she saw him she cried:

"Well, Werner, where are you off to now? *Àpropos*, do you still think so badly of my little Ried?"

"Oh! Heaven forbid!" said Werner. "I take everything back that I have said against her. She is a dear, good little thing; a little too much

high spirits, perhaps; but, except for that, the sweetest creature in the world."

"Well, Heaven be praised! all *that* seems to be getting on quite famously," thought the countess. She had sense enough to say that to herself only.

CHAPTER VII.

THERE was one person who was very much less satisfied indeed with the course things had taken, and that was Else's old playmate and impassioned admirer, Edmund Linden.

Up to this very last moment it had seemed quite a settled and certain thing that Else and himself were to become engaged to one another. He knew that such an engagement was regarded as a matter of certainty throughout the whole Taunus country. Why, what was there to stand in the way? It certainly did not enter into Else's plan of existence to become an old maid. And among all the people surrounding her there was no more desirable match than Edmund; and there certainly was no young man for whom she had shown warmer sympathy. In fact, her other suitors had, for some time now, given up the matter as hopeless, and retired from the field. As for Edmund, he was not one of those dreamy persons who get up all sorts of artificial doubts about plain and simple matters, and he had been perfectly satisfied with the way that things had been going—indeed, had not a doubt about the issue. He had all but heard the marriage bells

sounding in his ears when, this very afternoon, after that improvised waltz down the Nassau Alley, the two were standing still for a moment. And he had summoned up courage, at last, to put the decisive question to her. Then, lo! all of a sudden, before he could get the words out, the girl had turned her head in another direction, attracted by the sound of a thin, aged voice, which was like nothing more in the world than the after vibrations of a broken violin-string. And then she had vanished utterly from him, as though some witchcraft had been at work.

He could not get the picture out of his thoughts, of the girl sitting by the old woman, of the blooming face looking up at the old woman's face, with such an expression of warm feeling, so full of shy, coaxing sweetness and courage—Else Ried, his Else!

He had quite sufficient knowledge of the human heart to be afraid that the old woman was not the person in the foreground of Else's warm interest in that company she had left him to join.

He was in a very unpleasant frame of mind indeed, was Edmund Linden, as, on that sweet August evening, he drove his fine chestnut over the long, shady, picturesque forest road to Wiesbaden. A fine, sympathetic nature had this young Rhenish gentleman; and no disinterested person, acquainted with the circumstances, could possibly fail to be very sorry for him that matters were turning out so contrary to his calculations.

Like his charming young playmate, Else, he was of a joyous disposition—a Sunday child, as they call such—and, like her, too, the Rhine wine seemed to have got into his veins, and to shine in his honest, beaming eyes. He was of middle height, his form was muscular and lean, and, upon the whole, well proportioned; his face was of excellent outline, short rather than long; his features well chiseled. His hair was very profuse, dark blonde, and wavy, and his profile had character and distinction, in spite of a very little tilt at the tip of his nose. To all this add a pair of sparkling eyes that looked joyously out into the world between thick blonde eyelashes, dazzling teeth, and lips a little too full, perhaps, though beautifully shaped. Taking him all in all, he offered a contrast as complete as could well be imagined to the romantic minded, indeterminate Schlitzing. Linden's mind was of a much simpler order, of more straightforward perception, and more distinctly conscious of its own drift and purposes. He was fond of enjoying himself, and missed no opportunity of doing so; but, being of a gay and easy temper and constitution, though far from pliant, he was better protected than heavier men are against vulgar excesses. He was very distinguished in bearing, and in all other respects, even to the softness of his voice, which was very insinuating. He was cheerful, but had no particular pretensions to wit; had much tact, without general intellectual acuteness. His powers of imagination were limited, and did not go

beyond what was useful for keeping up his naturally optimistic way of looking at things. He could very readily fall in love, though insusceptible of the tortures accompanying a really great passion. And, taking him all in all, he was the most pleasant, easy, amiable person to consort with that can be imagined; and he belonged to that class of men whom every schoolgirl, just reaching maturity, falls in love with at the first glance, and who never inspires the least serious interest in a full-grown woman of deeper than average nature. He understood persons and things in general pretty well, including himself, especially as to the last particular we have mentioned. But the knowledge had never troubled him much till to-day. And just now he felt rather disgusted and miserable. He had a vague fear that his career had got a twist in the wrong direction.

"I wonder what the women can possibly find in Schlitzing?" he asked himself, again and again. "Well, well, there's no explaining these things; it's a question of magnetism. And, after all, perhaps, he won't care a jot about her. He's a curious sort of high-stepper; goes along past things, and never takes much notice of them. And there's one thing one can't help admitting in his favor. He's as disinterested as a fellow well can be. He wouldn't care one bit more than I do that the girl is a fine match, and that's more to his credit than mine, for he has not any money at all. There isn't such a charming girl in all Germany as our Taunus pearl. Why *was*

I such a fool as to make so sure of her, and put off proposing again and again?"

And, as he mused, the evening shadows grew longer, and the sun sank beneath the horizon.

CHAPTER VIII.

EIGHT days had elapsed, but Werner did not show much disposition to move away from Schlangenbad.

He had not given up his purpose of starting off for Italy, but he postponed his journey from one day to another.

He felt himself quite comfortable and happy at Schlangenbad. The peculiar charm of the little place had fascinated him, as it does so many.

When, quite early in the morning, he heard the sounds of the old-fashioned choral, with which it is the fashion to rouse the people staying at the place, from their slumbers, they always gave him a vague, dreamy delight. That thin little thread of commonplace music, coming streaming through his window, together with the perfume of the pine-trees and the dew-drenched roses, was inseparably bound up, ever afterward, with his memories of the little Taunus watering-place.

Each day, as he awoke, brought with it its own delight of thinking over the agreeable hours that were to follow till evening. There was always some charming plan or other afoot.

As time went on, he, of course, became acquainted with all the more prominent visitors. His aunt presented him to the Russian and Italian princesses, his mother to the amiable Countess O——, one of the most interesting of those notabilities among the Schlangenbad guests who returned thither regularly every year.

And this lady was, perhaps, the most conspicuous among the notable persons and things that strangers had pointed out to them when they came to the place—"Countess O——, daughter of the most original, most intellectual and most fascinating of all the celebrated woman-friends of Goethe."

This lady was the acquaintance of whom Madame Schlitzing was proudest, and certainly the one that made the deepest impression on her son. He felt quite a peculiar sensation when he kissed, for the first time, the hand of the lady whose mother had known Goethe so intimately well. He felt, almost, as if he was in a place of worship when he gazed upon the finely molded beautiful face, and the dark eyes, which seemed to him to be filled with the luster of the great romantic period of the literary history of Germany that marked the beginning of the century.

But this too exalted feeling of reverence which, while it lasted, crippled all his powers of expression, soon disappeared. In fact, the countess herself drove it away, putting him at his ease with her charming jests and smiles.

And then, indeed, he had an experience, the

like of which he never had known and never again was to know. Where, indeed, except in this lady, embodying, as she did, that great spiritual tradition and time, could he meet with a fancy and imagination like this, which could pluck all the flowers without tearing or doing injustice to the thorns, and which was preserved from excess because held always in leading strings by reason of the purest, noblest, highest order? It came to be with him so, after some intercourse with this deeply interesting person, that he hardly knew which to do; whether to fall over head and ears in love with her, old woman as she was, or to go down on his knees to her in sheer veneration. And what delight she took in his naïve, youthful enthusiasm, what charming things she said about him to his mother, after he had left her!

Yes, it was, indeed, a delightful time. His mother seemed to gain in vigor and cheerfulness every day. The very fact of his being with her seemed to be an invigorating tonic to the old lady. His delight at her improvement knew no bounds, and he was indefatigable in his attendance upon her. He would gossip comfortably with her as she went along in her rolling-chair hour after hour, and every evening he piloted her upstairs with the greatest care for her every footstep.

He had never forgotten how, twenty years earlier, she had often petted her little heavy fellow, carrying him upstairs to bed if he had hurt himself; or, it might be, when he had come to

her to be consoled for some childish trouble or other, and had cried his little heart out on her lap. He had never forgotten, never would forget, how sweet it was to hang on her neck when she had him in her arms, the delightful feeling of being carried up and up and up, half-awake, half-asleep, and of passing away soon after into some enchanting dream, which he might almost now fancy had been expressly ordered for him by maternal love.

And so one day followed another, and never did he observe or consider one whit what Destiny —and Aunt Warsberg—were arranging in his behalf.

As the repairs at the château of old Baron Ried were still unfinished, his daughter, of course, continued her sojourn at Schlangenbad. And as Mdlle. Fuhrwesen was still at Sondershausen seeing to the production of her opera, Else was left to herself as before. However, she had so many good friends among the oldest and most estimable of the important ladies at the place that her "unprotected" condition was hardly taken into account at all; and it was all quite right and proper, in everybody's eyes, even when a few of her young gentlemen friends from the neighborhood came on—as they pretty nearly every day did—to pay due homage to their Queen Else, the "Pearl of the Taunus."

But the young gentlemen began quite soon to come much less frequently. And then the old ladies began to put their heads together.

And the old ladies, and likewise the young gentlemen, began to discuss the question, "What can possibly be the meaning of Else's sudden intimacy with these Schlitzings? She's with them morning, noon and night!"

In fact, she was—not quite as much as that, yet quite sufficiently to create food for gossip. They would meet one another accidentally out of doors, and then, when the weather changed and rain came on, Else would ask to be allowed to take her afternoon coffee with them.

Madame von Schlitzing and her daughter occupied two rooms on the first floor, each of which had a bed in it. There was no parlor, of course. But Else did not mind that at all. It was her especial delight to sit in the old lady's bedroom and drink her afternoon coffee there. Palace or bedroom, it seemed nothing to her as long as she was with them.

As for the bill, Else paid for herself, as they did for themselves—folks are wonderfully old-fashioned and straightforward in their ways at Schlangenbad; and they provided for what they took with their coffee *pic-nic* fashion, each bringing her share, the old lady furnishing the biscuit, which she kept in mysterious tin-boxes, and Else the fruit. This was sent to her from Krugenberg, her father's estate; greengages, melons, and, above all, the juicy, golden-yellow apricots with hard brown spots upon their cheeks, the incomparable apricots of the Taunus country.

When the table was cleared away the four

usually played whist, at the same pine-wood table, with its reddish-brown varnish, where they had just taken their coffee. There came to them from out of doors, through their open windows, the phlegmatic sentimentalities of the Schlangenbad band; all sorts of dreamy German measures. "To-morrow must I leave thee, dear, and my departure take," etc.; or, "Kind Moon!" and "I know not what this means," etc. The sounds would mingle strangely, sometimes, with the rustling of the falling rain. And the perfumed breath of wet roses would come into the room with the old-fashioned tunes, mingling its cool and deep perfume with the aroma of the cigarette smoke which enveloped table and players in its transparent white clouds. For quite early in their intercourse, one day when Else had been staying a very long time with the old lady, noticing Werner's cigarette-case lying about, Else had said, "Baron Schlitzing, if your mamma doesn't mind, smoke, in Heaven's name. Why, I smoke myself."

Yes: she did smoke, after her own fashion. She would take just three whiffs or so at a cigarette and then put it down somewhere or other; three little whiffs, just enough to give her blooming lips a suspicion of the aroma without driving away from them or from her the sweeter perfume of her genuine womanliness.

They were very merry over their whist, laughed heartily at a revoke or not following a lead, and would argue for a whole quarter of

an hour about the propriety of playing out a particular card. But there never was the slightest touch of bitterness in their arguments: they did it only for the pleasure of pretending to quarrel with one another.

Else was decidedly not to be despised as a partner. It was not for nothing that she had played every night for years with her father.

Schlitzing declared one day to her: "You play whist unwarrantably well. A charming young girl like you has positively no right to be so superior in a matter of that sort, really not. You should leave something for the unfortunate elderly ladies, who are required to make themselves useful."

Then she laughed at him in a joyous defiant manner, and her big eyes joined heartily in the laugh. And then, suddenly changing to the manners of an old-fashioned, very punctilious person, she said, very seriously indeed: "Baron von Schlitzing, I am sorry to see that you have very bad manners."

"Oho, I must have an apology for that, I really must, it's I that brought him up," cried the old lady.

"I *say*, Mademoiselle Else!" said Werner, defending himself with a comical pretense of being highly exasperated.

Else went on in the tone of some one giving an important and valuable lesson: "I want to know how long it is since it has been admissible for anybody to say to a young lady—who should

be treated with proper respect — that she is a charming young girl? Just tell me that."

And then he answered with his fresh, candid, youthful smile: "Oh, I entreat you to forgive me, mademoiselle. I didn't really intend to say anything so dreadful as that. My tongue ran away with me."

And then the two laughed so heartily and so long—out of sheer delight at their own existences and in one another—that, at last, Thilda could stand it no longer, and said in her sour voice: "Werner! It's your deal."

These childish absurdities of the two young people were of course an abomination to transcendental Thilda.

When they had had enough of whist, they arranged games of patience.

It is an odd peculiarity of aged ladies, whose future is but short and cannot by any possibility have any surprises in store for them, that they are often quite as curious as younger people about that future. Old Madame Schlitzing shared this peculiarity, and was a little addicted to the practice of consulting the cards to see what oracles they might have to deliver concerning coming events.

Else was glad to give her assistance in this, and did so with quite amusing zeal and discretion. The girl was of extraordinarily simple and clear perceptive power, sharp-eyed, and aggressively practical—if such a phrase can be used—and these characteristics came out on every occasion. When any particular game—of patience,

that is to say—became so involved and mixed up that it took extraordinary skill and management to come out right with it, the girl, when she succeeded, was as proud as you please of the achievement. And then she would snuggle up to the old lady and purr in her little tender way, just as a petted and spoiled kitten does when its mistress has it in her lap and is stroking it.

In fact, Else was only too fond of being spoiled.

And, as they went on amusing themselves, the music out of doors was heard all the time mingling with the rattle of the rain drops among the leaves and the murmuring of the fountain. By this time it had finished its budget of German tunes, and was now at an Aria from Meyerbeer's "Africaine." In the composer's score this was a song of exultation and triumph, and was marked *allegro molto animato*. But the Schlangenbad musicians knew better than that, and transformed it into a dragging adagio. And Werner, engaged just then in arranging the cards for a fresh game of patience, turned his head toward the window and hummed the song, together with the words belonging to it:

"Can earth show aught more beauteous, sweet?"

Then, all of a sudden, with the air of an elegant goddess, coming at the very nick of time required in the drama to arrange things—though, in this case, it must be confessed that the "goddess" had no particular purpose in view

—in came Countess Warsberg, plunging, so to say, abruptly into the midst of all this happiness and good temper. "Ah, there you all are, quite at home with one another! How cozy and charming it is here! How goes it with you today, dear Rose?"—giving them all one of her comprehensive, semi-circular glances, which all but said, "if this does not makes you all feel happy, what in the world can?" And on she went, rattling: "Oh, do you want me to sit down? Well, for a minute, just for a minute. How nice it is here! Yes, you do all seem so pleasant and friendly with one another; I declare, it reminds me of a nice perfume! And, oh, what glorious apricots! No, no, thanks, Rose, no! I've just breakfasted with Marinja Ligowsky, and can't, I really can't. I'm so sorry; I can't stay, positively can't; such a pity. Adieu, everybody!" Then, another semi-circular glance, and she was gone.

Unfortunately, this lady's advent on the scene generally had the effect of upsetting them more or less; she had the unfortunate knack of cooling off any warm feeling that was about the room by the time she left it.

The old lady, then, would move about uneasily in her chair, as though she would like to change for a more comfortable seat, and draw her shawl close about her breast, as though she felt a sudden chill. She did so now.

Werner got up and closed the window. Then Else rose from her seat and kissed the old lady on the forehead, saying: "Now, I'm quite sure

that you ought to lie down and be quite quiet now!" and then, with a friendly nod to Werner, she was making for the door. But the old lady, disturbed by this sudden movement of retreat, held the girl firmly by the hand, and said:

"But, my dear child! Why in the world do you want to run off like that? Has any one of us done anything to vex you?"

"Good Heavens, no!" cried Else, with unmistakable sincerity. "It's only that I'm sure you ought to lie down quietly, lie down at full length and have a good, good rest. Then, when you've been refreshed we can all set about laughing to our hearts' content. Adieu, mamma!" She was off.

That last word had escaped her lips without the girl quite knowing what it was she said. But it sank into the heart of the old woman like a drop of dew into the calyx of a thirsting flower.

"The little creature is too enchanting for anything!" she cried, as Werner assisted her carefully in arranging herself at full length on the sofa.

Thilda, however, wearing her regulation sour face, was busy in putting some things to rights in the room, and wailed out: "She manages to get everything in the room out of its place. Well, God be thanked! one will be able to think and talk a little sense now. Oh, yes! she's nice enough, but dear me, her superficiality—"

"I tell you she's enchanting, simply enchant-

ing," said the old lady, with some heat; "so unpretending, so good-hearted, so perfectly unaffected, and so wonderfully pretty in the bargain!"

"Yes, she really is very nice," said Werner, arranging, with his deft hands—their military training served him well here — his mother's dress, tucking it under her helpless limbs and covering her feet. "The only thing is that she makes a little too much noise, I fear. I'm always afraid of your getting a headache afterward, mother. Didn't I leave a volume of Gregorovius lying about somewhere here? Ah, there it is! Adieu, mother! Do we sup this evening in your room, or do you feel well enough to go downstairs for it? Very well, I'll come about seven o'clock to carry you down. If you require me earlier, please send for me."

And, so saying, he vanished, taking with him the volume of Gregorovius, the careful study of whose work he regarded as an indispensable part of his equipment for the journey to Italy.

His mother looked at him as he retreated with some impatience. The old lady was a little angry with him: "Is the boy absolutely blind?" she murmured to herself.

CHAPTER IX.

YES: the boy was blind!

Else's disposition was quite sympathetic to his, and he took the greatest delight in observ-

ing her coaxing, clinging, affectionate ways with his mother. And it was a great satisfaction to him to think that when he left them —as would now so soon occur—his mother would be able to enjoy the society of such a lovable substitute for himself as this young Rhenish girl.

It never entered into his head for a moment that he himself might have something to do with the manifestations of regard which Else lavished on those who belonged to him. That Else's proceedings could be influenced in any way by his existence it did not occur to him to imagine for a single instant.

Italy was very much more in his thoughts than this girl. But there was something, at this moment, which interested and pre-occupied him far more deeply than Else and Italy put together. And that was the pale, slender water-Nixie whom he had dragged out of the waves of the Rhine. Often and often, and sometimes with startling suddenness when just at the point of losing himself in sleep, he all but felt the form, dripping with water, in his arms—felt it grow slowly, slowly, warmer and warmer there, until it was filled with life once more.

And if he so hesitated and hesitated as to leaving Schlangenbad, the reason for it in great part was that, while he would have given everything in the world to see his charming Spirit of the Stream once again, cudgel his brains as he would he could think of no way of reaching her. He covered his craving and longing for

another sight of the girl from himself with all sorts of hollow pretexts. It was really a sort of duty to appeal more fully than he had been able to, on that memorable occasion, to the girl's conscience and better nature. She required a sort of encouragement that perhaps only he, now, could afford her. She really ought to have the opportunity of telling him her story fully, and explaining fully to him the difficulties of her position.

At one moment he went so far as to resolve that he would positively take the mail train next day and go to Eltville and present himself to Countess Haidenheim. And then, at the very last moment, something made him turn almost giddy when it came up in his mind: and that something placed itself as an invincible obstacle between him and the execution of his purpose. It was the kiss which the little Nixie had pressed upon his forehead when they parted.

It was as pure and chaste a kiss as ever passed between youth and maiden; but it had had the effect of dispelling from their relations that absolute ease and unconsciousness which might otherwise have existed.

And after that sign, coming down as it had, to crown the excitement and agitation attending that first meeting of theirs, there seemed to Werner something inconsistent, impossible to think of, in renewing their intercourse on the plane of every-day conventionalities and sentiments.

It looked to him in this way. When they met

again, unless his demeanor was marked by a warmth which could have only one meaning—a thing forbidden by his narrow circumstances—the poor girl would feel his presence an unendurable shame and reproach. For he would not allow himself to think that she could possibly be one of those frivolous and perverted girls who give and take kisses as though they were things of no consequence at all.

The mere idea that she could be like that—crossing his mind when weighing these alternatives—was utterly repugnant to his reason, and gave him a sharp stroke of bitter pain.

No: he could imagine her anything but that, anything but that! Capable of the most unbounded enthusiasm of devotion, self-sacrificing to the utmost degree, everything which a man in his highest flights of imagination longs for in the woman he loves, all that he could well conceive her being. But, levity! Shameless lavishing of her affections or feelings here and there! No, indeed! Such things were impossible for that girl! Of that he was absolutely convinced. Then what in Heaven's name *was* he to do? Pay his addresses to her in regular form? Childishness! Folly! The girl was quite evidently of the material from which a heroine of romance can quite easily be wrought—given the hand that knows how to do such things. But, wife of a lieutenant in the guards whose pay is a few miserable dollars a month! Such a thing as that she certainly was not made for!

There was another alternative. He might fling everything else to the four winds, take her life in his own hands, liberate her from her imprisonment, and bend all the energies of his strong youth to the task of creating some adequate position for her and for himself somewhere, somehow. This alternative presented itself to him for a few brief moments—brief beautiful moments they were—during which everything seemed to go round with him, the very earth seemed to sink from beneath his feet, and he to be in very heaven—and then—then . . . !

There was his mother—the uniform he wore—the long traditions of his house. . . .

It was a great grief to him to be forced to conclude—as he was—that he dared not permit himself to make that expedition to Eltville; but it was only too clear that it *was* quite out of the question.

But—if only he were a rich and independent man—if this, if that! . . .

There was no help for it. Things being as they were, the sad little water-Nixie could be nothing more than a memory, the dear and sweet memory of the most charming adventure that had ever come to break the monotony of his drab-colored, uniform, humdrum existence. As to any deliberate plan for giving sequence and issue to this dream of delight, a delight all the greater for the element of terror that to some extent mingled with it, as to any translation of its witchery into the region of sober realities;

why, such a thing was not to be thought of! He must renounce such ideas now and forever!

But the more clearly and decidedly he saw this, the more fixed became his resolution to act on that principle, so much the more did that one meeting of his with the girl seem to gain in significance and importance to his life. He laid it away in the most secret recesses of his soul, *there* where the warmth was greatest, and the garish light of everyday was faintest, as something too sweet to be classed with intelligible things, something absolutely foreign to the usual circumstances of human existence, something that had come to visit and make itself at home with him straight from Fairyland itself.

So that project of a visit to Eltville remained unfulfilled. But his imagination went on working and working, weaving thousands of bright quivering threads into the web of that great longing of his soul. And it became more and more difficult to him to leave Schlangenbad and put a greater distance between him and this spirit of the waters that so haunted his thought.

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Mademoiselle Fuhrwesen's opera, meantime, had gone on its way slowly and surely to the glorious climax of being actually produced upon the stage. After the first performance the inspired composer had telegraphed at once to Else: "*Overwhelming success!*"

Next day she sent Else a couple of newspapers containing articles which were quite enthusi-

astic over her work. And then there was a break in news from Sondershausen.

And Werner had been about a week in Schlangenbad when Mademoiselle Fuhrwesen suddenly presented herself, bringing with her the melancholy intelligence that her opera had, thanks to a disgraceful intrigue, been struck from the repertoire of the theater. The lady seemed to bear this untoward event with heroic fortitude, and the more easily, indeed, because of her fixed conviction that it was really attributable to irritation and jealousy on the part of the disgraceful beings who belonged to the opposite sex.

"The men were afraid that I might out-top them altogether." Such was the final conclusion which Mademoiselle Fuhrwesen, in her exemplary modesty, not only came to, but freely expressed. "And, if the thing is properly considered, I don't think my little effort" (she always preferred to call her opera her "little effort") "could possibly have been honored more highly than by the jealous detestation which all the men who have anything to do with music have bestowed on it. When a woman does anything mediocre their lordships are always ready to extol it to the skies; but just as soon as anything feminine does anything decidedly superior, they are ready to tear it in pieces and trample it in the dust directly. But that sort of thing doesn't trouble me in the least."

One of her good friends, too—no musician, of course, and therefore not jealous of her supe-

riority—had drawn her attention strongly to the point that Germany and Germans were still very small and paltry in this particular, and that, speaking generally, woman's position in that country and with that people, as with all nations defective in culture, was quite too subordinate. Abroad, this was now altogether different. And, this being so, Mademoiselle Fuhrwesen had made up her mind that she would get her opera produced in Paris.

In fact, she had already opened correspondence with the direction of the Grand Opera at that city.

All this the highly excited composer imparted to Else the morning after her very unexpected arrival in Schlangenbad.

Else paid very little attention to what she said. The young girl's head was filled with quite different thoughts, sweet thoughts and sweet dreams. So she held her peace while the other chattered on.

The composer would not doubt for a moment, Else was quite sure, that she was being listened to with the most devout attention; and, accordingly, would let her own thoughts run on without the slightest check. As it turned out, the result was quite satisfactory.

It was Sunday.

Else—it should be observed—was by no means distinguished for piety, in the technical sense. Her father had educated her into extremely liberal views of things, divine and human. But that day she did feel a decided longing to go to church in order to express her gratitude some-

how to somebody, for making life such a beautiful enjoyable thing. Her heart was really just now deeply moved and filled with the instinct of worship; and in that frame of mind she had betaken herself to the Schlangenbad church, that extraordinary little church which had formerly been a gambling house, and in which now three different communions held Divine service one after another every Sunday, the Catholic, Lutheran, and Evangelical.

A funny church it was, indeed! An octagonal thing with white painted jalousies on its windows, and wild grape-vines growing all over it up to the very roof. Its very unedifying past was still quite legibly and unmistakably written upon its forehead. It gave one the impression of a croupier who had become a monk in his old days, and reminded one of the saying: "When the Devil gets advanced in years he turns hermit."

When Else, on her return from church, where she had lightened her heart with prayer—before she found that relief it had been heavy with the weight of undefined, exciting, and yet blissful anticipations — when therefore she entered the Nassau Alley, the girl's eyes were glistening with some tears not yet quite wiped away with which their own native brilliancy mingled strangely. Her cheeks seemed quite dazzling in their pink and white perfection, and produced the same impression as the calyx of a rose just fully opened in the moist yet vigorous morning breeze.

The worn-out old folks who were cowering on the white benches lining the Alley, and either trying, in a dreamy way, to feel as if they were still basking in the long-since quenched sunlight of their youth, or looking forward with inward shudders to the cold, damp mists that were to rise in the melancholy remnant of the day still left to them, these poor things gazed at her with admiration, not unmingled with envy.

And as she went along she saluted them all alike, those she knew and those she did not know, with the same sweet, refreshing friendliness, feeling the impulse strong within her to show kindness to everybody and anybody, just then.

And this impulse was so very strong, indeed, that it brought up all her most tender and compassionate thoughts in connection with a dear young friend of hers at Eltville, whose lot was far less privileged and happy, and whom she had altogether neglected to visit, for now ten days—these last so significant days. She made up her mind that she would atone for this neglect that very day and drive over to Eltville. It was the less difficult for her to form this resolution as Madame Schlitzing had, early in the morning, informed her that they would not enjoy a game of whist, or do anything else together that day, as she, Madame Schlitzing, and her daughter were going to be "very busy," indeed. And, as she uttered the words "very busy," the old lady gave a sort of magnificent

wave of the hand without further particularizing the "business" which was so to absorb them.

Else found Mademoiselle Fuhrwesen sitting on one of the benches in the Alley as she passed, and informed her of the projected trip to Eltville.

The Viennese lady had some sheets of music-paper sewn together, spread out before her, and was sketching the outline of a new composition which, judging from the expression of her countenance, was going to be something terribly grandiose and heroic indeed.

"Very well, I agree with all you suggest, my pet," replied the genius, when Else had told her what she intended to do, "but I implore you not to disturb me just now; I'm getting on wonderfully with this, *quite* in the vein. As the folks pass me I actually seem to hear melodies crunching out in the sand under their feet."

Else could not help laughing at this, and made off as quickly as she possibly could to order the carriage at the office herself. She was an independent little creature and quite used to shifting for herself.

When she reached the office she was informed that all their carriages were always bespoken much earlier for Sunday afternoons. And then the bookkeeper, seeing how long the sweet face grew at this information, added that a carriage should be got for mademoiselle somehow, positively it should, "Yes, even if we have to cut one out of this table here, it shall!" striking the

table energetically with his clinched fist as he spoke.

There was no more popular and beloved personage in the whole Taunus country than Else Ried.

CHAPTER X.

At about half-past two in the afternoon, being ready dressed for her excursion, Else met Werner not far from the Hotel Nassau. He stopped and spoke to her in the most amiable way—and Werner's amiability was something quite remarkable sometimes—informing her that he was on his way to his mother's rooms, and wouldn't she go there with him, too? She said that it would give her the greatest pleasure to say a word to Madame Schlitzing and Thilda before she set out, but that she was afraid of disturbing the two ladies.

He shook his head. As for Thilda, he would undertake no responsibility. What *she* might do or say in any contingency defied calculation. But Thilda didn't matter, and as for his mother —"I defy you to disturb her! I can just as well fancy any one having too much of the sunshine as my mother having too much of you."

This he said very warmly, but the girl answered, laughingly:

"But I assure you there are times when some people get very sick of the sunshine—for example, when there has been no rain for days and

days. I can certify you of that as the experienced daughter of an old agriculturist."

This made him laugh, too, and he said:

"Well, we have had no reason to complain of want of rain at Schlangenbad, anyhow." And as he spoke he gave the branches of a rose-tree a vigorous shake, which was all wet from a heavy downpour that had occurred only a few minutes before, and then he added: "But, on the other hand, if you had not been here, Mademoiselle Else, we should have been without sunshine altogether these last few days."

He said it with the simplest good faith, not meaning more than the words indicated, but meaning that quite sincerely; and he would have been astounded, indeed, if anybody had told him that he was "making up" to Else Ried or paying her anything beyond common attention.

Else told a servant who happened to be passing to beg Mademoiselle Fuhrwesen to come with the carriage to the Nassau Hotel to pick her up, and then went with Werner up to his mother's rooms.

Werner went on first and opened the door.

"Mademoiselle Ried wishes to know if she will disturb you?" he asked, laughing.

"Else!—good gracious no!" cried the old lady. "Come in by all means, dear child."

But when Else did come in she was almost as much startled as Werner had been before her at the disorderly ramshackle prevailing in the room usually kept so carefully neat. Place to sit

down there was none; there was some article or other of clothing on every chair, and on the sofa there were three.

"Why, what's up?" asked Werner. "Are you packing up?"

Mathilda slightly drew up her upper lip and slightly drew down the corners of her mouth.

"Oh dear, no!" said she. "We're preparing for a party. You ought to know that any event of that kind is preceded usually by a series of small earthquakes in our family—"

"A party?" asked Werner, in astonishment.

"Haven't you heard anything about it?" asked old Madame Schlitzing. "Malva has invited us to a tea-party for this evening. Hasn't she said anything to you about it?"

"Why, yes, she did ask me to come to her to-night—there would be 'three human beings there.' I think those were the words she used. I had not the least idea there was any question of a party."

"Three, or three hundred, it makes no difference," said the old lady, warmly; "one surely must make one's self look nice."

"But you always do look nice, mamma!" cried Werner, coming between them to smooth things in his amiable way; "and, surely, there can't be any particularly need of full dress at Aunt Malvina's!"

"Full dress!" repeated Mathilda, pointing contemptuously to the very miscellaneous articles all over the room. "Full dress!"

"Oh, you don't or won't understand! I don't

want to look shabby when I am at Malvina's and I certainly will not!" cried the old lady, in no little irritation. Then, turning to her daughter, she continued: "Why, where is my white lace collar? I cannot imagine where you've hidden it! Oh, how slow you are with your needlework, how ridiculously slow!"

Werner had his own uncomfortable reflections as to what his mother's exertions to be dressed well for this party might culminate in. But he kept them to himself. There was very little use in saying anything. He knew only too well that the old lady's determination to look as well as she possibly could when inspected by Malvina and her aristocratic acquaintances, sprang from a feeling of uncertainty as to her social standing which had come over her ever since she was forced, by her narrow circumstances, to live in a retirement little suited to her sunny, social temper. He was very sorry for her; for the rest, he felt no little vexation already with the "geese" who should so far presume as to criticise her old-fashioned, pretty things.

"But, do sit down," said the old lady, turning to Else.

"For the moment that's not such an easy thing to do," said Werner, laughing with a little perplexity.

"Oh, I really can't stop; I must go at once," said Else. "You gave me to understand this morning that there would be no time to-day for a game of whist, so I'm using the afternoon for a drive out."

"And where are you going to drive to, my dear child?" asked the old lady.

"To Eltville, to visit a friend."

Werner felt his cheeks grow hot. "Do you happen to know a Countess Haidenheim in Eltville?" he asked.

"Why, it's exactly her I'm going to visit, or I should rather say, her granddaughter."

"Haidenheim? Ida Haidenheim?" asked Mme. Schlitzing, looking up from her examination of diverse pieces of lace which she had taken out of a tin box and which were quite yellow with age.

"Yes, Ida Haidenheim."

"Wasn't it she who had that great misfortune with her daughter?" asked Madame Schlitzing. Then, correcting herself directly, she added: "But that's not a thing for you to know about, my dear child."

"Oh, but of course I do know about it!" cried Else, looking straight at the old lady with that frank, fearless look of hers. "And I know, too, what terrible things poor Lena had to put up with at our boarding-school on account of her sad story. Many of the girls wouldn't have anything to do with her at all because of her misfortune, especially those girls who had proud, haughty mothers. I had lost *my* mother by that time, so there was nobody to prevent my being with her just as much as I liked."

"Were you long with her at the boarding-school together?"

Werner went on, in strict silence, with his examination of a small collar of point d'Alencon,

which seemed entirely to absorb him, turning it over again and again, as though he found something specially interesting in the faded, fusty bit of stuff.

"Only a year," said Else; "for, after that, the lady who kept the school was obliged herself to write to Countess Haidenheim to take Lena home. She had too much altogether to put up with from the stupid girls. But papa gave me his permission to ask her to Krugenberg for the holidays. Oh! how we did enjoy being together. You can have no idea how much she was to me. I used to have a sort of scarlatina every summer. Papa wanted to send Lena away, of course. But she insisted on staying to nurse me herself. And how she *did* nurse me! There are a good many people who, when they nurse, are just like ancient martyrs in their devotion to duty and contempt of death. I mean they go on just as if they were, giving themselves such airs. That's dreadful for the invalid. And there are some nurses who are just like machines, so regular and punctilious. That's comfortable enough for the sick person in one way, but doesn't move you to much gratitude. Lena nursed me as though nothing in the world could give her more satisfaction. I never saw her so cheerful and tranquil as she was then, when she spent so much time at my bedside. Why, she used to sweep out my room herself, because the servant made so much noise, and I couldn't stand it. That's the sort of person she is."

"Poor young creature, poor baby!" murmured Madame Schlitzing.

"Well, is that right *now?*" suddenly asked Mathilda, holding out to Madame Schlitzing the dark violet "waist," the sleeves of which she had been operating on, improving them much, as she believed.

"Why, Thilda, Thilda, it's perfectly horrible; that's not how I want it at all!" said the old lady, in great excitement.

"Well, all I can say is—yes, I admit it, I'm not very well fitted for this sort of thing, and haven't done much at it," said Thilda. "If you would only tell me what it is you want a little more fully, I'd try to meet your wishes. All I ask is to be more clearly instructed by you as to what *is* to be done."

"Thilda, you're enough to make one jump out of one's skin!" said old Madame Schlitzing, with a funny expression of horror.

Werner felt just the same way.

Else only laughed, in her sincere, hearty way, and said: "Oh, dear; I'll tell you what, Mamma Schlitzing. Thilda will never be able to do much at this sort of thing, with this inspired artist hand of hers. "Will you allow me to send you my maid?"

"For Heaven's sake, no; certainly not!" cried Madame Schlitzing; "I've got quite used to your knowing all about my poor little shabby wardrobe, dear child! But I should die of shame if I had to go into it all with your maid."

There was a knock at the door.

"That will be my Fuhrwesen," said Else. "She was to pick me up here. Perhaps you'd rather not have her come in, just now."

"Oh, really, now—really!" cried Mathilda, with great vivacity. "But *you*, mamma—if it's disagreeable to you, of course not! But I should feel the greatest interest, as far as I am concerned, in making the acquaintance of a lady of such genius."

Else opened the door.

"Dear little Fuhrwesen!" she cried.

"The very person," was replied by somebody unseen.

"Come along in!"

Then there stepped into the room a lady with very short lower limbs, with a big brown tuft of curls over her forehead, which bulged out under a yellow hat of eccentric shape, and wearing a cloak of some thick cinnamon colored woolen stuff, with a gigantic collar or supplementary tippet.

Then followed the introduction of her to everybody present.

"But, Else, dear, you really must come if we are to have this drive!" cried the Viennese lady. Then bowing to the others: "It gives me very great pleasure to make your acquaintance, ladies; but, if we are really to go to Eltville today, Else, pet, we have no time to lose. The carriage has been waiting now for a quarter of an hour."

"Let us see one another again quite soon, quite soon!" they all said to one another.

Then Werner escorted Else down to the carriage. Little attentions of that kind were not at all usual with him. Else was quite aware of that, and could not help attaching special importance to this and other little demonstrations of the same kind. Poor Else! Poor girl! As she went down the stairs with him she gave him a good sidelong look. She observed on his face an expression of tenderness, as though he were deeply moved by something, an expression she had never before seen there. Her heart beat strongly.

"Shall you be to-night at my Aunt Malva's?" he asked, as he assisted her in to the carriage, into which he had already put Mademoiselle Fuhrwesen.

"She has invited me," replied Else. "If it is not too late when I get back from Eltville I shall certainly go there."

"Then be sure and don't come back too late from Eltville," said Werner, in a coaxing voice.

Else's heart beat stronger. He kept staying on at the carriage step, as though it was difficult for him to let her go. And the truth is, she had never pleased him so well as that day. And he was trying his best to make up his mind, turning the subject this way and that, whether he could not send some kind of poetic little message to his melancholy little water-Nixie through Else—something enigmatic, mysterious, with a veil over it which she would see through and nobody else. However, nothing satisfactory occurred to him, so he simply kissed Else's

hand—for the first time in their acquaintance—put up the carriage steps, and gazed at her steadily with his tender, dreamy eyes as the carriage went off, with his thoughts filled with—not Else at all—but quite another person. But how could she or anybody else divine such a thing?

"Oh, I say, pet Else, that Schlitzing is over head and ears in love with you," remarked Mdlle. Fuhrwesen, who, we must say, was perperfectly justified in coming to that conclusion. And Else saying nothing, but turning her glowing little face in another direction, the Viennese lady went on: "Well, I've nothing to say against it, I'm sure. He's one of the handsomest fellows I ever saw, and an excellent character, I've no doubt. But has he got anything?"

"How should I know anything about it?" said Else, with a little vexation.

"Oh! well, I only asked. Why do his women folk dress so, and pinch so? Is it poverty, really, or because they're simply close-fisted? One never can tell, with those Prussians. Well, as I've said, I wash my hands in innocence. And if papa has no objection—"

"I should like to know what you mean. *What* is papa to have no objection to, pray?" cried Else. She tried her best to seem extremely angry, not with much effect.

CHAPTER XI.

It was about half-past four when the carriage with the two ladies stopped at the uncanny edifice, which had the air of an old palace transformed into a prison or a lunatic asylum.

From behind one of the gratings, with its curious, grotesque twists, there came the sound of prayers—hard, cold mutterings, without a trace of sensibility. Mdlle. Fuhrwesen raised her brows as high as they would go. "Oh! Heaven have mercy upon us, Else, dear!" she cried, "the same story, the same old story! Well, well! It's best, perhaps, not to disturb the old devotee when she's at her favorite work; though I certainly think I should be doing her Maker a service by protecting Him a little while from these perpetual, servile, obtrusive solicitations which the unsupportable old pietist is always boring Him with. However, after all, it's no business of mine. You and your friend would like to have your gossip all to yourselves, and I'll go my own way and have a good look at the Rhine. Besides, I've taken the precaution of bringing music-paper with me. Perhaps I shall compose a new finale to my third act."

So saying, the Viennese lady, one of the queerest, certainly, but also best-hearted creatures in the world, hurried away, making all the tassels of her remarkable cloak dance about like the trappings of a mule in a high trot.

Else stepped into the niche, the recess where

the door was at which Lena had given Werner that kiss. She pushed open the little door and went into the courtyard, where the tall poplars were that looked like cypresses. The old yellow dog made a confused, hoarse sound at first, something between a growl and a bark, and then yawned and wagged his tail.

Else stepped into the hall of the mansion, which was high and vaulted. A young girl came flying to her, a creature tall for her years, half a head taller than Else, with large, clear eyes set in a pale, mobile countenance surmounted by a profusion of brown curls.

"Else! what a surprise! Oh, good Heavens! how delighted I am to see you! And how sweet and good of you to come!" And Lena kissed her friend with such an overflowing passion of tenderness that she almost took Else's breath away.

"Oh! I say, Lena," laughed out Else, at last, when she could get a chance, "what in the world has come to you? you're like a crazy creature!"

"Oh, it's only that I'm so *frightfully* glad that there is one being in the world to love wholly and utterly and absolutely," replied Lena; "and how often, pray, do I get a chance to do that, Else? But now, come along to my room; it's almost pretty there to-day. I've crammed as many roses into it as it will hold, to keep down the musty smell. I was in there with grandmother—grandmother's room, I mean—when I saw you come in. We are not to disturb her just now, but we're to take coffee with her at half-past five. She gave me her gracious per-

mission to invite you, although she still finds it quite impossible to conceive how it can be that you have permission to keep up your intercourse with me."

"Gracious goodness! why should I not?" asked Else, in her warmest tones.

"Yes, why—why?" Lena's eyes grew very dark. "Because I—oh, you know all about it; everybody knows about it—because I am the child of sin, and, as such, belong irrevocably to sin; don't properly belong to anything else, and, of course, must spread sin wherever I go!" And suddenly the big tears came into her eyes. "That's what she tells me every day. Oh, God! you cannot think how terribly it makes me feel! What wouldn't I give if I were like other girls; you, for example, who have come to nineteen years, and haven't the faintest notion what sin means!"

"Not the faintest notion?" cried Else, quite hurt. "What an idea! I know what it is, just as well as you do."

"Is that so? Do you, really?"

"Yes, I know all about it." And then she added, in a very low voice, and with some solemnity, "It's having children without being married, or running away from your husband after you are married."

"Why, you are quite formidably learned!" cried Lena, and began to laugh so that the tears which had been gathering on her cheeks suddenly fell from them.

Then Else put her arm quite tenderly round

her friend's neck and said, in a low voice, speaking at her ear: "And I know something else, too, that it's very wrong of your grandmother, and that such a hateful, ugly thing as that could never happen to you—never, never, I don't care what your grandmother chooses to prophesy!"

Lena stared straight before her, looking away from her friend and into the distance. "Oh, if I only knew that! if only I could be quite, quite sure of that! But I sometimes feel such anguish that I want to throw myself into the water, and so run away from my fate—God knows what fate! And—I'll let you into a secret. I tried that once—"

"*What!* throwing yourself into the water?"

"Yes; but something happened which brought it all to nothing."

"What was it, an accident—or somebody?"

"It was an accident, in the shape of somebody."

And, as she uttered those words, there came into her eyes such a peculiar light, so full of tenderness and delight, that even innocent Else could not help exclaiming: "Do you know how you look? You look as if you had fallen in love with that *accident!*"

"Fallen in love—fallen in love!" murmured Lena, closing her eyes. "That *is* such a stupid phrase. Grandmother often uses it; and, then, I think it not only stupid, but hateful, ugly. Fallen in love—no, not at all! It only seemed to me that a ray of sunshiny hope found its way into my heart. I ought not to have let it get in

there at all, I am quite aware of that; for, generally, any ray of hope is nothing more than a disturber of one's peace; sheer resignation is best. But, this time, it came with such a bewitching countenance, and began to tell me such wonderful fairy tales that I couldn't find courage to shut the door in its face."

Before this dialogue took place, they had come to Lena's room, a big bare room, smelling musty with lime and other unpleasantness. It produced the impression of a prisoner's cell.

The windows were wide open, and the summer air and sunshine had access to the apartment; but the summer air could not warm, and the sunshine could not light it, the walls were too thick, the window recesses too deep.

The few articles of furniture were dark colored, and of awkward, ugly make. The flowers which Lena had bestowed there in profusion—we have heard her tell Else about them—had a melancholy air about them in this incongruous place. One might almost fancy that they paled visibly as you looked at them. And their perfume, strong as it was, did not suffice to neutralize the ancient, musty smell of the room; it pierced through everything.

The two girls were seated on a large sofa-bed covered with brown cotton. The rustling sound of the Rhine waters came into the room, as well as the twittering of the birds which were darting hither and thither in the sunshine. But these sounds were unheard by the girls; they had ears only for one another.

"Now confess, confess!" said Else, teasingly and tenderly. "Confess all about that fairy-tale which Hope told you!"

"Ah, me! nothing *but* a fairy-tale—no substance in it whatever!" Lena was leaning back with her eyes half closed. Suddenly she raised her head, and looked full and steadily at her friend and asked, with some difficulty: "Else, do you think I'm pretty?"

"Pretty, indeed? Why, you're wonderfully pretty, bewitchingly pretty," Else assured her with unmistakable sincerity.

"Pretty enough for somebody to commit folly for me some day?" Lena asked breathlessly, her whole frame tense with emotion.

"Yes, quite enough, precisely enough, *more* than enough. You look as if you were *made* to turn somebody's head," Else said, with great decision.

Lena drew her to her bosom, and kissed her excitedly.

"Why, you're just like an intoxicated creature, Lena," laughed Else.

"I'm afraid you are only too right," confessed Lena humbly. "In truth, it doesn't take much to intoxicate a creature who's all but starving."

"But you really must let me know all about the fairy-tale."

"Fairy-tale! fairy-tale! It's nothing but stuff and nonsense! You'd better tell me what you've been doing with yourself all that time at Schlangenbad. You must have found plenty of amusement, otherwise you would not have been so

long without coming to look *me* up. Have you made any new acquaintances?"

"Yes, very nice acquaintances."

"Who may those be?"

"An old lady and her daughter."

"And the daughter is something more, I suppose; a new friend. I am jealous, I warn you!" said Lena. "Is she about your age?"

"Who? the old lady?" asked Else, half laughing.

"No; the daughter, the young girl."

"Oh! she's not really her daughter; she's a stepdaughter, and she isn't exactly young; she's two-and-thirty, at least—quite an old thing. I don't like her much, I must say. She's too clever for me; at least, she very frequently gives me to understand that I'm too stupid for her. She is very gifted, if you please—paints and reads Schopenhauer. I really don't know how it is, but I can't endure these so-called talented, gifted women—I really can't!"

"Well, where does the niceness of these new acquaintances come in? I haven't heard yet."

"Oh, dear! the old woman is such a dear, sweet thing!" said Else. "She *is* so kind and nice with me! And, do you know, Lena, I'm made so that I am quite delighted when anybody spoils me a little. It *would* be so delightful to have a mother like that!"

"Well"—Lena smiled a little slyly—"if this delightful old lady has a son, perhaps that might be managed somehow."

"Oh! Lena, Lena!" cried Else, quite angrily. "How can you possibly think of such a thing?"

"Such a thing as what? That an old lady may very possibly have a son?" said Lena, significantly.

"No! But—but—"

"Well, has she really no son?"

"Yes, she has one, but—but—"

"He's an insupportable, pedantic monster, like his sister," conjectured Lena, in a careless sort of way.

"No, God knows he isn't—nothing of the kind!" cried Else, in exasperated tones. "He is quite nice, really nice. He has such charming ways with his mother! Just think! he is an officer in the guards, and is at work at the Berlin War School. And it appears—so his mother says, at least, and Linden too, who has known him a long time—that he is expected to do great things. And he has got a two-months' leave of absence to go abroad, and improve himself in the languages. And then, all of a sudden, he says nothing to nobody but just puts his journey to Italy on one side, to come and stay with his old mother and cheer her up."

"Is that so? Really, an exemplary youth!" remarked Lena, as if she were saying something quite deep and original.

"I should like to know what you mean by 'exemplary youth'?" asked Else, whom the phrase didn't please. "Do you mean a dull, Philistine kind of body? Because, if you do, he isn't that kind of person at all—not at all!"

"Oh! I only meant a youth from whom other youths might take example," said Lena, carelessly.

"Well, that he certainly is!" said Else, warmly. "Oh, you needn't look so sarcastic! If you only saw him with his old mother, you would have no inclination to laugh, I promise you. The old woman broke her foot last spring, and is still a little lame. So, he carries her up and down stairs. And you should see his affectionate face when he does it, and how careful he is to hold her properly, and how tenderly and sweetly he pulls her dress this way and that, to make her comfortable when he lays her down. A poor old silk dress it is, that shines like a flat-iron. And—and the old woman is so kind and clever and warm-hearted! a bewitching old woman she is, I assure you. Both of them are so entirely chips from the same block, mother and son. But she is quite fussy and fretful about trifles sometimes. She seems to have had a great deal of trouble earlier, and she excites herself terribly about nothing at all sometimes. And then you should see how the daughter lectures her. But he never loses patience with the old woman, never by any chance. And—and—this I've heard from Edmund Linden—he is in a regiment of the guards in Berlin, all of them terribly rich officers. He has very little to spend, yet never goes a farthing in debt. Not that there's so much in that, after all. There are plenty of young people who do that, but some of them make a disgusting show of it, and are al-

ways telling their parents of the privations they have to put up with, till the poor things are almost ashamed at having brought them into the world, seeing that they can give them so little. A merry fellow that runs in debt is better, I think, than a tiresome, conceited, reasoning animal of that kind. But he's quite different, quite. He puts up simply with his lot, and hasn't the least idea that he is making any sacrifice or doing anything fine at all. He never seems to think like this, 'If I can't have better things, I'll put up with what I have.' It's not that way at all. No, he is just simply good, and enjoys his life sincerely and truly; and his joyousness is a much better thing for a poor old mother than any mere gratitude would be."

"Why, Else! who would have thought you had so much eloquence in you!" said Lena. "I begin to be quite interested in this new friend of yours. What may his name happen to be?"

"Werner Schlitzing. A nice name, isn't it. But what is the matter with you? Why, you are as pale as death!"

"Yes; I have just had a sharp spasm of headache—*migraine*. You know I suffer with it frequently. But I'm so delighted with what you tell me, dear; so much interested in your narrative! Do go on!"

Lena's pallor was something frightful to see. She spoke hurriedly, and with painful excitement.

"What do you mean by saying, 'Do go on'?" asked Else, in a kind of startled way.

"Why, you're going to tell me how it is with both of you, surely. He loves you?"

The blood shot into Else's cheeks. "I don't believe he does; something at the bottom of my heart tells me he does not."

"But you love him?" asked Lena, with a sort of violent, almost unscrupulous, pressure in her tones.

"Oh, Lena! how can you possibly—" Else suddenly burst into tears, and threw herself into her friend's arms.

For a moment Lena was quite stiff and motionless. Then a sort of convulsion seemed to go through her whole frame; and she pressed the weeping girl close to her breast, with something of maternal intensity, and tried to comfort her with encouraging words and the tenderest of caresses; while poor Else sobbed out: "It is such a shame, such a terrible shame, to love a man before one knows—before one knows quite, quite for certain that he loves you!"

Lena shook her head. "No, dear!" she said, "no, it's no shame; it's never a shame to love a fellow creature purely and with one's whole heart, whether he return the feeling or not. But it would be a shame, it is a shame, to run after him, to try to cling to him, whether he wants it or not; to complain and cry over the unsatisfied thirst of one's heart. *That* sort of thing *is* shameful, disgraceful! But to love a person simply and hopelessly, that is no shame, only a misfortune! Besides, I can't think you have anything of the sort to fear. He is quite sure

to become fond of you. How could it be otherwise, you sweet, bewitching thing? He is only holding himself in because you are rich and he is poor."

"No, no, no! I know better!" murmured Else, dashing the tears from her eyes with both hands. "He likes me well enough, in his way. He often looks at me with a strange intensity, he always smiles at me, when he meets me, in the sweetest, kindest way. But whenever he begins to talk to me his glances go in every direction; he has nothing to say to me whatever. And I know this well enough, I never could fill his life. All I could do would be to love him inexpressibly. But that would not be enough."

"Not enough! for a creature like you?" Lena's eyes gleamed almost with angry bitterness. "It's more than enough, and he would be a very stupid person not to see it. Mark what I say, within eight days you and he will be engaged!"

All of a sudden a great stillness and quiet seemed to come over the room. Out of doors was heard the rustling of old Rhine—a cool, grave, majestic sound.

Else nestled up to her friend. "Now, tell me all about your fairy-tale," she said.

"My fairy-tale?" asked Lena, in a harsh voice. "What fairy-tale?"

"Oh! that one which Hope told you."

"That! I have quite forgotten what it was," replied Lena. "It was nothing but silly, meaningless chatter. But there's another I can tell

you of. Once upon a time there was a princess, whom they took into a wonderful garden, where the trees were all full of the juiciest fruits, and the bushes of the most delightful flowers. But she was not permitted to do more than look at the fruits and flowers; whenever she put out her hand and touched one, it crumbled away at once into evil-smelling dust. Then, one day, she was thirsty, and—"

The door was opened at this moment. The old waiting-woman of Countess Haidenheim stepped in. "Her ladyship requests your presence; the coffee is ready."

Lena gave her friend a quick, breathless sort of kiss, and then left the room with her.

* * * * * * * *

The old countess and the two young people had finished their coffee, and the afternoon was now far advanced. The shadows of the poplar tree seemed of endless length as they lay on the disorderly grass growing in the spacious court-yard.

The carriage stopped at the door. Mdlle. Fuhrwesen had come to fetch her young charge.

Else gave her friend many warm kisses, and then got into the carriage. Lena was standing in the recess at the door, where she had taken leave of Werner ten days earlier.

All of a sudden a cold shiver ran through her frame, and, immediately afterward, her face flushed to a deep scarlet, such as Else had never seen there.

"Heavens, Lena! what is the matter with

you? You surely have a fever; you're ill!" cried Else. Before Lena could reply, the horses had started. Else drove away into the moist, blooming landscape of the Taunus country, and Lena returned into the cold, mouldy-smelling air of that fateful house, the atmosphere which her life seemed condemned to breathe. She went up to her room. She threw herself with her face downward on the bed, and dug her hands deep into the pillows.

Why, oh, why had he forced her to live, seeing that he did not care to do anything to put a little sunshine into her life? she asked herself.

Then a very passion of anger seized and shook the girl. She hated, she despised him. But this passed away almost as soon as it came. She shrugged her shoulders, and asked herself why she should be angry? Only, forsooth, because he had not been such a fool as to ruin his whole career out of compassion for a poor creature, whose life he had saved by the merest accident, and who had for a few moments gazed up at him in an enthusiasm of grateful admiration when she was drenched with water. How could she ever have imagined such absurdity for a single moment? She was amazed at her own folly! And yet—yet, the Hope was dead; but the Dream, the dangerous, seductive Dream, still thrilled through her soul.

Ah! if only, only it had been possible! To her wretched fancy it seemed as though a door had been opened in her House of Misery. Then *he* came in—he, or some one whose features

were the same as his; one invested with every gift, power, charm of mind and heart her utmost imagination could think of. He bent down to her, and whispered: "Thy time of torture is past and done with. Come, come!" Then he lifted her out of the pit, the pit of desolation where her life was spent, and raised her up into the sunshine.

Oh! how she would have loved him for it! how she would have loved him! Never had girl so loved man, as she would have loved him! And she would have made him happy, as none other could—none, none!

A shiver of sudden rapture shot through her frame; for a moment only; then it was over.

Out of doors there was the never-ceasing sound of the Rhine; close to her the monotonous murmur of the prayers, praises of God, deemed the more acceptable to Him because accompanied by constant injury and insult to a creature He had created. A few hours ago she was rich indeed; now there was no beggar so poor as she. The Hope was dead. And now the fitful light of the Dream too had faded away. No Light, no Joy, no Outlook! None, none, none! Darkness, cold, stiffening cruelty and hardness surrounding her everywhere! Her whole existence nothing but a grave, in which she was not even permitted the consolations of Death.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN Werner, with his mother, arrived at the party of the model-countess, the only guests that had come were an old Mme. Norbin and two Austrian ladies, a mother and daughter, from Croatia; the Countesses Iwantschitsch, new acquaintances, which, for some reason or other—nobody exactly knew what—Countess Malva seemed very proud to have formed.

The elder of these ladies must have been very pretty at one time, and, as the story went, very rich too. She wore very large, but false, brilliants, with a nonchalance which proved that she must have been in the habit of wearing real ones for a long time. And she was full of those airs and graces, when talking with men, which ladies of advanced years never indulge in unless they have been taught to believe, from their earliest years, that every glance of theirs is a special favor. She was slightly rouged, heavily powdered, and had her hair dressed Greek fashion. She wore her sleeves quite short, and had very round, smooth, white arms. Her voice was deep, and when she talked the voice seemed to be almost singing, so strong were its inflections. For the rest, the general impression she produced on the North German folks was very agreeable; she seemed so warm-hearted and natural, natural even to brusqueness.

The daughter was the image of the mother,

about twenty years younger, but slow and languorous instead of lively and brusque.

Both ladies were in full evening dress, contrary to Schlangenbad usage; both *décolletées*, the mother's dress coming to a point, or, as it is called, heart-shaped; the daughter's quadrangular. And both had some arrangement of lace, which wobbled about a good deal, about their extremely developed busts.

Both of these ladies had a great deal of scent about them. Every Austrian would have seen at once that the case was one of very overacted aristocratic pretensions, suggestive of the adventuress.

The model-countess was not endowed with the requisite perception, nor had she had the amount of social experience, which would enable any one to class these personages correctly. A more practiced eye would have set them down at once as belonging to the order known in social Europe as "traveling countesses by profession," and which now might, perhaps, better be called, briefly, "railroad countesses."

The mother seemed an unpretending creature enough, and appeared to be astonished herself at the fuss people made with her. The daughter was one of those girls who can be said properly only to exist when they are in contact with some man or other.

Countess Iwantschitsch held out her hand to Werner, when he was presented to her, in the most amiable manner; one of the prettiest hands it was he had ever held in his. He just touched

it with his lips, in knightly fashion, and then, according to his shy custom, withdrew into a corner, where he sat quite quietly, adding greatly to the decorative beauty of the room, and studying the people about him with his large, serious eyes. His conclusions, however, he always kept to himself.

But we are bound to say that those conclusions were, generally, at this time of his life, quite mistaken, lying far apart from the realities of life. He had no standard to try people by except that one of idealism and romance with which his character was saturated. Women, indeed, he could not see at all, except in that very misleading light. Poor boy!

Countess Iwantschitsch began, directly on being introduced to Werner's mother, to lavish the most kindly and amiable marks of attention upon her; a kind of flattery to which the old lady's susceptibilities were very open. And what especially gratified the mother was that the countess put her glass to her eye, and looked over Werner long and carefully, and then said, in a quite audible whisper: "So that's *your* son? I congratulate you indeed—have rarely seen such a handsome creature!"

Werner, poor fellow, turned his head in another direction, and withdrew even deeper into the shadow of his corner. As he did so, he noticed that the eyes of the younger Countess Iwantschitsch also were turned in his direction; very big blue eyes they were, with an unusual amount of eyelid.

These eyes seemed, to Werner, to have a great deal of poetical enthusiasm lurking in them. They rather reminded him of Beatrice Cenci's eyes.

At the outset the conversation, on this occasion, seemed to turn upon the question whether a little Prince Uxow, who had been unwell the night before, had upset his stomach with mushrooms, or a particular kind of Russian butter-cake. After dealing with this subject, the talk dragged a little.

Then there was heard outside the room the rustling of a silk dress, with a good deal more rustle than a dress usually has, and which induced expectations.

The footman opened the door. And the whole room seemed, all of a sudden, as though it had had its former air replaced by a fresh, vigorous, biting, quite different atmosphere. A very tall old lady came in, tall and with a proud, exceptionally erect bearing; with eyes still beautiful, but sharp and searching to a degree; with a mouth quite beautifully shaped, round which there lurked all the time a smile compounded equally of mockery and kindness. A very remarkable old lady indeed! This was the Countess Anna Lenzdorff.

"I've brought somebody with me for you!" she cried. "Guess who it is!"

"A gentleman, it's to be hoped?" lisped the model-countess, to whom, however, the point was really one of supreme indifference. She had never been in the habit of running after men.

The two Croatian ladies, to whom such a point was very far, indeed, from being a matter of indifference, laughed at her remark.

"Yes, a gentleman! But don't any one of you run away with the idea that you're going to have another worshiper. Nobody gets any of his worship except myself. You'll all have to go with empty stomachs, positively you will!" cried the countess, in high amusement. She stood at the door while saying all this, with her hand upon the door-knob. "Guess who it is!"

"How can we guess?" lisped the model-countess.

"Cardinal, you come in!" cried Countess Lenzdorff, with a merry laugh.

Then there stepped in a very handsome, but extremely aged man, with a long white, very full beard, but without a hair on his head.

"Count Retz!" cried the model-countess. "I am enchanted, indeed!"

The count—nicknamed Cardinal, no doubt, because of the historical reminiscences conjured up by his name; but, some say, because of his having on one occasion taken the part of a Prince of the Church in some charade or other, though there never was any one with less of the priest about him—the count bowed laughingly, and made some jesting observation. And the excitement caused by the advent of the pair presently subsided.

Old Mme. Schlitzing had been a friend of Countess Lenzdorff from her earliest years, and hastened to present her children to her.

Countess Lenzdorff said something polite to Mathilda, but greeted Werner just as an old acquaintance, with all the heartiness and freedom old ladies of her straightforward, open character are wont to use with young men who much please them.

"Your son and I have been friends for a long while, Rose," she said, holding out her hand to the young man. "He's a frightfully handsome fellow, but a great favorite of mine. He has ideals of his own, and that does a young man much credit in these material days. Besides, he's a cousin of an old favorite of mine, Goswyn Sydow. But tell me, Schlitzing, how are you getting on? What about the journey to Italy?"

Werner became rather red, and made no reply. His mother answered for him. "He has, for the present, postponed it a little to play the part of a good Samaritan with me."

"Really, that's quite nice of him!" She gave the young officer a look of roguish good humor. "And hasn't he any other little affair in hand for off moments?" she asked.

He smiled in an awkward, defensive way.

The old lady observed that he was a little embarrassed by the attention she was paying him, so she turned to his mother and asked:

"Isn't he somewhat marked in the attentions he's paying to little Ried? Something of the sort has reached my ear. By the way, I expected to meet the little thing here. She rather gave me to understand so, Malva."

"She promised me that she would come," said

the model-countess, "only she said it would be rather late before she could, as she had to drive out to Eltville."

"To Eltville? What takes her to Eltville, the little witch?" asked Countess Lenzdorff, taking a cup of tea from the salver presented to her by the footman.

"She had to visit some acquaintance—a Countess Haidenheim, I fancy," replied the model-countess. As she said this, she blinked with her two unequal eyes, as if she had a difficulty in recalling all the circumstances connected with what they were talking about.

"Ida Haidenheim—she who was Lady-Superintendent at the Court of the Duchess of Schamberg-Mechingen, years ago?" asked Countess Lenzdorff, nibbling a biscuit.

"An exceedingly estimable old lady," interposed Count Retz, "but a singular acquaintance for a young girl. I knew her very well twenty years ago. I used to keep out of her way as much as I could; she always produced on me the effect of a shower of cold rain. I wonder very much what effect she produces upon people now?"

"Oh, she's a perfect North Pole, ice-bound, freezing, where nothing whatever can grow and flourish!" cried Countess Lenzdorff, "and small blame to her, considering the ghastly misfortunes that have befallen her. She is quite insupportable, though; there's no denying that."

Werner managed to bring out something at this point. "Countess Haidenheim has a granddaughter living with her," said he, "with whom

Mademoiselle Else is exceedingly intimate; they were educated at the same boarding-school."

"The granddaughter—the granddaughter!" cried Countess Malva. "That granddaughter is never spoken of, my dear Werner!"

"And why is she never spoken of?" asked Count Retz.

"There's a rather uncomfortable story connected with her, I rather fancy," said Countess Warsberg. "If I'm not mistaken, she is— But, if I don't take care, I shall say something indiscreet!"

"Oh, no! you are not in the least mistaken. It *is* the fact that the granddaughter is the natural child of Ida Haidenheim's only daughter," said Countess Lenzdorff, in an easy, careless way.

"For Heaven's sake, do think of what you say; there are young girls here!"

"Oh! my daughter is not a mincing young thing," Countess Iwantschitsch hastened to say. "A little thing like that won't upset her. Still, if the child is in the way— Ilka, dear, go out on the balcony!"

This was said quite energetically, and Ilka immediately obeyed. As she left the room, she looked round for Werner. He either did not understand, or was too deeply interested in the disclosures that seemed imminent, to pay any attention to the invitation her glances conveyed. The only person who followed Ilka out to the balcony was Mathilda.

CHAPTER XIII.

"AND now, countess, pray, your story?" said the elder Iwantschitsch. "There's nothing in the world I'm fonder of than a little bit of scandal."

"Oh, there's nothing to amuse anybody in this particular scandal," replied Countess Lenzdorff; "especially for us, who were witnesses of the tragedy—for tragedy it was—and who knew the heroine of it well and intimately."

"Really? Knew her intimately?" cried Countess Iwantschitsch. "Then the lady in question was in Berlin society — the highest society, was she?"

"You heard, just now, that she was the daughter of a lady-superintendent at one of the German courts," said Countess Lenzdorff.

"Ah! that escaped me."

"She was one of my most intimate friends," said Mme. Norbin, here, in her small, refined voice. "Although it is impossible for me to do otherwise than blame her for the course she took, involving ruin to her life as it did, I never was able to discard her altogether from my affections. She was an exalted creature."

"She was a goose," said Countess Lenzdorff, shortly and sharply; then she added, in milder tones, "but she was a goose very much to be pitied."

"And what sort of man was it who led her into all that trouble?" asked the Cardinal.

"He was the sort of man whom neither of you"—here Countess Lenzdorff looked from the old count to Werner, and from Werner to the old count—"whom it would never have occurred to either of you to be jealous of. He was a Russian, a refugee, a teacher of languages. He made Julia's acquaintance owing to his being engaged to give her lessons in Russian. He certainly was no dowry-hunter. When he ran away with Julia she had not a penny in her pocket; and, being himself married, he could obviously not have speculated upon the family paying him well for marrying and making an honest woman of her. His disinterestedness did not then, or ever, admit of a shadow of a doubt."

"That's rare indeed, I must say!" observed Countess Iwantschitsch.

"Well, as there was absolutely no self-seeking motive in the transaction, it is plain that he was not altogether an unworthy person," said Werner, shyly; "he must have been an exceptional being."

"Oh, dear me! unfortunately not. His kind is only too numerously represented!" sighed Countess Lenzdorff. "In my view he was a donkey, but a donkey who was so profoundly unfortunate as to think himself somebody. And, what was still more unfortunate, the people about him did their best to fortify him in that opinion. He was a Nihilist, or Socialist, or what not, and was the inventor of a new system—a radically fresh system—of truth which required that all the rules and conventions of society, moral and

other, should be entirely rooted up. Just at that time there was a positive epidemic of such new truths and systems. His whole soul was possessed with the conviction of the truth of this new system of his. He was the kind of fanatic, in fact, who never has a moment's doubt of the soundness of his views, because, having got one idea into his narrow little brain, there isn't room for another to compare it with."

"Why, did you know him personally, Anna?" asked Mme. Norbin.

"Yes, indeed!" replied Countess Lenzdorff. "I went to see Julia, in Paris. Of course, it was Paris where they had taken refuge."

"You went to see her?" cried the model-countess, half laughing and half horrified.

"Certainly!" replied Countess Lenzdorff, with perfect equanimity. "I went to see her several times. Oh, Heaven be good to us! what misery and poverty they lived in! Their lodging was in some quite remote quarter—Boulevard de l'Enfer, I think—where all the Russians live who have no money; those who expect to astonish the world with their artistic performances, and those who mean to turn it upside down with fine speeches and dynamite; both of which sets never come to anything. A whole colony of spoiled lives was about them there—the halt, the lame and the blind, in a spiritual sense. Before her great misfortune I was far from being fond of Julia, but after that I confess that I could not help being interested in her wretched lot. It was the other way with most other people. They

used to rave about her before, and cut her dead afterward. Heavens! when I remember that she used to make rain and sunshine, as she chose, in the most refined and intellectual circles of our capital. They used to declare that she had genius, that nobody could come up to her. The Lord be merciful to us!"

"Well, what sort of person was she really?" asked Countess Iwantschitsch, who seemed determined that the whole story should be looked at from a more or less humorous point of view, if possible.

Countess Lenzdorff shrugged her shoulders. "What sort of person? Well, she was a crank, that's what she was, or not far short of it. She wore her hair tightly and smoothly combed behind her ears, and cut short behind. She raved about Shelley and Mary Wolstonecraft. She hadn't a particle of religion, but believed in all sorts of wonderful, impossible things. For example, she held that, in regard to the moralities and immoralities, men and women were under the same responsibility; which really meant that neither of the sexes was under any at all, I think. Then she believed that all the various sorts of disorders growing out of civilized society could be healed by allowing all our instincts entirely free play; which, in my view, is pretty much as if you should set about draining a marsh by flooding it with water. She believed that free love would entirely regenerate the human race; that society could only be organized aright by a preliminary process of disorganization; that uni-

versal wealth would be produced if you would but begin by making beggars of everybody. She believed in the millennium. And she used to talk of all these absurdities with such a fine, confused eloquence, wrap them up in such a rose-colored fog, that most people thought her chatter fabulously intellectual and poetical. People tore themselves in pieces to get at her. Originality, at any price, was the fashion just then. It was a positive disgrace to have any healthy common sense of your own, quite ordinary, quite vulgar! She used to make me shockingly nervous when I was in her company; like a crazy person does, a really mad person, who is invited out in society, though everybody knows he's cranky, because he's not yet quite ripe for the madhouse. And she, poor soul, was a good deal riper for the madhouse than anywhere else. Her story proves it. And, after the crash came, I felt as if I owed something to the poor creature, because I had always been taking exception to her while I never fully believed in her sanity. But that's the way with us; we're always taking some lunatic for no more than an undisciplined or affected person, until he does some terrible thing to himself or other people, something which no sane person would ever think of doing."

"And how did her family deal with this interesting Julia?" asked Count Retz, dryly.

Countess Lenzdorff drew a deep breath. "When any one steps in a puddle," said she, "it's the people who are nearest that get splashed with the mud; and if they make some outcry, in

consequence, one must not be surprised. There was no one so stern in her condemnation of Julia as her own mother. But, for all that, she gave her daughter to understand that she would draw a veil over the shame and disgrace the girl had brought on all her connections, if she would give up her lover and return to her mother's roof. But Julia's own set, the wretched æsthetic coterie of which Julia had been the central figure, spoke very indulgently about the affair, their view being that a really great passion was a thing of rare occurrence, and that its very rarity made it excusable. So the set decided; *as* a set, however; for, as far as each individual member of it was concerned, the result was that, in spite of these very sympathetic views, not a soul of them would have anything further to do with her."

"Hm! And *you* were courageous enough to bid defiance to these prejudices, and find out where poor Julia was, and go and see her?" asked Count Retz.

"Courageous enough!" Countess Lenzdorff gave a shrug of her powerful shoulders. "There was very little courage in the matter. The fact is, I have all my life been on such a particularly good footing with the beast they call Prejudice, that I was quite sure people would forgive my taking the bit in my teeth on this occasion, as I had so often done before. Accordingly, I went to hunt up poor Julia, in her sixth story on the Boulevard de l'Enfer; it was curiosity took me there, perhaps, as much as compassion. In what

state did I find her? You want to know? Well, in the state unhappy creatures who have done anything like she has usually are in. She was wretchedly poor, and proud, even to defiance, of what she had done. She had it principally at heart to convince me of one thing, that she did not for one instant doubt, never had doubted, her perfect right to take the course she had done in life. Eccentric, grotesque she was; anything you please. But all I can say is, that I couldn't help respecting the unhappy creature, more or less. It's a great deal more difficult to keep a firm footing and stand still on a dangerously inclined path, than it is to keep going on when you're on level ground. And I really must say that she had force of character enough to achieve perfectly the first of these two things. There she stood, like Emperor Max on that ledge of the St. Martin's mountain, a sheer wall above her, an abyss at her feet; yet she held her footing with unshaken courage. Of course, she and her Russian were living together; she called him her husband, and did everything for him that a common servant might do. She always wore her hair very short, which was not so becoming to her as it had been earlier, as it had become quite gray. And she still despised and would have nothing to do with a corset, and looked barely respectable now, in consequence. She was dressed in miserably poor clothes, and her hands were quite spoiled by rough work; but, in spite of it all, there was a touch of condescension in her bearing toward me—in fact, she

treated me and my views of life as if they were made up of something which she had long entirely outgrown, but which courtesy forbade her to attack, whatever opening the conversation might give for doing so. She was still very clean in her person, but everything about her was incredibly dirty and messy. Her lodging consisted of two tiny rooms, though I saw only one of them. The roof nearly came down to your head, there was no carpet, but there was a wall-paper with blue and brown arabesques and all sorts of horrible designs grinning out of it. That wall-paper would have been enough to make me wretched all the time, if I had had to live in the place. Not the least sign was there anywhere of an attempt to give a pretty and cheering look to things. That room told you quite plainly its story, that its tenant was a miserable creature to whom no place was anything but a sort of prison, and who deliberately cultivated insensibility, if one may so speak, to lessen her tortures. There was hardly any furniture at all, only a few chairs and one table and a small iron stove, with a pipe that went winding about here and there in a wonderful fashion before it left the room. That stove looked like some hideous monster, and there was something cooking on it which smelled horribly of cabbage. The air was thick with tobacco-smoke. Julia offered me a cigarette directly she saw me, and when I refused, asked me if I minded her smoking; it was the only thing, she said, she really could not do without. She smoked without cessation, mak-

ing the cigarettes herself as she went along. She coughed a good deal, and assured me that she was quite happy. Bassistow—she always referred to her Russian as Bassistow—was a man, according to her, of extraordinary attainments and commanding genius, whose society was quite sufficient to indemnify her for all she had given up. Besides, she had plenty of society to prevent her from stagnating. She assured me that Bassistow was held in the highest esteem by all his compatriots; indeed, might be said to stand at the head of the Russian colony. And it was quite extraordinary what a number of people had already given in their adhesion to the new doctrine and associated themselves together on its basis. Bassistow was hard at work upon a book which could not fail, in any event, to do much in changing the opinions and actions of mankind. Meantime, *her* principal occupation was the preparation of little articles for a journal of the fashions, the materials for which she got on the street, and from the displays in the shop windows. She made merry over this remarkably uninteresting work of hers, and, as she did so, gave a significant and ironical look at the rags she had on herself. However—well—yes, to be sure! Poor soul, she found it difficult to go on with her melancholy apologies for it all; but I saw clearly enough that she was wearing herself to death in trying to support them all, so that Bassistow's mind might be quite free to prepare his catechism of socialism. While we were in the middle of our talk, in he came, a

man of middle height, with shoulders somewhat rounded, carelessly dressed in a shabby, loose, dark gray sort of cloth jacket, which looked like a dressing-gown cut in half, and with slippers down at heel. He had a big head, or, at all events, one which gave you an impression of bigness, owing to the size of his beard and the blonde hair which came streaming down to the man's shoulders. The face was rather good-looking, in spite of the rather thick nose, and it was only the eyes which told of the fanatic, with their fixed, intolerant and yet bitterly anxious expression. His face darkened when he saw me, and took on a look of almost angry distrust. He made a sort of movement with his head and shoulders, and, as he did so, his matted hair fell over his forehead. It was meant for a bow, I believe, but he withdrew just as quickly as he had come in, without addressing a single word to me. I felt a tightness at my throat. The man, I was sure, was quite sincere, absolutely sincere, in his fanaticism; so was the woman, and that was the worst misery of it all. After that sudden incursion of her husband, she took occasion, again, to assure me, at some length, how happy and contented she was. And then a noise was heard at their outer door, and the sweet twittering of a child's small voice. I looked at Julia, and she was as red as fire. She hadn't said one word about a child, not one. I really don't know why it should have been more difficult for her to speak about that than anything else. She seemed quite to shrink

into herself, and tried to say something, when in came the child, with some woman, a neighbor of theirs, who had been taking it out for a walk, and who, it appeared soon, formed part of that animated social circle of Julia's, and whom Bassistow had converted to the new doctrines. This person had formerly been a teacher, and was now in partnership with a painter, one of those painters who have any amount of opinions and no amount of success. She believed in his genius, and fomented his absurdities. She looked as if her dress had been made out of old window-curtains, and as if she hadn't eaten meat for a month. The child, a little girl about seven years old, soon occupied my attention to the exclusion of the other two. She had all the beauty of the Haidenheims, of which her mother, strange to say, had not been allowed her fair share by Providence; and, in the child's case, as might be expected, the beauty was flavored with something foreign, un-German, which showed itself in all her movements, and was made more noticeable, intentionally, I think, by her curious dress. She came, with her fresh young face, into the miserable room, like a misplaced flower; and, what was remarkable, Julia, who had never at any time exhibited the slightest vanity about her own person, took pains that were really quite pathetic about the little one's person and dress. All that she had on was cheap stuff enough, but put together *so* picturesquely! There was something quite uncanny in the eyes of the poor little soul. They were really the Russian eyes—green

we must call them—of her father; but they had a penetrating clearness and limpidity about them which showed that, in due time, the chimerical absurdities of her parents would retreat from before them in a sort of terror. With the coming of the child upon the scene, all Julia's artificial fabric of self-possession and complacency fell to pieces at once. She looked as if she were stretched on the rack, and I left her as soon as I decently could.

"Well, I don't think I ever felt more wretched in my whole life than I did in those ensuing days. I wrote at once to the old Haidenheim woman, telling her everything about Julia, and particularly about the child, of whose existence the old woman was quite ignorant. The countess sent me an answer which was almost evasive. If I could prevail upon Julia, so far as to make her see the horrible delusions she was living under and give up Bassistow, she was quite prepared at any time to receive her daughter and the child under her roof. The letter was hard, but not without a certain nobleness in its tone.

"I went to Julia and told her of its contents, without giving it her to read. I conjured her to return to her mother. She eyed me over contemptuously from head to foot, and said: 'My duty is here; I must not abandon my post. It is easy for me to do it, for I am convinced of the soundness of the new doctrine. The strong are here to furnish an example to the weak. The first adherents of every new faith must go to ruin; it is their destiny. To try and take hold

of the routine of things, as the world has settled it, is much as if a single person should try to stop a large steam-engine by seizing the fly-wheel. Yes, it is true, the individual goes to ruin, but his fate necessarily attracts the attention of his fellow-creatures, the masses are influenced by the example, and, little by little, general movement sets in. I am a fellow-laborer in the liberation of humanity.' That is what she said. And I should very much like to know what reply can be made to that sort of thing? My head went round and round, as she talked, and I declare that when we had done I was not quite sure which was the crazy one of the two, she or I.

"After this I put off going to her, and had not seen her for some little time, when I received a letter from her. Merciful God! what a letter it was!—only a few lines: 'Dear Anna—I am very miserable. I am dying. I regret nothing, nothing for myself. But the child! The child is different from me; she does not feel happy—quite the reverse, indeed—in our surroundings. I entreat you take her away as soon as you can, and send her to my mother. I shall not know a moment's peace till you have taken her away. After my death Bassistow might make difficulties.' Then there was a little more pitiable lamentation about the situation, and a scarcely legible signature. Of course, I went and fetched the child the same day. Julia was lying dressed on her bed, and, when I came in, Bassistow was cowering at her side with his head buried in her

skirts. I had entered without ringing the bell. Their outer door was never fastened; poor things, they had nothing for anybody to steal! He did not hear me coming in. She placed her poor wasted hand upon his shaggy head, to shake him out of his death-like grief. This was the first time that I had seen them really together. And what a depth of tenderness and affection there was in the midst of all their fanatical exaggerations, with all those repulsive surroundings! Hateful as were their errors, ugly as their surroundings, their love, at all events, was something that challenged respect. And they did love one another. I saw now, for the first time, that when Julia assured me that she was happy, that was not entirely misrepresentation. Yes, she loved him. It passed my wit to understand how she possibly could, but there could be no doubt of the fact. As I went downstairs that day, with the child, I seemed rather small in my own eyes, and my existence seemed, comparatively, a poor sort of thing. It was a long time before I could get over the impression of that sad scene, of those two together at that dreadful moment; the dying woman, and the man with his face buried in the poor, shabby dress, just like a child averting its face from some ghost that it does not dare to look at. And the ghost came only too soon upon the scene. Ten days later she was dead. The day after the funeral he hanged himself to a bed-post." A painful silence followed the countess's narrative.

Count Retz was the first to resume the conver-

sation. "And this child, with the limpid, clear eyes, is the granddaughter who was referred to just now?" he observed.

"Yes, that is the granddaughter, whom, unfortunately, people can hardly be said ever to refer to," said Countess Lenzdorff.

"She is very charming!" Werner said, in a low voice, as if speaking to himself.

"Why, do you know her?" asked Countess Lenzdorff.

"Oh! I have only seen her once," said the young officer, in some embarrassment.

"Perhaps it is as well that it was only once," said Countess Lenzdorff, dryly. "Lena is not a desirable person for young idealists to have much to do with. She appeals so strongly to compassion and to the imagination; and, unhappily, marriage with her is out of the question; *elle n'est pas épousable.*"

"Decidedly, it is out of the question," said Countess Malva.

"But old Madame Schlitzing said, with dry humor: "*Pas épousable!* That is hard indeed. All I can say is that I heartily wish she may find some capital young fellow who will have resolution enough to marry her; but God forbid it should be my Werner!"

"I can quite understand your feeling so, Rose," said Countess Lenzdorff; "but, for all that, if a man could be found with the requisite courage, who knows but that—"

At this point a cough was heard outside the room.

Countess Iwantschitsch took a light lace shawl from her shoulders, and handing it to Werner, she begged him, "Dear Baron Schlitzing, would you be so very kind as to take this to my daughter? The girl will catch her death of cold if I don't do something. She is so romantic and imprudent! When she can get a chance of seeing a few stars shining over the tops of the trees in a wood, everything else goes out of her head."

Werner hurried out with the wrap, as was his knightly duty, and put it round the young girl's shoulders.

"Oh, how sweetly kind of you!" she said, under her breath; "really, quite too kind!"

"It was your mamma who sent me with it," replied Werner, the inexperienced.

"Oh, indeed! It was mamma sent it," murmured the young Croatian lady, with much less energy than before.

"Yes, indeed, countess," Werner hastened to assure her. "I should never have permitted myself to come out to you of my own accord; I should have been terribly afraid of intruding."

"Nay!" She just looked at him with her eyes, as wide open as they would go, and laughed.

Mathilda tried to inject a few thoughtful remarks, but the Croatian girl evidently had no ears for them. Thilda's sense of superiority and vexation came into immediate operation; the two sentiments were inseparable in her, poor thing! and she went to the other end of the balcony, and, in a little while, back into the room.

CHAPTER XIV.

BETWEEN Werner and Ilka Iwantschitsch there now ensued a quite lively conversation. It was unmistakable that this luxuriously formed girl, with the red-blonde hair and the big blue eyes, did, for the moment, take a more exclusive hold of Werner's mobile fancy than Else had managed to do. She did not utter a word that had anything in it either intellectual or even amusing; their talk was all on the lowest, flattest, most humiliating level. But every look the girl gave him had homage in it; every word she said had some flattery in it; yet the young woman had tact enough not to spoil the matter by any too direct compliments, which would have upset him altogether. She went no further than to insinuate in everything she said that she regarded him as an exalted being, infinitely above her own level, whom she could only think of as one to be always deferred to. And she asked his advice and suggestions as to this, that, and the other thing, as if she were consulting an oracle. Where did he think it most advisable for two ladies to spend the winter, Wiesbaden or Dresden? Werner knew nothing of Dresden or Wiesbaden, and suggested Italy as a good place to winter in—Rome or Florence; but Ilka Iwantschitsch knew Rome, Florence, Venice, and declared that there was nothing she so much longed for as to spend a whole win-

ter in a German city, a thing she had never yet done.

"Where do you intend to spend the winter?" she asked him at last.

"In Berlin, countess—"

"Oh, how interesting! And are you going to remain permanently in Berlin?"

"For some time to come, at all events, as I have some hope of being promoted to the general staff," he replied. His voice sounded fuller and more rounded in his own ears than usually. He seemed to feel a sort of need of making as good an appearance as he could in the girl's eyes. He had never experienced such a sense of self-importance as now, talking with this young lady.

"Oh, dear, so you are an officer!" she cried, as though it were the first time in all her life she had seen such a personage.

"Yes, that is so, countess."

"And do you love your occupation?"

"With all my heart and soul!"

"Oh, how fine that is! What a poor creature I am compared with you!" she sighed.

And, as he made no reply to this—what reply *could* the unfortunate young man make?—she murmured: "We poor girls have only one occupation, one vocation, that of wife and mother."

"A very fine, noble vocation!" said Werner, in somewhat subdued tones.

"Yes, indeed, when one can follow the dictates of one's heart," sighed the Croat. "But a poor girl like me! Marriage for me means nothing except that I *must* provide for myself, whatever

it may cost me. And, up to the present moment, I have not been able to bring myself to do it."

She sighed; her breast rose and sank.

The stars were glimmering above the wood on the other side of the high road. A soft, keen perfume from the vigorous pine trees and the forest odors came up to their feet, and, mingling with these scents of nature, there was the sickly perfume which the girl had about her person, some sort of exaggerated fashionable scent. These incongruous odors were, however, in some strange way, harmonized, for Werner's perceptions, by the influence of, or emanations from, the girl's youthful luxuriance of form and frame. Werner had not the least idea that his person and the girl's were approaching each other, if, indeed, it was not rather she than he who abridged the distance. And, almost before he knew it, his shoulder came into such decided contact with hers that he shrank and discreetly withdrew a little. A little while afterward her hand came close together with his on the ledge of the balcony. And this time he did not withdraw his hand, which he found it very pleasant to leave lying by the side of the soft, warm hand of the young girl.

"And nobody has ever yet succeeded in inspiring me with any interest," she groaned. "I'd rather peel potatoes for a man I love than be crowned with diadems by any one I don't care for."

"How strangely she looks at me!" thought

Werner. Then, all of a sudden, the thought thrilled through him that there was probably offered him the opportunity of a little love affair without any particular responsibility or issue of any kind; something between a flirtation and a passion, but nearer the first than the second. He did not feel at all sure of it; he had had no practice in the matter; and the type of women with whom such things are possible was not at all familiar to him. It had, so far, never entered into his head to pay any beyond the most ordinary attentions to any woman of his own circle, and certainly not to any girl. Besides, all his sentiments in regard to the other sex were of the exalted kind one attributes to knights and troubadours of old, romantic and high-flown. But, for all that, the young man did now lay his hand upon the hand of the handsome young Croatian lady, and murmur, "Oh, if any one had but the right—"

"To what?" she said, under her breath.

Werner almost felt the place go round with him.

"To console and comfort you; to have the privilege of putting a little happiness into your existence," he said, almost in a whisper.

She was now all but leaning against him, so close together had they got.

Just at that time he heard the roll of carriage wheels. It was as if he had been suddenly struck by lightning. That could be no one but Else, returning from Eltville. The Croatian

girl went utterly out of his head in an instant. He left her side and stretched forward to see who it was. The carriage stopped very near the door. Else and Mdlle. Fuhrwesen jumped out.

"Oh, there you are, Baron Schlitzing!" cried Else, joyously, looking up to him. "Isn't it too late? Shall I come up? May I?"

"We shall be only too delighted," cried Werner. "We've all of us been longing for you the whole evening. You see that I've been looking out for you in every direction."

And the really extraordinary part of the matter was that he believed what he said.

He stepped back into the room and informed his aunt of little Ried's arrival.

"Go and fetch her," suggested his mother.

He obeyed.

A few moments after he returned with Else and Mdlle. Fuhrwesen. Else was beaming with beauty, amiability, and youthful happiness. Everybody received her with the utmost demonstrations of delight, which she seemed to take quite as a matter of course, but seemed not the less charmingly grateful for. Werner did not leave her side, brought her tea and biscuits, and took particular pains in inquiring as to her further wishes, all in the most laughing, heartiest, most knightly fashion. Mdlle. Fuhrwesen began to regale them all with an account of the adventures of her opera, and went to the piano to give them as good an idea as she could of the most important numbers.

The servant announced that the carriage had come for Countess Iwantschitsch; whereupon the two Croatian ladies took their leave for their return journey to Schwalbach, both of them quite visibly depressed.

"Which is it to be, Cardinal—the mother or the daughter?" said Countess Lenzdorff to her old adorer.

Count Retz scratched himself, in humorous perplexity, behind his left ear.

"If you have really nothing better to offer me—" he murmured.

Countess Lenzdorff lifted her eyebrows well up to her forehead, and now asked Werner:

"Well, and you! How did the red-haired Croat girl please you?"

Werner was still in much higher spirits—or more highly excited, whichever it was—than usual. He seemed to have lost for the moment a good deal of his native shyness. Stroking his mustache, he looked straight in front of him, and as though he could say a good deal if he only chose, and his scrupulous kindness did not stand in the way: "Oh, well, she's not a bad kind of lassie." Yes, positively, he said "lassie," a mode of referring to a girl not at all familiar to him. However, just now, he felt himself pleasantly and quite unusually excited. It was quite plain that his head was still going round; a result in part due to his talk with the Croatian girl.

But the model-countess, who seemed altogether without any sense of the situation, went

on with her mincing talk and her choicest manner: "So natural they are, those two, both of them, mother and daughter, so delightfully natural! After all, there's something quite peculiar about the Austrian great ladies!"

Mademoiselle Fuhrwesen at this moment was not being listened to by anybody except Mathilda, who, most flatteringly, compared all her compositions with Wagner. Just at the moment when the model-countess made her last reported observation, the instrument was, under Mdlle. Fuhrwesen's hands, enjoying the respite of a quite long pianissimo passage, so the performer heard the remark quite well. She was a little put out by the scanty attention her performance had received. Turning to the company, she asked sharply: "Who is that you're talking about?"

"Countess Iwantschitsch and her daughter," replied Countess Warsberg.

"They! Austrian great ladies!" cried Mdlle. Fuhrwesen. "Oh, they! Let me tell you that they don't count in Austria at all, those Croatian women! To say nothing of the point that these two, as things stand, have made themselves quite impossible in Austria. Yes, that is the case, and it would be just the same if their name was Esterhazy or Schwarzenberg."

"Do you know anything to the prejudice of the two ladies?" asked the model-countess, turning a little pale.

"Well, merely this; that one fine day in Venice they levanted from their hotel under cover of

the night—a foggy night—without paying their bill," answered Mdlle. Fuhrwesen very coolly. "Besides — besides; oh, well! the less said the better. The ladies might very well write their biographies; there's plenty of material for it, goodness knows!"

Countess Malva turned so green that the rouge spots on her cheeks came out with a conspicuousness that was quite uncanny: "But, dear Mdlle. Fuhrwesen, one really must not believe everything that malicious tongues choose to utter in such cases as these."

Countess Lenzdorff laughed. "Well, Malve, that these two ladies have lost the privilege of being presented at court—supposing they ever had it—one could see at a glance without a microscope. The type is quite familiar."

"If the ladies require further details I am quite at their service. But there mustn't be any gentlemen present," said Mdlle. Fuhrwesen, with tolerable explicitness.

"I really can't understand: I am quite without experience in this sort of thing," said poor Countess Malva.

"Well, children, it's really quite late, I shall drive home. Shall I take you with me, Cardinal?" asked Countess Anna Lenzdorff.

The Cardinal assented with thanks.

Very soon afterward Countess Malva's rooms were quite deserted.

Old Mme. Schlitzing had upon the whole been vastly entertained. And perhaps it was not the least among her sources of satisfaction that

her affected and pretentious sister-at-law had exhibited herself in such an utterly ridiculous light. While she was being pushed home in her rolling-chair, she made Mdlle. Fuhrwesen walk along by her side and impart to her all the details concerning the damaged reputation of the two Croatian ladies, and all the reasons why they were now socially "impossible."

Werner had offered his arm to Else, which she took. Her heart beat loudly.

He bent down to her and said: "And how did you find your friend at Eltville?"

She was a little surprised and disappointed, and then said: "More charming than ever. At first she was quite open and expansive, but that did not last long: her life is too sad altogether. Old Countess Haidenheim won't allow her the least distraction or amusement away from the house, and takes care she shan't have the least enjoyment of her life in the house. Lena, it seems, is to do perpetual penance for what she couldn't help at all. It gives me such pain to see her that I can hardly stand it."

Werner said nothing. He could not utter a word, his heart beat so wildly.

Else went on: "I'm terribly fond of Lena, I am indeed. I very much wanted to take her with me for a few days to cheer her up. But of course the cruel old woman wouldn't hear a word of any such thing. She'll kill Lena with her cruelty before she's done, I'm sure she will." Else nearly wept as she said the words.

They soon reached their hotel. Werner had

not spoken a word since his first question. But now, to make up for it, he took Else's two hands in his and said in his warmest tones: "You have won my whole heart, Mdlle. Else. God keep you!" and then he turned to his mother to assist her out of her chair and carry her up the stairs.

Poor little Else!

CHAPTER XV.

"WHO'S that you're talking with, my boy?" asked old Mme. Schlitzing, next day. It was her son to whom she put the question. The young man was in her room, and looking out of the window; and he had just called out something to somebody passing below.

"Oh! it's the little Ried," replied he, turning round to look at his mother. "She called up to me to ask whether the project of the excursion to Rauenthal holds good, and whether the carriage is ordered for three or four o'clock." He left the window, and went up to his mother. His bearing was a little more careless than was usual with the young soldier, and his hands were deep in the pockets of his short gray tourist-jacket. "She's walking up and down below there with Linden in the Alley. She's got a sky-blue frock on, and a large white hat. She looks positively charming! I declare, she gets prettier every day; and Linden is making eyes at her like a stuck calf! That fellow has fallen on his feet, I must say. She is really charming!"

"Yes, and she's something better than pretty; she is a kind, good girl—as good as gold, indeed; and, though people have done their best to spoil her, she's quite simple and unpretending," said his mother. "I think that, under some circumstances, she would be quite happy and contented with limited means."

"There'll be no need of her having to make the trial," said Schlitzing, carelessly, "Linden is very rich."

"I should very much like to know why you make such a point of insisting on marrying her to Linden?" said his mother, evidently put out.

"Oh! *I* haven't any particular desire, one way or another, in the matter; but I think that's a tolerably obvious and settled thing."

"Do you, really?" said his mother, in a curious voice; then she passed her eyes all over her son's tall form, with an odd expression in them, and then let them rest full upon the young man's face. And an uncommonly attractive face it was, with a slight touch of dreaminess about the eyes, and with full lips overflowing with vitality. It was the face of a man abounding in physical health, and an idealist to the extreme. When these two attributes come together in a young fellow, it may be confidently said that fate has many a sly, sharp stroke of suffering in store for him. But, at the same time, there's no denying that the combination makes its fortunate or unfortunate possessor a most attractive and sympathetic sample of the human family.

He bent down a little to his mother and passed

his hand caressingly over her gray head. "They'll make a pretty pair, those two," he went on with his gossip. "Linden is an excellent fellow; it doesn't much matter to me, of course, whether he is or not, but I must say I'm glad of it for her sake. Whenever I see a charming, innocent young girl throwing herself away on a worthless, good-for-nothing fellow, it hurts me more than I can say. But nobody can say anything like that of Linden."

"Hm! so you're convinced that she's in love with Linden, are you?" murmured his mother.

That question seemed to set him thinking. He had never looked at the matter from that point of view.

"I haven't the least idea, but I can't have any doubt but that she will marry him," he replied, scratching his head slightly.

"Very possible, indeed!" said the old lady, dryly; then, suddenly, her patience seemed to break down altogether, and she hurled in his face: "Oh! you stupid, stupid, stupid fellow!"

Werner was so startled that he fell back a step or two; he was incredibly slow of perception in certain directions. "Why, mother! do—you—mean—" he stammered.

"What I mean is that you are born under a lucky star, and that your old mother is more pleased than she can say!"

He felt the blood come into his cheeks, not with a sudden blush, but, as it were, deliberately tickling and pricking as it came. He was not the sort of shy young man who blushes readily

and frequently. It was a slow process with him, but when it did happen it seemed to set his head all on fire. And the implication in his mother's words made him feel giddy too. He felt as if the earth were giving way under his feet.

At that moment Countess Warsberg came into the room, painfully well dressed, with a very elegant round hat and a coquettish little open jacket, and informed them that little Ried, with her Fuhrwesen, was waiting below.

Werner, who seemed to move like a man in a dream, stooped to carry his mother down the stairs. Everything swam before his eyes. His nervous system was shaken and agitated; but the agitation was of a painful kind, there was nothing agreeable about it whatever. He felt that he had lost his mental equilibrium for the moment. He had lost his firm grip of things entirely.

There, below, was Else Ried, her eyes filled with sunshine; and, as he came, she looked up to him with laughter, in the sound of which there was all the loving sincerity of her sweet nature.

Linden was by her side, following every one of her movements with his eyes, over head and ears in love, and about as miserable as a fine young fellow well could be.

They helped the poor lame old lady into the carriage, and then there was a big fight among the other ladies as to who should occupy the front seat. This was one of those cases in which the appalling politeness of the model-

countess gave the world such trouble. However, Mdlle. Fuhrwesen carried the point, and the countess was obliged to occupy the preferential seat by the old lady.

The carriage started. "To our speedy reunion at the Hotel Nassau, at Rauenthal!" cried the ladies to the four they left behind them, and Else laughed and waved her pocket-handkerchief; then she turned to Werner and said, merrily: "Now for the donkeys!"

It had been arranged, in fact, that the two girls should make a donkey-ride of it on this occasion, under the escort of Werner and Linden. Else was as pleased as a child at this plan, the gods only know why! Perhaps her expectation was that Schlitzing would be by her side the whole time, and that they would talk all sorts of delightful nonsense together. There seemed very little prospect of that, however. He lifted her into the saddle without saying a word, and with a demeanor weighted with care; so that poor Else's merry mood came to a sudden full stop, just like the sails of a windmill when the wind drops entirely.

"Is everything all right? is there anything more you require, mademoiselle?" Then the donkey trotted off.

A more lovely forest road than that which connects Schlangenbad with Rauenthal is not anywhere to be found; and a more painfully tedious hour than that which dragged its slow length along, as Else then rode that way, perhaps no human creature ever spent.

It is agreeable enough to ride a donkey to the accompaniment of hearty laughter and bad jokes, and in the midst of pleasant, merry people, with the beeches and hazel-bushes rustling all about you. But to be seated on a donkey as if the beast were some throne at a grave court ceremony, with a young lady trotting in front of you more solemn than solemnity itself, who seems, indeed, to be the very incorporate presentation of all one's own absurdity, with two young men stalking along on either side in equal silence and solemnity, and a couple of donkey-drivers dashing here and there, and conscientiously letting fly with all their various allocutions of encouragement or abuse to their beasts, in honest determination to give full value for their forty cents an hour; all this can hardly be said to make up a pleasant combination. Else could not help wishing that she and her donkey together were sunk several fathoms below the earth.

Schlitzing never spoke a single word; looked gloomily before him, and, for the most part, kept by his sister's side. Linden paced along patiently by Else, attempting, now and then, some mild little joke which stuck in his throat.

Thilda distinguished herself by venturing on one remark. "How glorious the air is!" And, then, she spoke no more.

It was nothing short of horrible! It was like a bad dream. Else had a sort of waking nightmare; she felt as though she was growing every moment bigger and bigger, stouter and stouter,

and tons upon tons were being added to her weight.

The leaves rustled about her merrily; the blue sky sent its light through the branches; a sweet perfume hovered over everything. Else felt none of those things. But, when she had to leave the shelter of the forest, and go along a road through the open fields, quite unprotected from the sun, she suddenly did realize that something very sweet and lovely, which she might, under other circumstances, have greatly enjoyed, was past and gone.

"Oh, I've had enough of it!" she groaned. "Mumu"—that was what she called her old friend, Edmund, sometimes—"Mumu, help me down—do! You won't get me to do anything of this sort in a hurry again!"

* * * * * * * *

There are some country excursions in which everything goes wrong; it rains, it thunders, it hails; you get wet to the skin, you spoil your best clothes, the wheels of your carriage come off and you are pitched into a ditch. You get a meal consisting of highly questionable materials and ingredients, and then stretch yourself out at full length on a haycock. Fate has settled things for you; after all these accidents, how you are to get home is not clear. All these things may occur, and yet you may have had royal entertainment all through these mishaps. Every fresh trouble may have been the occasion of renewed amusement and delight. And the whole affair may be crowned by your having to

pack yourselves, the whole party, in an unsavory room in some tavern, to escape from the storm, where you may probably waltz to the music of some wheezy barrel-organ, and where, if you can get nothing better, you will make a famous meal of stale crusts and sour wine. You may catch a cold, or get rheumatism, at excursions of this kind; but you will never blame the occasion for the misfortune at all. And even after twelve months have passed you'll speak of it as "that capital picnic when we went to such or such a place, and had no end of fun and rheumatism!" And there are other occasions when everything runs with exemplary smoothness. The sky is of a blue perfection; the foliage is perfect; you are all the time protected against the sun; all the wheels of the affair run without the slightest creaking; the victuals are such as no rational creature can take the least exception to; blameless occasions these, which, for all their faultlessness, leave nothing in the memory but an insignificant spot of gray, and which you look back upon when you return home with a grateful feeling of relief that the whole thing is over.

No one of our friends who participated in this jaunt to Rauenthal could ever look back at it, even after the lapse of a year, without feeling a sense of oppression, a sensation, almost, as if the whole cup of life's pleasure had not a single drop left in it.

And yet, if they had been required to point out in what, precisely, the discomfort they all experienced on that day had consisted, not one

of them would have been able to do so. But there could be no question about that discomfort; it was like a wet blanket spread over the whole company. They all seemed to feel as though they had risen three hours earlier than usual and gone a journey on an empty stomach. And yet there they were, at the Nassau Hotel, in Rauenthal, in a delicious little garden, under the shade of glorious trees, and with splendid dahlias, phlox and pansies all about them in such profusion as, perhaps, was nowhere else to be found. They had bread and butter than which the world affords no better; they had for their drink the most exquisite Rauenthaler in the host's cellar, that incomparable wine in which Emperor William the First, when he visited the little town, some years ago, and Prince Bismarck drank to each other's health. They were full of praises of the weather, of the butter, the bread, the wine. But every soul of them felt the time drag dreadfully, and as though they were listening to an orchestra in which half the instruments were tuned to one pitch, and half to another.

But of all the uncomfortable people there, Werner Schlitzing was certainly the most uncomfortable. Every now and then he stole a glance at Else, who looked very pale, and who was taking the most pathetically fruitless pains to look as if she were thoroughly enjoying herself. Thilda had materially contributed to the general cheerfulness by repeating, for the fourth time, that the weather was splendid, and had, moreover, said a good deal about Italy. Countess

Warsberg had condescended to express her great satisfaction with everything, the bread, the butter, the splendid dahlias—everything. And Mdlle. Fuhrwesen had regaled them with narratives of Sondershausen and her opera.

"Werner, I do wonder what you are doing with your thoughts!" at last exclaimed old Mme. Schlitzing, in a very discontented voice. Indeed it was more than discontented; it was sharp and almost peremptory, as was always the case when things were not going right, in her estimation, with any of her children.

"I! *My* thoughts, mother?" He just put his hand to his short curly hair and scratched his head slightly; then he hesitated a little, as though he had something to say which it was difficult to bring out, but which must be brought out. He had been thinking, for the last half hour, how to let them know what he meditated doing, and he now saw his opportunity. "I, mother? I hope that all my kind friends here will forgive me, but my thoughts were wandering away, just now, in quite another direction, and I was simply thinking at what hour to-morrow I would drive off to Eltville." He trusted that he had said the words in a quite careless, purposeless way, and had been careful to look over the heads of them all when he brought them out, so that nobody's eyes should meet his.

"You are going to leave us?" exclaimed Countess Warsberg, much disturbed, looking at his mother and then to his sister, and from her back again to his mother.

"I had not the least idea you meditated any such thing," said his mother, curtly; and then there followed a leaden silence.

"Does any such thing as a red parrot happen to be hanging in the trees up there, or do you happen to see some balloon going up, Schlitzing?" asked Linden, with gentle malice.

"Why?" asked Werner, brusquely.

"Oh! only because you keep staring so over all our heads. I supposed you had some particular reason for doing so," replied Linden. In the bottom of his heart he was rejoicing hugely that Schlitzing intended to go off, next day, to Eltville.

"Oh! Else, my dear, how can you?" It was Thilda's sour voice that uttered the words. Of course, everybody's eyes were turned on the young girl.

Else, whose every movement was usually so carefully and gracefully made, had upset a small cream jug. There was not much cream in it, but quite enough to send a small stream of greasy white drops all down Else's blue cambric frock.

"Oh, dear! pet Miezerl, how could you!" now echoed the Fuhrwesen, in tones of horror. It was really a most charming dress, and the good Fuhrwesen knelt down and wiped up the mess from it with her pocket-handkerchief.

"Oh! don't bother about it, dear little Fuhrwesen," said Else, with her small, soft voice. "How *could* I have been so awkward! Never mind, we'll go in to the landlady, and a little warm water—"

So saying, she hurried off. Werner could not be quite sure, but it seemed to him, when she returned, that her eyes looked as though she had been crying. Anyhow, she bore herself quite courageously enough, in all conscience.

It was a dreadful afternoon for them all, and it seemed as though it would never come to an end. A good many observations were made about that grease-spot, and the question whether it had been quite successfully washed and ironed out. Mdlle. Fuhrwesen and Thilda exchanged receipts of great value for removing grease-spots generally. Old Mme. Schlitzing was grimly silent. Her lips were firmly compressed, and her face wore an expression of great dissatisfaction. Else gossiped sweetly with one after the other, and smiled from time to time. She was deathly pale, and had dark brown streaks below her eyes.

"How bravely she carries herself! A trump of a girl she certainly is!" said Werner to himself. He could not help letting his eyes travel in her direction, again and again.

They all rose, and went strolling off to see some fine view. Werner got himself entangled in a talk about gaming hells with Mdlle. Fuhrwesen. It seemed to him that he had quite sublime and deep things to say on this theme, one which raised a conflict in his mind between economical and moral considerations. He was speaking with eloquence quite satisfactory to himself, and just about to give the last point and finish to a particularly fine passage, when he

heard laughter behind him, clear, silvery laughter, which suddenly broke off into painfully hoarse sounds. His beautiful passage was abruptly cut short, too; he looked round. Else was gossiping with Linden; her lips had the movement of laughter on them still; but her eyes! What a dreadful look there was in her eyes all the while! Linden's form was bending down to her with every sign of gentleness and heartfelt sympathy.

"He's a capital fellow! Why in the world should I trouble my head any further about it? She'll be quite consoled in eight days, at furthest!" said Werner to himself. Then, all of a sudden, in the most secret recesses of his soul, there came up an obscure, gnawing feeling of vexation. He stumbled over the sharp-edged stones of the rough pavement, overgrown with grass.

The old-fashioned, high-gabled houses of the winding street they were traversing in the little town seemed to him to be moving to and fro on their foundations. Presently they had left the small town behind them altogether. There was an odor of dust and of ripening crops all about him, and, spread over everything, the red light of the setting sun. Then his ears were assailed with loud outcries. It was Countess Warsberg and the Fuhrwesen, who were vieing with each other in exclamations of delight at the beautiful view. He was quite sure that the view must be beautiful, as everybody round him vociferated admiration so loudly; but all he saw, for his part, was a big telescope, and an old superannuated soldier

who was the keeper of the telescope, and who was offering the ladies wreaths of withered flowers; and, beyond these objects, a green chaos through which flowed something broad, full of light, shining now with steel-blue radiance, and now golden-yellow and red—the Rhine, the Rhine! Then the thought suddenly darted through him that the Rhine flowed through Eltville. Eltville!

When, at last, they started to go home, Else begged Mdlle. Fuhrwesen to ride back on the donkey, as she would much prefer to go in the carriage. Werner was a little vexed, at first, when he heard this, but said to himself immediately: "Well, better so! Thank God for it!" He lifted Mdlle. Fuhrwesen into the saddle, and walked by her side through the little sleepy town, along the dusty open road, and, in due course, through the green wood.

The sourish smell of the beech-leaves became more marked as the cool of the evening set in; the last ray of the sun was extinguished, everything seemed to have dwindled down into grayness and soberness. And, all of a sudden, a voice projected itself into this neutral-colored world, the hard, sharp voice of the Fuhrwesen, singing:

"Forth went two lusty fellows
The first time from their home."

And then all the real world seemed again to totter on its bases about Werner; the ground under his feet, the green bushes, the vaulted blue sky over the forest trees. And the darkness came on.

CHAPTER XVI.

And now, at last, it was indeed all over, that charming excursion of theirs. Old Mme. Schlitzing is once more in her room, setting out the cards for a game of patience. The poor old lady is trying to quiet her nervous system, to do something or other to get rid of the feeling of extreme vexation which she has brought back home with her from this trip to Rauenthal.

In the adjoining room sits Thilda, making some sort of entry in her diary, some sort of extemporaneous fantasia upon the theme, "Only who yearning knows, knows what I suffer!" She had never felt so isolated in her prosaic, non-artistic surroundings as at this moment. She was very unhappy.

Then there was a gentle knock at the old woman's door.

"Mother, are you alone?" asked Werner.

"Yes," she said. The old lady was quite unaware whether Thilda had yet returned from the regulation evening walk, in which she always went to keep company with solitude. The old lady's voice sounded hard, unlike itself. She scarcely looked up when her son entered, and went on with her game of patience; her hands trembled, and she failed to notice the most simple and obvious combinations. Werner went and stood in front of her and looked steadily upon the table. She went on placing the cards.

"Oh! put the nine of spades on the ten of diamonds," said he, "and the deuce of—"

Now, at last, the mother looked up at him, and with startling suddenness. Her glance was as sharp as her voice, almost an angry glance.

She pushed all the cards impatiently into a heap, and, leaning back, said, brusquely, to him: "What *is* it you want? Have you anything in particular to say to me?"

"Well, not anything in particular, perhaps, but you know that I like to have a quiet gossip alone with you, with nobody to disturb us, when I'm going to part from you."

"Part from me?" she repeated, with excitement. "Do you really mean it? Are you really going to leave to-morrow?"

"Yes, mother."

A leaden silence followed. His mother set out the cards again, evidently much disturbed and agitated; her son pulled at his mustache industriously. After a little while he laid his large, young, soft hand on his mother's withered one, and tried to take a jesting tone. "Ain't I to have any of your good, clever advice to take on the road with me, mother?" he asked. "Am I to brave the perils of the journey without that capital supply of moral suggestions I am generally furnished with?"

"I have no more good advice to furnish you," his mother gave him for answer—in her vexation she could not help it—and took her hand sharply away from his.

He wrinkled his brow. This sort of treatment

was something he was quite unaccustomed to, and it was particularly disagreeable to him. His mother's behavior seemed unjust and irrational to him; and being, like all warm-hearted, full-blooded creatures, somewhat irritable and hasty, he was much inclined either to lose his temper or bolt from the room.

But respect for his mother was, with him, no mere matter of early and continuous training, thoroughly well brought up as he had been in this regard. Filial reverence was something that belonged to the very currents of his blood. He kept himself well in hand.

But he felt much oppressed, and to get some relief he walked, with long strides, up and down the small room a few times, and then seated himself astride of one of the chairs, bringing it close up to his mother, and then began: "Now, mammy, let us understand one another about this matter. What *is* it you have against me?"

"I? Nothing."

"Oh! but there is. Out with it! It's easier for you than for me."

"Well, well—I think you are making a mistake in hurrying off to Italy like that."

"Now, really, mamma! I've been ten days here, and you know I didn't come for treatment; my health is right enough."

"Treatment, indeed!" She smiled involuntarily as she repeated the words, and her eyes went over the young man's fine frame with a sort of triumphant expression in them. She

was very proud indeed of this son, idolized him, in fact, and would have been only too glad to rifle heaven itself of all its treasures for him were the thing possible. And she had had so long and terrible a struggle with extreme poverty that she had come to attach more than rightful importance to a secure and prosperous condition of life. A good match was a thing she had always desired for him; and she had, for some time, kept her eyes well open to any opening for so desirable a thing.

But Else's wealth was by no means the only reason which made her long so sincerely for a union between him and the young girl. No; she knew him better than he knew himself. She knew that, in spite of his superficial reserve and abstract way of dealing with life, the hot blood which had led his less gifted, shallower elder brother into such innumerable troubles and conflicts, flowed in Werner's veins as well. That flow was more gentle, less dangerous, perhaps, in Werner's case, because of the bent of his nature toward the world of dreams, of poetry, of romance. But the characteristics of the two were radically the same. Sooner or later the ferment would begin to work in him; and then all his idealism would not prevent, nay, would rather combine with, a certain weakness in the structure of his character, the source, probably, of his marked amiability and kindness of heart, to produce results of incalculable trouble. And no one could know when the inflammable material of which he was really composed might

not be fired by some stray spark, carrying ruin in every direction.

Her fears for his future would not have been nearly so great if he had had more levity in his composition, like his grandfather—the old lady's father—who had had a protective touch of genius besides, which the grandson was without.

His grandfather had never exactly overstepped those laws of knightly obligation which are so singularly compounded of ambiguous and unambiguous elements, but which every really superior character easily ascertains and, in the main, conforms to. But, apart from any such serious infraction of duty, the old lady's father had followed his own instincts in life; and these were the instincts of a man of pleasure in the less offensive sense of the term. In satisfying these he had dashed over every obstacle in his path. He had drained the cup of enjoyment to the very dregs, filling it at every disposable fountain. And, when he could drink no more, he had dashed the cup to the ground without scruple, and never condescended to give so much as a look at the broken pieces.

But Werner had no trace of this kind of levity in him. The Rhenish fire was in him, but he had also a terribly large share of North German heaviness in his blood. He had none of the unscrupulous temper which is so necessary, sometimes, if a man is to extricate himself from the worst involvements. That drop of inexorable cynicism was not in his veins, which is needful if a man is not to be a hopeless victim in certain

sentimental situations. But he was his mother's idol, faults or no faults; though only she, perhaps, had had her eyes always open to the elements of latent danger in his composition. It had from the first been her conviction that all that was noblest in him would receive its best conservation and development in a happy marriage, and she had always longed to bring about that result. In her fondest expectations she had never hoped to see him mated with any one so charming as Else. And here was the foolish boy defending himself with might and main, with hands and feet, against the happiness that was all but thrown at his head.

"No, indeed, it was not exactly for medical treatment that you came here," she said, after a pause. "I know quite well why you came. It was because Malve worried you about my health. I dare say you are now cursing the hour when you put off that journey of yours."

"No, no, mother! nothing of the kind! The ten days I've spent here with you have been very delightful. Only—" He hesitated.

"Well?"

"Only, I feel that they ought to stop now."

"Indeed! And why, let me ask?" She looked at him very sharply.

"Why?" The blood shot into his brown cheeks. "Oh, mother! how can you ask? I should never have noticed it, but for you. And I'm vexed enough without that, that I—"

"Oh! that you can't shut your eyes, now, to the true state of the case? You think yourself

wanting in sensitiveness because you cannot," his mother said, discontentedly. "Well, in my view, if you have any tenderness to spare, you'd better be employing it in a different way. I can't make you out at all. There isn't another person in this world who wouldn't go down on his knees and thank his Maker for the happiness thrown in his way; and you. . . ! Now, just tell me, will you, what objection you have to make. Is it possible that the girl doesn't please you?"

"Mother! quietly, quietly! not so loud!" whispered Werner, turning his head to the open window. The peculiar perfume of a summer night in hilly, woodland country came into the room, an odor of the soil cooling off in the evening, mingled with the smell of foliage and roses, and with the sounds of the dance-music from the club-house. And, mingling with the faint, far-off sound of the waltz there played—a waltz of Strauss—there was heard quite another sound; that of a soft, bird-like small voice. "No, Mumu, it won't do to-day—really not; my head's not right, I cannot waltz."

"And I was looking forward to it with such pleasure—such great pleasure!" said a male voice, with pain in it—unobtrusive pain.

"Poor Mumu! Another time." The voices were heard no more.

Mme. Schlitzing attacked him again. "Do you mean to tell me that you don't like her?"

He was silent for a moment; he turned his head quite involuntarily in the direction where

the voices had been heard, and his countenance took on a disturbed expression; some struggle was going on in him.

"I should like to know whether you've ever met a nicer girl in all your life?" went on the old lady, in great irritation. "A recognized beauty; a rich heiress, whom people are trying for, right and left; and, what is better, a pure, original nature, one who looks on life with her own beautiful, clear eyes. And goodness of heart! Never was there such overflowing, affecting goodness of heart! Are you blind, deaf —dull, dull, dull to all these things?"

His head was sunk on his breast. "No, mother, I'm neither blind nor deaf nor dull. She is a charming girl, a noble girl; but—" He stopped short, and lifted his head in the attitude of one listening to something. The two voices had come near the window again, but this time they went away without his being able to distinguish a single word they uttered. Do what he would, he could not help asking himself the question: "What *is* going on below there? What?" He became frightfully agitated.

"Yes, she is indeed a noble girl," his mother repeated; "she's so fascinating that one feels as if one could eat her up. But that's not all; she's a fine, solid character; she's one in whom a man can put his whole confidence. And, for all her youthful impetuosities, she has a clear, firm understanding. She will be, nay, I'm sure she is already, a housewife in the highest, noblest sense of the term; a woman who will be a true

helpmate to her husband in weal and woe, through light and darkness!"

Then the son laid his hand upon his mother's arm. He had ceased to try to catch what those voices might be saying. "Helpmate—helpmate! What will she, what would she, have to help *my* life in?" he asked, hurriedly. "There will be nothing for me to bear, or for her to help in. Our life will have a course as smooth as a looking-glass, from one idle day to another; it will be spent between enjoyments of a petty kind, and comforts of a grandiose kind. And, only twenty-five as I am, there will henceforward be no object for me to strive for; my life will be wholly without end and aim. Comforts, resources, which would have been highly delightful to me if I had gained them laboriously, and confronting perils, will be nothing but a disgust and vexation to me, will be a stumbling-block to me, because they've come to me too soon and too easily. Look here, mammy dear, it's just this way. Say that a man has made up his mind to a walking tour; the distance is great, and the discomforts will be equally great, and the whole affair is to make a heavy call on his energies. And he is heartily enjoying the prospect of a struggle with all those difficulties. Then comes somebody, and coolly informs him that he can reach the end of his journey in one tenth of the time by the railroad, sitting in a comfortable, first-class carriage into the bargain. Of course, you get to the same place at last, whether it's the feet or the railroad that take you to it. But there are fellows to

whom movement, exertion, God's fresh air, their own active, searching outlook into the world and the future, are not so much pleasures as necessities of life. I can't endure to think of any sort of life without energetic exertion. I am quite sure I should be ruined physically and morally in the midst of luxuries, and with nothing to rouse me. Everything you say about Else is true—every word. God bless and protect her! she is a noble, charming girl!"

Those voices, with their barely audible murmur, approached again; and the sweet perfume of the roses came through the window. Werner moved his chair nearer to his mother. "Do you think it is so easy a matter, after all, for me to refuse what is offered me here?" His voice sounded feverish and hoarse. "Yes, indeed! Charming is no word for her! Why, to-day—she behaved just like an angel to-day! God defend me from seeing her sweet, pale little face again! But—but though I do feel drawn to her, now and then, just for a moment, I am quite clear that it would be wrong, downright wrong, to yield to the feeling; a wrong to her, a wrong to myself. I don't really love her in the one, only, deep, true sense of the word. I don't feel that she could ever constitute the highest, the one exclusive and absorbing interest of my life. Family life, family duty, has always seemed the highest thing in the world to me. How could it be otherwise, with *you* for mother? And I am sure that if I marry now, and marry Else, my spirit will not find rest and peace in marriage—

the rest and peace without which no man can look forward with security to married life, and the upbringing of children."

His mother looked searchingly into his eyes. "Have you an inclination in any other quarter?" she asked.

"No," he answered hurriedly—"that is to say" —his mother's eyes were too much for him—"I don't quite know myself," he murmured; "it is something so unsubstantial, such mere fancy—"

He had said all that he could manage to say, and was much vexed with himself for saying so much.

The sound of the two voices came up to him now, again. His mother was silent too. And now there was something quite curious and strange.

For the last half hour he had been doing his utmost to convince his mother of the soundness of the view he took of the affair, and showing her on what exalted ethical grounds that view rested. And now he sat there in breathless expectation, longing, almost, that his mother would successfully set herself against that view; that she would come out with some short, energetic speech which would upset at a stroke the whole edifice he had been so laboriously rearing. The two voices below excited him more and more painfully every moment. He longed to run off, and go down to see what was happening to that couple.

Heavenly Father! what tortures he was undergoing! And for what? That episode at Eltville was nothing but a dream. It could lead to

nothing. Else, on the other hand, was reality; Else was life. He had done everything in his power to persuade his mother that a union with Else would be an unwarrantable thing; and, at this moment, he was hoping from the bottom of his heart that he had quite failed. His mother suddenly raised her head. What would she say? He waited with painful anxiety. She spoke very slowly, very seriously, almost solemnly. "If it is really with you as you say, go your own way —the sooner the better—and take my blessing with you. I am sorry for the dear, dear girl; but a creature so healthy in body and soul as she is will get over it. She'll not be the worse, or the poorer, for the suffering she'll have to go through. And now, good-night, my boy; it has been a difficult day for me." She took her son's head in her two hands, drew him to her and kissed him. "My noble boy! my fine, splendid boy!" she murmured, "you've upset my plans sadly, but I'm proud of you, for all that!"

He left her. "Well, God be thanked, that's all over—past and done with!" And then he added: "I wish this place was behind me, and I was on the road!"

CHAPTER XVII.

WERNER went down the stairs, and walked along the Alley, in the direction of the lower springs. He strode along, taking very long steps, as though he were running away from some-

thing. He was laboring under a feeling of extreme vexation. He was out of temper with somebody or other, whether his mother or himself he could not be certain. The lamplight came full on the luxurious rosebushes lining the Alley. The thought went sharply through him that it was a foolish thing, life being what it is, to reject all the roses and choose only the thorns—an utterly foolish thing. What could he have been thinking about? He felt disposed to curse his Quixotic conscientiousness. And what could have possessed him to make all those fine speeches about it? That was the stupidest trick of all. For how could he ever even appear to retract them, after having forced his mother to come to his way of thinking?

She had allowed he was in the right. And now here he was vacillating again, turning this way and that. Was he never to know peace? Why was it that he could not make up his mind to go in one absolute direction, follow one purpose without hesitation and without reserve? His mother had admitted he was right. He ceased to hurry as he had done, walked more slowly and deliberately. Then, all of a sudden, he shrank violently into himself, as though the lightning had struck something at his feet. There, along the Alley, coming in the direction opposite to his, was the form of a girl, and she was quite alone. She caught sight of him, and, as he saw, made a sudden movement, as though she wanted to spring back into the shadow to escape his notice; and some feeling of the same

kind, the wish to avoid meeting her, came up in himself too. It was too late, however. Each had clearly seen and recognized the other, and both of them knew it. How astonishingly pretty she was in her light-blue dress! In the lamplight she looked deathly pale, and the pallor seemed to communicate itself to the dress too.

Linden was no longer with her. What could have happened? Had she given him his dismissal? While this question rose in him, and shook him almost as if it were screamed in his ears, he came up to her and bowed very low, stopping half short in his walk, and behaving just as a man does when he hopes or expects that the lady whom he meets will be the first to speak.

It looked, at first, very much as though she intended to pass him, with no more than some slight movement of recognition; but she stopped and held out her hand to him. "Good-night, Baron Schlitzing!" said she, in her soft, bird-like voice.

Everything went out of the young man's head at once, except satisfaction at having this opportunity of saying a few kind parting words to the girl, words in which he might convey to her some idea of the great and sincere esteem in which he held her. He told himself that so much was owing to her, at all events.

"I am exceedingly glad to meet you here!" he began. "It would have been very painful to me to leave without having seriously taken leave of you."

"Really?" she murmured; and something of

her old, sweet, teasing willfulness suddenly stole into her poor pale little face, and gleamed in her troubled eyes.

"You have been very sweet and good to my old mother, and I thank you for it from the bottom of my heart," he said, in those tones that always seemed to have such a warmth of soul in them, and with a look at the girl that had the same perilous quality.

But she lifted up her chin a little. "There really is nothing to thank me for that I know of. I am exceedingly fond of your mother, that is all."

He was a little embarrassed. He felt that she was doing no more than he had drawn upon himself, in rapping him over the knuckles in that way. "It was silly of me to say that," he confessed to her, with that sincere humility, in the face of which, when the feeling is really that of a strong man, no woman's pride or resentment can hold out for a moment. "It was quite a mistake to thank you for such a thing; but I may at least be allowed to say what a genuine delight it has been to me to see you putting sunshine, as you do, into my mother's life. Or, may I not have even that privilege?"

He smiled in her face, in all seriousness, and with an irresistible expression of warmth of heart. Everything was forgotten except the sensation of the moment, and that was the feeling of a strange comfortableness, which seemed to make it impossible for him to leave her side. It had been his purpose only to say three or four

words to her; and here was the matter going on indefinitely.

There was a slight pause. Else was the first to speak.

"I shall certainly do everything in my power to make your mother's time pass as pleasantly as may be, when you are gone," she said, quietly. "When do you leave?"

"To-morrow, about eight."

"Well, I wish you a most prosperous and happy journey. Good-night!" She held out her hand to him once again; but when she tried to withdraw it, he drew it to his lips.

"Good-night!" he murmured. "God protect you, and send you all the happiness you so richly deserve!"

Her eyes suddenly filled with tears, and then . . .

"Else!" he cried, and the next moment he had her in his arms, and was kissing her as though his whole life had only known one single passionate desire, that of pressing his hot lips on her soft, tender mouth.

She let him do as he would, without the least resistance. She had thrown both arms round his neck, and nestled to him like a child that has found its mother after going about in every direction, in painful perplexity, to see where she was. Her surrender was frank, entire, unreserved; there was no morbid passion in it, and no shyness; there was nothing there but purity, simplicity and straightforwardness. It was the behavior of a girl sound to the very core.

"Oh! you wicked, wicked fellow! How could you torture me so?"

"My darling!" he murmured, in low tones, "my own sweet, my heart's darling!"

His caresses were as warm as caresses well could be, and all his heart seemed to be in his voice. But, for all that, she suddenly extricated herself from his arms, and held a little back from him for a moment.

"Is it true? Is it really true?" she asked him, with a look that had some pain and perplexity in it.

"What?"

"That you love me?"

"Is it true?" he exclaimed. "Oh, Else! darling Else! what possible reason could I have for pretending to do so, if it were not so?" He kissed her hands, one after the other. "It isn't generous of you to doubt me like that. *You* should not, certainly! Think what a poor, penniless devil I am!"

But, when he said that, she laughed through her tears, and laid her hand on his arm and shook him a little.

"Oh! you needn't pull a long face like that, as if somebody had done you the worst of injuries, *Werner!*" Oh, how deliciously that "Werner" sounded on her lips, strangely and deliciously. "That you've not been influenced by my miserable little bit of money I know quite well, even better than you do yourself. It was something quite different that I was afraid of. And I—I—I've been fond of you for such a terribly long

time! Haven't you really seen that I was? Wasn't it too, too plain?"

To make any answer to this very straightforward question, without speaking falsely or unkindly, was a task requiring almost more than human skill. But he managed to do it.

"Else," he whispered, "how should I ever have plucked up courage to address you at all, if I hadn't guessed just a little, little bit?"

"And you didn't really intend to go off to Italy, did you?" she further pressed him. "All you meant was to try me, and bring me to my knees, you—"

"Oh! I don't really know quite what I meant, but I know quite well now what I mean, and what I want," he murmured, kissing her hands again and again. "My own heart's darling! my own soul!"

They heard a noise, in the distance, of the doors of the club-house being closed. "Good-night!" cried Else. She put her hands on his shoulders, rose to the tips of her toes, and gave him one short, quick kiss. Then, before he could say or do anything, she fled from the spot in breathless haste, and made for the hotel where she was staying.

He followed her with all a lover's looks, but felt she had been a little too much for him. "Charming, delightful thing she is!" he murmured to himself. She had done right, he admitted, in running off at that hour. But he would so much have liked to keep her with him a little longer. Oh, well, there was to-morrow—

to-morrow! Then the thought suddenly struck him, in the midst of his exultation, that there were some other things in the world besides; that he had already made quite other dispositions for the following day. He seemed to wake up from a sort of dream. The clock struck half-past ten; the gas-lamps were extinguished by this time.

Yes, it came back to him now; he had actually ordered the carriage for to-morrow, for his drive to Eltville. He remembered that he had had a long discussion with his mother, in which he proved to demonstration that it would not be right for him to take Else Ried. He remembered that she had, at last, given way to his reasoning; her last words now came ringing in his ears. "My noble boy! my splendid boy! You've crossed my plans dreadfully, but I'm proud of you, for all that!" And now . . .

The intoxication which had overcome him in Else's presence was gone. And there came upon him, in all its bitterness, in all its heaviness, the sense of having undergone a moral defeat, of God knows what import!

When he went to his couch, that night, sleep came to him soon; as it does to tired men after a lost battle. But, after an hour or two, he woke suddenly with a painful feeling at his chest, as though the power of drawing breath was being taken from him. It was intensely dark. His heart was hammering at his ribs. What could have happened? What was it that had frightened him?

He had affianced himself to Else Ried! Her

sweet little face came before him. He tried to bring up again in his soul the feeling of warm, vital, searching happiness that had been there when she was by his side. He could not. Happiness had fallen—happiness, good fortune—in the shape of a heavy burden, into his arms. The burden was refined gold, but it oppressed him. He felt that it was tearing him, weighing him down to the very ground. And if he sank there, would he be able to rise again? God only knew!

* * * * * * * *

Next morning, old Mme. Schlitzing was rather earlier than usual in the shady little open space at the right of the Nassau Alley, where she was in the habit of breakfasting. The table was spread, and her coffee was before her, but she could not make up her mind to drink it. She had quite lost her appetite. Her heart was heavy with the thought of Werner's impending departure.

"And yet, he was right," she said to herself; "under the circumstances he was right. My noble boy! Any other, in his place, would have seized on such a chance with both hands. A splendid fellow is my Werner!" and her old eyes shone bright with proud excitement. But what was keeping him? She would have liked him to be a little longer with her this last morning. Every other day he used to knock at her door punctually at eight o'clock, to carry her to her rolling-chair. But this morning she had had to hobble out of the room, with no better help than Thilda's arm.

At last he made his appearance. His hands were in his jacket pockets, and he had an embarrassed smile on his face, which did not seem to perform the proper functions of a smile at all.

"Good-morning, mamma! How is it with you? Had a good night?" he asked, coming up to her.

"Well, it might have been better. Parting from a child always cuts rather deep into an old heart," said she, tenderly. "But, as you have to go, I suppose one must reconcile one's self to it as best one may."

He seated himself by her side, and poured out some coffee for her. A pause followed. His mother began to perceive that all was not with him quite as it should be. Then Werner looked up at her, still having on his face that curious, forced smile, the smile of a schoolboy who has said his lesson very badly, and is trying to find some excuse for it. At last he managed to bring out: "But, after all, I am not going away; I'm going to stay. Great things have happened since our talk of last night. There has been a complete change in all my circumstances and plans. I have to ask your congratulations, mother dear —your best congratulations. Yesterday I became engaged to Mademoiselle Elizabeth Ried!" All this he said in a voice little becoming the gravity of the occasion, with more of jest than seriousness in it. That it was so did not escape his own ear, and it was very disagreeable to him. But, do what he would, he could give his voice no other inflection.

He had not the courage to look his mother in the face, when he imparted this news to her. And he clutched wildly at the idea that perhaps, after all, she would take the thing well. He lifted up his eyes. His mother sat there rigid, as if she had been turned to stone, pale as a corpse. A short, leaden silence followed, then the old woman turned to Thilda, saying: "Thilda, fetch me my black shawl, the air is damp."

"I will fetch the shawl," offered Werner, hastily.

"No; I wish Thilda to go," she said, incisively. "You stay here!"

Mother and son were alone.

The old woman said nothing to him; her look seemed to say that there were no words for such a case as this. And a severe, disapproving look it was. Never in all her life, and his, had she looked at him like that.

It was more than he could stand, after a little while, there was such contempt in her glance. He rebelled; he thought that she was taking an exaggerated view of things. "What is the matter with you, mother?" he said, hoarsely. "Better speak, and then we shall get it over."

She measured him once again, from head to foot, and then said, slowly: "I believed I had a son who knew what he wished for, and did only what he thought it right for him to do; but—it is clear that I have been laboring under a delusion."

The words were like a blow in his face. He

clinched his fist and his teeth, and then began in a hoarse, compressed voice: "All that is very fine, mother; and, up to a certain point, I cannot but agree with you. But, after all, the circumstances—"

She broke in passionately: "Circumstances, indeed! Don't let me hear the wicked word! That's what weaklings are always doing, pleading *circumstances*. The best thing you can do is to say nothing; you have cut yourself off from all retreat. Be it so. Look to it now, that, at least—" She stopped short suddenly; her rigid features took quite another expression, of softness and tenderness. Her eyes left his countenance, as though drawn by some quite other person.

She must have felt, if she did not see, who was coming. It was Else! She had been in the wood, and was now emerging from it by the Rauenthaler Road, and she had a big wreath of wild-flowers in her hand. She looked more beautiful than ever; the light in her eyes had doubled in intensity, and there was an indescribable movement and expression about her mouth, that peculiar expression which shows that the first kiss of pure, passionate love has been pressed on a girl's lips. The hair about her temples shone golden in the sun under her broad-rimmed straw hat, which threw a shadow, more like a transparent veil than anything else, upon her love-filled eyes.

When she caught sight of the mother and son she blushed deeply and stopped short. The mother nodded to her. Then she ran up to her

as swiftly as a young fawn, knelt down by her side, threw her arms around the old lady in shy rapture, and said in an agitated whisper: "Has he told you all about it? Are you glad? Will you give us your blessing, sweet mother?"

The old lady could not answer for a little while. The girl felt her hesitation, and looked up to her with a sort of wounded alarm. "I am not good enough for him," she said, in a half voice, laughing and weeping at the same time; and then, in a lower voice, to the mother's ear: "I am convinced of that in my inmost heart!"

"Not good enough!" cried the old lady, in a sort of suppressed exasperation, kissing the glowing face of the girl tenderly on lips and forehead. "I don't know the man on this earth that you are not good enough for!"

"It is quite the other way, Else!" said Werner, somewhat bitterly. "My mother does not think me good enough for you!"

"Perhaps I do!" said his mother.

But Else's reply to this was to rise quickly to her feet. Then, going to her lover's side, and placing his hand on her shoulder, she said, with a little passion: "That's a thing you and I will settle together, isn't it so, Werner?"

He took the girl's dear, warm hand in his. "You see, you have no alternative, mother, but to wish us every happiness."

"Well, well!" replied the old lady, "I do wish you every happiness, God knows I do! with all my heart and soul; and, above all, that you, Werner, may always prove yourself worthy of

the precious jewel which God has been pleased to set in your life! As for the rest"—and here the solemn tone in which she had been speaking changed, and her voice suddenly became drier and harder—"for the rest, Else, make a man of him! Perhaps you may meet with better success in that than I have, or should."

CHAPTER XVIII.

ALL the world approved, without a dissentient voice. No one had a word to say against this engagement of Werner Schlitzing and Else Ried. "An extraordinarily suitable match!" was the general verdict. "The sort of engagement which might almost make one say that the very doves of Venus and Cupid had made the marriage!" was the remarkable criticism of Mdlle. Fuhrwesen. Countess Warsberg assured all her acquaintances that she was more than satisfied with her nephew's choice; and old Baron Ried, whose workmen were still pulling his old chateau to pieces, and who, accordingly, still could not have his daughter with him there, gave his blessing in all form, and had a delightful gossip with Mme. Schlitzing about old times.

But the deeply serious expression did not leave that old lady's face. She carefully observed all her son's movements, and seemed to find very little satisfaction in them. And this made her all the warmer and more tenderly maternal in her behavior to Else.

When Krugenberg was, at last, in a condition to receive guests under its roof, the old lady took up her abode there, taking her son's *fiancée* under her wing until the wedding.

Of course, there could be no further question of any journey to Italy for Werner. He divided his time, before the marriage, between Krugenberg and Berlin.

Autumn came on. The waters of the Rhine changed their color and grew dark, and the leaves began to fall from the bushes. The days shortened; the dawn was later and later in breaking, the light failed earlier and earlier every day.

In that House of Sadness at Eltville the life of the two pale women, the aged and the youthful, went on in its dull, monotonous, uniform course. And when the autumn was old, and winter now not far off, the windows of the apartments in which the aged woman lived were closed, and the mutterings of the prayers were no longer heard by those without.

But the windows of the young girl's room remained open, even when the autumn air became sharp, cold, almost wintry.

During the daylight hours, everything in that house was deathly still. But in the night hours, a fine ear might detect footsteps, uneven footsteps, as of one walking uneasily to and fro, fitful as the pulse of one stricken with fever; the footsteps of an imprisoned creature trying all the time to find some outlet from the cage to which it seemed condemned for life, seeking and finding none.

And there was one other who, at this critical time, turned uneasily, first to one side then to another, to find rest for his spirit; and could not. And this was Werner. Else appealed strongly to his affections, to his sense of pity; he was fond of her, in a sense, very fond. Where Else was, there was warmth and sunshine; but when she was no longer present to him bodily, then—then—

If he had been asked to put into clear words some reasons for the disturbance under which his soul labored all the time, he could not have done it. It was something quite indefinable; a shuddering sense of breathing all the while some atmosphere which had no power to sustain life; something like the fear of a man lest ghosts should rise up to overwhelm him at any moment, while he does not even believe in ghosts.

The wedding day approached nearer and nearer; and then there came one day, when Werner was constrained to say to himself, "To-morrow—to-morrow!"

According to arrangements, the marriage was to take place at Krugenberg. After the usual, somewhat noisy, festivities with which the assembled guests celebrate the eve of a wedding—which had seemed very protracted and wearisome to Werner—he found himself, at last, at liberty to withdraw to his chamber. It was strange. The night before his first battle he had slept the sound, tranquil sleep of a child, but now he could not even keep his eyes closed; try as he would, he could not.

He tossed about on his luxurious spring mattress, and resented the cool, silky smoothness of the linen sheets. His veins seemed on fire. The whole thing was too soft, too luxurious, too comfortable. He would have given the world to be free, at large, tramping with his regiment through the mud, sleeping on the ground in camp, bivouacking under any sky, however stormy. Then it suddenly came back to him what a splendid night of sleep he had had in the forest, in God's free air, on the road from Eltville to Schlangenbad. He seemed almost to feel that odorous, glorious air in his nostrils; he stretched out his arms, as if it were some living thing he could clasp. He was fond of Else, yes, very fond; but he would have been thankful to have been ten weeks younger than at this moment, and have the chance of doing otherwise with his young life.

His throat felt as if he were being bowstrung, and something seemed to be compressing the veins at the pulses, both of hands and feet. His breast seemed absolutely to be swollen by the currents of his blood; his thoughts became a mere tangle and confusion. He was dreaming —dreaming, though scarcely asleep.

The dread certainty of marriage clung to him in his dream. But the wedding was to be in Schlangenbad, not Krugenberg. He was in a mortal hurry to reach Schlangenbad, but he was too late for train after train. Then, somehow, he was at Eltville. He saw a young girl dressed in white, with the bridal wreath upon her head.

She was going through the streets of Eltville, singing in a low voice: "Die, love and joy! die, love and light!" She had something in her hand. He followed her footsteps till she reached the Rhine banks, feeling all the while that he had no right to be wasting his time like that; for was it not his wedding-day? But some force drew him on that he could not resist. He heard the rustling swish of the river; heard it quite distinctly.

The girl in white turned suddenly to him, and fixed him with her large, dark eyes. He asked her what it was she held in her hands. "Thy destiny!" said she, and, with those words, sprang into the river. He sprang after her. Long and bitterly did they struggle together under the waves. He could breathe no more. He brought her to the surface, to the land. He held her in his arms—oh, how tenderly, how closely, how rapturously! Then she grew warm again with life on his breast; she opened her eyes, and threw her arms about his neck, and kissed him once, once, only once—one single, hot, burning kiss, upon the lips. And then *he* tried to press a kiss upon her lips. But she was dead. Horror, dread—helpless horror and dread took possession of his sleeping soul!

What to do with the corpse—what, what? Then, suddenly, he heard the clash of bells. They were his marriage-bells, and they were summoning him away. So he left the corpse there, on the banks of the Rhine, and went with breathless haste, and with the weight of mountains on his

breast, to his wedding. The pealing of the bells was louder and louder in his ears. His eyes opened, his brow was damp, the many sounds of morning had shaken him from his dream.

An ugly dream, indeed, for a bridegroom! He rose, dressed himself hastily, and went below into the park.

He felt as though he had done Else some wrong in the past hours; it must be made good. He looked about to see if he could find some late, lingering roses for her; he would put them on her plate, and when she came to breakfast she would find them there. But look where he would, not a rose could he see. There had been a frost in the night. All the roses were dead. The leaves were falling in crowds from the bushes to the hoar-white ground; they were blood-red, yellow, brown. And Werner went along in a frozen, melancholy world, and strove to put his thoughts in order for the most serious step of his life. But the thoughts refused to obey. And when he tried to hold them fast, lo! they were gone! And, in their place, fantastic images, pictures, songs, went confusedly through his head. He saw the Rhine before him, and in his ears there was the sound of that strain of fate: "Die, love and joy! die, love and light!"

CHAPTER XIX.

In a room provided with every luxury in the way of furniture—in one of the new houses on

the Leipzig Place, at Berlin—we see seated a young man in civilian costume. He is at his writing-desk and is yawning over some work in which he finds no satisfaction, and the end or aim of which he finds it difficult to see.

The young man has just turned thirty; he wears a full brown beard so delicate that you might almost call it transparent; his hair is short and somewhat curly, and is already touched with gray. He impresses you as one who had just missed being a strikingly handsome man; but his shoulders had too much breadth for a person of his age; and the lines of his features had fallen in, as if they had begun to wither long before their time.

He presented the appearance of a man of relaxed fibers, with a weight pressing on him; of a man the best and strongest part of whose powers are lying fallow, or in perilous, latent fermentation.

This was Werner Schlitzing after seven years of marriage, universally recognized as happy. He had now for some time abandoned his military career and thrown up his commission. At first he devoted himself in a more or less blundering way to agricultural pursuits. For the last three years, however, he had occupied himself with extensive researches and other preparations for a history of the War of Liberation in Germany (1806–1814). And he had even gone so far as to compose some trial chapters—if they might be so called.

A thick folio lay open before him, and by its

side some sheets of paper sewn together, in which he was jotting down notes. At this particular moment he was trying his best to write an elaborate "characterization" of the Chevalier Stein. It was to be something quite new and original. But he made no progress with it at all; and he saw suddenly—but with inexorable clearness, to his great chagrin and humiliation—that his "new" characterization of Germany's noble regenerator was nothing but a re-hash of the innumerable other portraits of the great man already before the world; the only difference being that this new effort was enriched with a few of those excesses or extravagances in style peculiar to our later and more adventurous literature.

He laid down his pen in great vexation. How silly, how awkward and foolish, appeared to him these attempts of his to "write history!" How ridiculous all this vain taking of pains to clothe in new statements and words, instead of those which people were already familiar with, facts perfectly well known. It was really no better than helping his children to make the toys they were fond of putting together with scraps of wicker. He yawned. Then he suddenly asked himself whether—instead of a long comprehensive history—it wouldn't be better to write some short, spirited, unscrupulous pamphlet—say a parallel, or contrast, between Stein and Bismarck. Yes, that would be something, at all events.

The thing ought to be such that people would

at once cry out against it as indiscreet; so it would have to be published anonymously. Then, his reflections were arrested by one single thought connected with it, and could go no further. It must be, it would be, a gigantic success.

He was in possession of plenty of material for "indiscretion"—as far as that matter went—in private communications he had received at one time or another from friends in Frankfurt.

It would be something, at all events, to rouse the curiosity of all Germany. But he recoiled with a sudden disgust from all these inviting prospects of a literary scandal. Such things, after all, were not his line; it must not be! Self-respect, the respect of others, these things had always been the daily food of his life, more or less. It must never be otherwise!

He yawned again; and then again. And then—like all people with whom time drags—he looked at his watch. It occurred to him that he had some engagement or other for the afternoon. Yes; to be sure, he had it! But first he must go and say good-by to Else. He rose and went to the drawing-room.

A large airy room it was, this drawing-room, furnished in precisely the same fashion as had prevailed at Wiesbaden some seven years before, at a time when the tasteless absurdities of the Second Empire were still in damaging vogue at that watering-place; the furniture all covered with yellow damask, staring red mahogany tables, some ceramic oddities, stands for flowers, and a great many mirrors in gilded frames.

But the room seemed a good sort of place to be in. The furniture was all of solid make and comfortable; there was not too much of it, and there was nothing there that looked as if it would go over at a touch. But it had nothing of the subtle harmony of color to be found in the private apartments of some ladies, where everything is as carefully devised as skill can do it, to constitute a picturesque background and framework for the figure of the gentlewoman in command there. Else's salon was no more than the reception-room of a young woman very amiable and very German, and conservative in her tendencies; the sort of woman who never gets over a certain turn for the ugly, because of the strength of old associations, perhaps. It was the reception-room of a young woman not in the least absorbed by her personal interests, and, least of all, her own beauty, and whose only thought is to make a few friends feel happy and at their ease in her hospitable home.

Yes: it was a chamber which appealed to the affections. You seemed to breathe a good sound healthy atmosphere there, with a pleasant infusion of some perfume, the ingredients of which were quite honest and unadulterated. And, perhaps, the impression of that perfume was derivable altogether from a certain most sweet and lovable presence that was there, at the moment we make our entry in the apartment; a charming little creature with a very big pair of scissors and a very little watering-pot, who was at this moment adding to her innumerable

claims upon our affection and esteem that of being busily engaged in attending to the health of one of the plants on one of the old-fashioned flower-stands.

Werner could not help standing still for a moment at the threshold of the room to take a good look at her. His eyes shone with a light that showed that, after the seven years of marriage, he was as keenly sensible as ever of his young wife's merits and charms. How pretty she looked, how sweet! Not a particle of her bloom diminished in all this time; fresh as the morning dews still; just as much so as when she waltzed madly down the Nassau Alley on that morning with Linden!

Indeed, her beauty might be said rather to have gained than diminished, by reason of a greater intensity of expression now to be seen in her eyes and about her mouth. How charming was the line of the chin and cheeks! Only, only—well, perhaps she might have been a trifle better dressed. Why, why did she persist in wearing that eternal black satin dress?

This dress had been a too familiar acquaintance ever since his marriage; it had a history, and had experienced many metamorphoses. It had first entered this world white of color; in that, its first stage, it was an imposing state-dress, trimmed with Brussels lace, and had been made as a proper contribution to the effect of some gala occasion, when Wiesbaden received and fêted certain crowned heads. Then it had got spots of rust on it, here and there, owing to

its having been laid away so long unused, in consequence of which it was dyed black, and had subsequently done useful service in minor soirés. Its final distinction would be to go into the hands of the lady's maid, in order to be cut down and re-composed to a condition of extreme simplicity, outside of fashionable motive; and in this, its last estate, it would represent, with a living female inside it of course, the "girl in black silk," whom every housewife of importance has such frequent use for, to impress her callers and visitors withal.

Werner hated this dress with a mortal hatred. It seemed to him the incorporate and visible chronicle of all the intolerable amount of "social entertainment" which, since his marriage, he had had to swallow as best he might, at Krugenberg and Wiesbaden.

"Ah, Werner! Do you want anything?" she asked, looking up from her plants as he approached. And as she spoke, without putting down the little green watering-can which she had in her hand, she raised herself on the tips of her feet to give him a kiss.

"Can I see to anything for you, Else?" he said. "I am going out."

"Where?"

"I promised Thilda to go to her studio." There was a little restraint in his voice.

That young lady had, some time before, become quite independent, having inherited some substantial property. When this occurred, she bade farewell to her stepmother and established

herself in Berlin, devoting herself with great zeal to painting and giving her genius full course, wherever it might take her; if "genius" that should be called which was, in truth, no more than exemplary and insupportable absurdity.

"Thilda! That's not important; I was reckoning on your going with me to Schulte's."

Else put away her watering-pot and laid down her scissors.

"Oh! we can go to-morrow to Schulte," he answered; "besides, it is late to-day."

"But I don't see why to-morrow won't do just as well for Thilda," said Else, making a comical pretense of going out of temper.

"Oh, you know how sensitive and easily irritated Thilda is. She thinks we do not at all sufficiently acknowledge her talent, and that we ought to take much more interest than we do in her artistic endeavors. And she begged me particularly to come to-day."

"Really! Had she any particular reason?" Else blinked a little as she said this.

"Well, yes. She's painting Princess Orbanoff's portrait, you know, and it seems that lady would like to have my opinion about the pose. She pretends to consider my criticism very valuable."

"Hm! that's it, is it? And I suppose, of course, the lovely Ilka, *née* Countess Iwantschitsch, has written to you herself on the important affair?" observed Else, in tones which had plainly something of contemptuous depreciation in them.

"She has, indeed. Would you like to read her letter; here it is," said Werner, taking the document out of his breast-pocket. "Would you like to read it?"

"The idea of such a thing!" said Else, who was really a little vexed. But, for all that, she threw a glance at the closely-scribbled sheet. "So, she addresses you as 'Dearest friend'? Perhaps you address her also as 'Dearest friend'?"

"Nay; up to the present moment I've never addressed her in any way except simply as 'Princess,' without more. But if that seems to you too familiar, for the future I'll say, when I write, 'Your highness,'" and Werner laughed.

"'Your highness!' These little Russian princes are not highnesses at all!" cried Else, contemptuously.

"How comical you are, Else! I declare, one might almost fancy that you're jealous!"

"*I?*" Else threw up her charming little nose. "Jealous! How can you suggest such a disgraceful absurdity? I? Do you suppose that—that—I should be as fond of you as I am, if I did not know quite well"—here she drew him to her, and gave him a slight slap—"if I didn't know quite well that you are the noblest, purest hearted man in the whole world. Jealous, indeed! I! I think that the Orbanoff woman is a great deal too pushing; but if you like to amuse yourself with the ways of that lump of fat, you're quite welcome to, I'm sure. And much good may it do you!"

"Lump of fat!" he echoed. Else's little burst

of temper had restored his own equilibrium, and he thought it would be nice to tease her a little. "Lump of fat! She's a beautiful woman, I say, fat or no fat, I assure you she is; and her beauty is just of that kind which turns men's heads."

This was too much. Far from being annoyed, Else burst out into hearty laughter. "Really! Is that so?" she exclaimed. "Well, if that is the case, I won't stand in your way. Go and enjoy yourself. Go and get yourself dazed a little by this beauty that turns men's heads. And now look sharp, or else you'll lose the best of the light; you'll want it for your important bit of criticism."

"Oh! there's time enough; it will be quite light enough a quarter of an hour hence," said Werner, who did not seem at all anxious to get away. He had seated himself on one of the yellow sofas by Else's side, and began to stroke her hands and cheeks.

"Oh! let me alone, and go along with you!" cried Else, disengaging herself from him. "There'll be a nice company of you there, in Thilda's studio. It's a pity I can't take a good look at the trio through some peep-hole! Thilda, leaning on her malstick, blinking heavily at the model; you, not far from Thilda, blinking attentively also—and, before you both, the model—decolletée, of course, lavishly decolletée—and all huddled up in some pose that signifies pining to death for somebody—with her head—now, shall I turn the head? so, or so? And her arms—well, both arms over her head! That's the best way of displaying them! Much good may it do

you, dear old man! But it's like them, asking you to go and play critic in a studio. Why, you know about as much about painting, from top to bottom, as a dromedary does about playing the piano!"

"Else, you shall pay me with a kiss for that piece of rudeness!"

"No, no, no!"

"You've put me out of conceit with the princess altogether. Come along to Schulte. Put your hat on; I'd much rather go with you there."

"Don't want to, now. Besides, I haven't courage enough to bring down on my devoted head the combined hatred of Ilka and Thilda both. Go where your heart calls you, Werner; but don't, don't you forget that we dine to-night at Aunt Warsberg's!"

"Hadn't the least idea of such a thing; when did she invite us?"

"Yesterday. She begged us, in her note, to be nice and good-tempered, and not to take it amiss that she had invited us at the last moment."

"Indeed! Well, I'll tell you what *I* think!" exclaimed Werner. "It means that we're wanted to fill up a couple of unexpected gaps at her table. And you have accepted, without saying a word to me—eh?"

"If I had asked you, you would have been sure to refuse; and I'm glad to take every opportunity of forcing you to go into the world. You do get a little distraction on such occasions, if not much, poor, dear old Whimsical! And I have

an idea that it's going to be a particularly nice dinner. Linden told me so. He can't come, more's the pity, because he has to dine to-day with the War Secretary. Besides, it's always nice at Aunt Warsberg's."

CHAPTER XX.

YES, it was always "nice" at Aunt Warsberg's. People might think what they pleased of the model-countess, but there was one thing that everybody was forced to admit. Her house was one of the most pleasant, and her invitations were among those most eagerly sought for, in all Berlin.

How she had managed to bring things so far as this it would have been quite difficult to say; but this, at all events, was certain, she owed her success far more to the qualities in which she was deficient than to those which she was endowed with.

She was not beautiful; she was not young; she was not intellectual; she was not witty, and, in consequence of this, she was never in anybody's way in her own salon. Unlike many other ladies at the head of important households, she left every place free for her guests to occupy according to their talents or tastes, making no prior claim for herself. She made no point of concentrating the attention of the gentlemen upon her own person; she all but effaced herself, and, thus, never marred the pleasant progress of

anything going forward by her own intervention, as so many hostesses do. Countess Lenzdorff one day summed up, in a few apt words, all her merits as a hostess, when she said: "The Warsberg is like an agreeable neutral background in her own house, throwing up her guests well in the foreground."

She resided in the best quarter of the town, in a tasteful mansion, not too large, which had formerly been the property of a wealthy stocking manufacturer. It was intrenched in front from the noise and observation of the street by a pleasant little garden, and the entrance was at the side of the house, and by a stairway inclosed in glass—a sort of exterior conservatory. This stairway led first to a small ante-chamber; and from that you passed, by way of a door paneled with colored glass, into a high, airy hall adorned with statues and growing palm-trees.

The statues kept themselves in the background, in a sort of shamefaced way, almost hiding themselves among the palms. And they showed their good taste in so doing. They were inheritances from the time when the stocking-maker reigned there; and their settlement in that hall was due to a journey to Italy made by that gentleman, who had thought it only right to exhibit to his friends the result of his training in art obtained in that excursion.

The only really beautiful and valuable decoration of this hall was a large Renaissance chimney-piece, of reddish marble, decorated with elaborate and delicate carvings, subtle and gro-

tesque. This prize Countess Warsberg had carried off in a razzia she had made, one day, in a monastery in the Rhine country when on the hunt, here and there, for antiquities.

And it must be said in her favor that she never failed to bring back with her from her campaigns some article or other with the genuine stamp of art upon it. She had a true feeling and eye for art, in fact, which was shown equally in the inanimate objects with which her rooms were decorated, and in the animate bipeds whom she collected about her as guests. She was always a sort of center for works of art, and personages who were either interested in art, or themselves artistic, or artistically artificial, and who, therefore, belonged themselves to the category of "works of art."

This feature of her salon it was which—taken together with the neutral gray of its background constituted by her own person—gave it its special individuality, and constituted its chief attraction.

People were always finding, at her house, things new or old which were not to be met with elsewhere, and human beings, too, of whom the same might be said. And Else and Werner belonged to this last section—of the human rarities, namely, present at the dinner we have just heard of.

Werner looked very handsome, as usual, and very distinguished, and, besides that, seemed bored to extinction; a combination which the ladies found quite irresistible. Those veiled,

half-sleepy eyes of his lent themselves to much speculation, on the part of those fair creatures, as to the interesting qualities which might be lurking in the possessor of such romantic orbs.

Else, on the other hand, was fresh and blooming as ever, and in the highest spirits; more like a young girl at her first ball than a matron at a dinner party. And she looked enchantingly pretty in her white silk dress, trimmed with rich old lace, which had come to her from her mother. This time her toilet was open to no exception whatever. Werner's glance turned to her again and again, attracted by her slender neck and the charming contour of her shoulders, so white and ample, and yet so delicate. And, with all this beauty and vivacity, there was so much genuine modesty, such excellent breeding, such unobtrusiveness; a combination, indeed, such as the most exacting, jealous and severe among men could hardly expect to find in one woman.

And Werner, who was by no means all that, could not help saying to himself: "After all, there's nobody like her in the world!" and he felt, for the moment, a strong impulse to be grateful for the blessing vouchsafed him to the exclusion of every other feeling. Ah, Heaven! why —why was it that he had so often to search so painfully in his heart for that feeling of gratitude, and extricate it from that dense black melancholy in which it would always persist in sinking again out of sight?

Else was plunged deeply in a talk with Erica Sydow, evidently a very delightful, confidential

talk, accompanied by much whispering and laughter.

The two young women glanced merrily at him from the other end of the room, now and then. Erica was, at this moment, in the position of a grass widow. Her husband, who was still adjutant to an illustrious personage, was with that notability on his travels, but was expected that day in Berlin, and had promised to come and fetch his young wife away from the dinner party in the course of the evening, if he could possibly manage to do so. Erica was very much in love, and Else never tired of teasing her about it in her sweet and tender fashion, to the great delight of both.

The folding-doors were opened to admit guests; first, the Prince and Princess Orbanoff, and, next time, Thilda.

The princess gave Werner a glance which began by expressing wrath, and shaded off into languorous reproach, and Thilda went straight up to him with the angry words: "So, you've been too busy again to-day, Werner! Of course, Else wouldn't let you have a holiday." She was in the highest dudgeon; for Werner had, in fact, omitted altogether to put in an appearance that day at the sitting for the portrait. At the last moment he had sent a dispatch excusing himself.

They seated themselves at table. Werner had had the agreeable task of taking Erica Sydow in to dinner. At his left there was some great lady, with whom he was unacquainted, and whose specialty was that she had some sort of griev-

ance, genealogical or other, about the question of her right to be received at court. There is quite a category, or class, of ladies in that predicament, and they entered into the number of the "remarkable objects" which people never saw anywhere except at Countess Warsberg's. They were rarities which she generally brought back with her from her travels, together with other objects for her collection.

This neighbor of Werner's was a certain Countess Lenz; and he could not make out whether the beauty was a widow or a *divorcée*. But, whichever it was, the lady was highly dissatisfied with her lot. She heaved frequent sighs, and made frequent and melancholy allusion to the unhappy situation of unprotected women. And, before she had talked with him five minutes, she went off into a strain in which the abstract and the concrete, the philosophical and personal, were jumbled together in an astonishing manner. Werner knew the species well, and it had never been sympathetic to him, although he had honored it with some portion of his attention at some time.

Old Countess Lenzdorff had, not long before, capitally described one of these ladies as a bundle of hysterical cravings, masked by small intellectual activities. They were all so terribly like one another with that regulation, pigeonhole originality of theirs.

Sharp and severe was that pronouncement of the old lady's, like most of the things she said; but it hit the mark fair and square.

Werner turned away with a sense of relief from this querulous blue-stocking to Erica, in whom marriage had brought about a great alteration for the better. As a girl, she had been full of perversity, and never seemed to care whether she made her fellow-creatures miserable or not. But, with wifehood, she had developed into as sympathetic and amiable a creature as one would wish to meet.

Right opposite to Werner, painfully opposite, was seated Princess Orbanoff, that same Countess Iwantschitsch whose acquaintance Werner had made in former days at Schlangenbad. She had on a rose-colored dress which persisted in coming down from her shoulders. She said very little, and ate very little, kept fanning herself throughout the whole course of the dinner, and launched occasional glances of tender reproach at Werner across the table. Her consort, upon whom the hostess had devolved the honor of taking her in to dinner, favored her and each of her guests in turn with glances which can only properly be described as filled with suppressed fury.

This couple, the male and female Orbanoff that is to say, got on as badly as possibly together, although—or, perhaps, because—the prince was still as much in love with his spouse as when he first met her; and that was very much indeed. But, in spite of his passion, he was quite as discriminatingly severe in his estimate of her conduct as the most jealous rival of her own sex could have been, and that is saying a good deal.

When he was with her in society he gave people the impression that something like this was going on in his mind all the time. "I know perfectly well what my wife is made of, and about all her ways, but I will not put up with other people knowing it too!"

Old Countess Lenzdorff was there, of course, as lively and untiring as ever, busily occupied in spicing the conversation about her by scattering over it judicious quantities of pepper and salt.

Just about this time, the old countess was paying particular attention to a certain Prince Enzendorff. An extraordinarily handsome man this was, not quite forty years old, a southerner in appearance, with large black eyes, and a peculiar expression in them that seemed to betray a character cold and cautious, and keenly alive to every opportunity for the selfish gratification of passion.

He was in the diplomatic service, so far as he could be said to have a profession at all; but was at present unattached. He was of a proud, overbearing temper, which was kept in order, however, by tact and prudence. He was without a spark of high moral principle, but well practiced in the discipline of unmoral conduct; fully capable, therefore, of self-restraint when necessary. In short, he was a cynic to the marrow of his bones, and a gentleman from hat to boots.

He frequented the most different and diverse circles of Berlin society. His views in political and social questions were severely conservative,

and these he never for a moment concealed or allowed to be misapprehended; but, for all that, he made a point of going wherever he had a chance of meeting clever men and pretty women. His politeness was perfect, and his unapproachableness likewise; familiarity and condescension were equally absent from his bearing. Old Countess Lenzdorff had a sort of weakness for him. She was, just at this moment, having a very lively conversation with him about the founding of a projected institution for erring but repentant women, a theme which gave the old lady and younger man ample opportunity for witty and rather unscrupulous observations.

At that table, also, was a sufficient representation of the class of well-dressed, pretty women of distinction, and of courteous, high-bred gentlemen of assorted ages; these last either in uniform or evening-dress. Smooth, blameless creatures, these gentlemen, blameless from the point of view of the salon, at least, and affording no handle to criticism. These are the people, these pretty women and regulation men, whom one is never sorry to meet once, and whose very existence one forgets the day after; who are as difficult to portray in full description as it is to paint a perfectly groomed, thoroughbred horse. They represent nothing but the upper ten exclusives; individuality of their own they have none whatever.

The most decidedly remarkable item of the objects, animate and inanimate, at that table was Thilda. Her independent way of life, and

the "Art" to which she now devoted it, had quite rejuvenated her, in spite of her forty years. She had, in the interval since we last saw her, added to her former merits all sorts of little provocative tricks of speech and manner indicative of a sense of superiority. But as she was just as lean and stiff as ever, stiff as a poker one might say, and as angular in her movements as a railway signal, the general effect was certainly not such as to enhance the seriousness of those who had the privilege of being with her.

She now wore her hair cut close and frizzled; her dress was pale-green, with Oriental, or Turkish, trimmings, pure Second Empire style, highly artistic indeed. In society she turned the "Artist" side of her complex being uppermost; on the other hand, when among artists, it was the "Aristocrat" whom she produced in the foreground.

The person seated next to her was a young musician. His name was Oscar Ryder-Smythe, and he was an American. He was much more handsome than any man has a right to be, a perfect Antinous; that is, if you go through the process, in your imagination, of transforming one of the pallid busts of the Antinous, of which we have so many, by warming it into life and giving it the high color of a man bronzed by southern skies. His attitude toward the art which he professed was one of extreme condescension; he was fond of speaking of his ancestors, who were among the companions of William the Conqueror in early times, and, in later, part of the Pilgrim company of the *Mayflower*. And

he was, in the bargain, particularly and amiably *empressé* in his attentions to Thilda; and, as Werner seemed to perceive, to his annoyance, to those attentions Thilda was far from indifferent.

The dinner was excellent, and the table was very prettily got up. Big pyramids of wax-lights, in old silver of Louis XVI. pattern, threw their subdued rose-blue shimmer upon the profuse masses of flowers—which were so disposed as to be but a few inches above the tablecloth—upon the glittering crystal of the glasses, and upon the table services of Berlin porcelain which were decorated with variegated arabesques.

Werner had much lively talk with Erica during the dinner, and while it was going on he heard, here and there about the table, mention made of a certain Countess Retz. So far as he could gather, this lady was at the moment occupying a large share of the attention of society. And Werner went out so little that he was comparatively uninformed as to the last novelties, in persons or things, in fashionable circles.

Retz—Retz! It seemed to him that he must have heard the name before. As he thought the matter over, the memory of something which had long faded away into insignificance came up slowly again in his mind with ample form and color. He saw before him an aged man, bald, and with a long white beard.

"I had hoped to have her here with us to-day," said the lady of the house, "but she was prevented by an invitation from the empress."

"Does she go to court?" asked Countess Lenz.

"She had at first intended not to, but I persuaded her that it was a thing she ought not to omit doing," remarked Countess Lenzdorff.

"I cannot understand how anybody can go to court, unless under some absolute obligation to do so," observed Countess Lenz.

"There are some circles in which reception at court implies the seal and stamp of social position," replied Countess Lenzdorff. "Besides, you can really get quite as much fun out of the court as any reasonable person can require, if you know how to go about it."

"Pray who *is* this Countess Retz?" asked the wife of a Russian diplomat, Countess Glinka. "One has been meeting her everywhere, for some time past. I should very much like to have a little trustworthy information about her. Is she all right? *Who* is she?"

"She is the widow of Count Elnor Retz, who was the owner of that mansion in the Beeren Road," said Countess Lenzdorff, dryly.

"Old Retz, whom I met ten years ago at Vichy?" cried the Russian lady.

"There was only one Count Retz, and this old gentleman was the last of the race."

"Why, he must have been at least a hundred years old when she married him!" said the Russian lady, in tones of horror.

"Not exactly a hundred; seventy-six," said Countess Lenzdorff, carelessly.

"Such marriages as that ought to be forbidden by the police; they ought to be prevented by government," said Countess Lenz, sententiously.

"I wonder what people will *not* expect government and Divine Providence to see to next!" sighed a minister of state, who had some orders on his breast, and was amply endowed with daughters, two of whom were of the company.

"And what was she before she married old Retz?" asked Countess Glinka, "a dancer, or a telegraph clerk? I suppose she had antecedents?"

"Oh, pray! Gossip of that kind!" said Princess Orbanoff, in protesting tones. "Whenever anybody says anything prejudicial to a lady's reputation, I simply turn a deaf ear to it."

"Very courteous and judicious on your part, I must say," growled the prince. "I take the opposite tack. And, when such things are said, believe them implicitly, and add fifty per cent more of my own; but it doesn't make any difference, after all. One has got to be a philosopher."

Prince Orbanoff was one of those persons who blazon abroad their disbelief in the respectable conduct of any woman whatever. Perhaps he did it to console himself for his own want of luck in the selection he had made of one for himself. His princess, as we see, seemed to wish to make people think that, in her view, women all round were nothing less than angels. She disbelieved on principle, we see, everything that was said against them.

These little "games," if we may so speak, are both of them quite useless now; people see into them. But of the two, perhaps indulgent construction, simulated for effect, is a more mis-

chievous thing, for the dissimulator and everybody else, than indiscriminate censure. Really worthy women, at all events, resent the latter less than they do the almost willful blindness implied in the first. Such women need no indulgence or whitewashing for themselves, and they know that the "whitewashing" habit tends ruinously to break down altogether all moral distinctions and barriers.

"Countess Retz is a person quite without a flaw; there is not a single point in her life which gives the slightest handle to the most unscrupulous tongue," said Countess Lenzdorff, very positively. "Nobody can say a word against Lena, absolutely not one word."

"Except that when a girl of twenty-two she married an octogenarian," said Countess Lenz, acridly.

"Considering the unhappy predicament the girl was in, everybody ought to approve and congratulate her for what she did!" exclaimed Countess Lenzdorff. "Besides, it was I who made the marriage."

These words were uttered amid the rustling of silk and noise of the chairs being pushed back as the guests rose from table.

CHAPTER XXI.

WERNER rose from that dinner with a strange feeling of disturbance, even agitation. Who in the world *could* this mysterious Countess Retz

be who had so suddenly taken hold of Berlin society, who was so much talked about, and whose name was Lena? Could it possibly be . . . oh, nonsense, nonsense! Cobwebs of his own brain! If it were so he would have heard of it long before.

After the dinner several other guests arrived. The rooms began to fill. There was plenty of gossip, laughter, flirtations, to enliven the scene. Upon the whole, however, the evening was not such a success as was usual with Countess Warsberg. The original programme of the occasion was not fulfilled, and something had to be done at the last moment to stop an unforeseen gap. The invitations had really been sent out in the expectation that Countess Retz would be there for people to say a word to, but the countess had not turned up. There was nothing left for the hostess and guests but "a little music."

Mr. Oscar Ryder-Smythe went to the grand piano and played the Tannhauser march, with variations and embroideries of his own, involving great and obtrusive difficulties of technique. He played with fabulous smoothness and strength, and gave you the impression of something between a man and a barrel-organ.

The little public present was in no humor for music; not a few among the guests made their escape from the music-room to the adjoining apartments.

"I don't know how it is, but ever since Rubenstein retired from the concert platform I don't take any interest whatever in pianoforte playing,

or players," declared Countess Lenzdorff, in the aggressively audible whisper peculiar to old ladies who are growing a little hard of hearing. "I feel about these *virtuosi* of the instrument as the Shah of Persia declared he does about racehorses. 'I know that one horse can run faster than another, and I don't care a jot which one out of a number can do it.' That one *virtuoso* plays quicker than another *virtuoso* I know, but which—"

The only person present who seemed at all enthusiastic over the youthful American was Thilda, who had no more music in her than her own paint-box. She placed herself right in front of him, and jotted down his outlines in one position and another in a sketch-book.

Else, buoyant and beautiful as always, was surrounded by a little cohort of worshiping young officers, a good many of whom were from Nassau, old acquaintances who were heartily delighted to see their dear old Queen Else again, and who knelt at her feet with most enthusiastic and innocent homage.

Old Princess Lenzdorff entered into a lively and merry argument with Prince Enzendorff about moral concepts and definitions. The man knew all about morality, theoretical and practical, perfectly well; accomplished cynics always do—none better. Your men of ideas are always raising doubts and difficulties about this, that or the other obligation. The cynic sees his way quite clearly, where the idealist stumbles, in these matters.

Countess Lenzdorff was one with him in opinion, in the main; but she thought his views were a trifle more imbued with sentiment than need be for one of his mode of thinking.

Countess Lenz had taken a sort of dislike to Werner, who, on his part, was quite fond of Erica. He would much have preferred to continue his conversation with the latter after they had left the dining-room, but she was, for the moment, taken possession of by another person, Werner's cousin, Goswyn. He had got through with his adjutant duty for the evening, and, according to promise, made his appearance at Countess Warsberg's to take away his young wife.

The two were standing together by the red marble mantel, in the hall leading to the rooms. Goswyn had become slightly bald in these last years, and was stouter than before; but he was just as handsome and distinguished as ever, and Erica looked up to him with a quite pathetic affectionateness.

Without exactly knowing how it came about, Werner found himself seated alone with Princess Orbanoff on a sofa in the small room hung with amber-colored velveteen, which adjoined the music-room.

The intoxicating sounds of Siegmund's and Sieglinde's love-song came heavily upon him. Besides this he had, as best he could, to listen to the Croatian lady's jeremiads about the feelings of a sensitive woman mated to a man who could not understand her, and what a sad thing it was

to be obliged to marry a rich man without any inclination for him, when you were the very woman made, if any ever was, to marry a poor man under the dictates of exalted love.

"Then, why didn't you do it?" he asked, at last, almost losing patience. He had heard this sort of thing so often from her before.

"Why?"—she leaned back a little, and put her full, white arm round her neck—"why?" she murmured, blinking at him significantly. "That question from *you!*"

There was no help for it. He could not avoid letting his eyes sink into the depths of hers. And then a strange feeling shot through him. In his view, she was nothing better than a woman without taste, reserve—a creature scarcely to be taken seriously; but, for all that, he had the same sensation, just then, he had experienced on that balcony at Schlangenbad, as though he had taken some narcotic, composing and also pleasantly stimulating; and all his sensibilities, bodily and mental, were quickened for more active operation.

"How well he plays!" said she, sinking her eyes slowly before his searching glance, and turning her head a little, in the direction of the music-room. "Do you know what these impassioned sounds have put in my head? Some old verses of a poet of my country. Listen:

"Ah, let us fly to distant, distant lands,
Despising the cold world's reproving cries,
Spurning its thoughts, which only weaklings prize,
Across broad seas to brighter, safer strands!

There, wandering where the Sun alone commands,
And light of highest freedom bathes the eyes,
Two souls in one, let us appease our sighs,
And dash to earth our bravely broken—"

Her voice was deep and rich. She spoke in low tones. It was a comedy, certainly, it was only pose, that she was playing and making for his benefit; but, at all events, she played her part like an actress, throwing herself altogether into her part.

When she began to repeat this poem, he felt as if he could hardly restrain his laughter; then, suddenly, he felt himself grow hot and cold. And then! . . . What was that? What was the meaning of that voice here?

Was he here, in the Countess Warsberg's house; or was he far, far away? The superb woman at his side vanished from his ken, as though the place she sat in was empty space; the oppression just now on his chest left him at once. More than seven years of his life disappeared; he heard the roaring of a mighty river; the gold of a certain sunset came dazzling his eyes as though he were on the never-to-be-forgotten scene again.

But was it really the same voice? It did not sound so deep, it had not the boyish rawness which he had known. It sounded, in the main, much softer, much more sweetly insinuating than in the earlier day; but in this its maturity of womanly beauty, as in its earlier stage of boy-like roughness, there was something in it that jarred, though it could not displease. There

was, amid all its melody, something of that elemental discord which attaches to all that is most lovely on this earth of ours; that discord which can never be resolved; which leaves us here always dissatisfied, always yearning for something more and beyond, and stamps upon us the impression of a mystery that makes us appeal unceasingly from the insufficiency of earth to the omnipotence of Heaven for its solution.

Could there really be two such voices in this world?

But Princess Orbanoff, all the same, was by his side, and she went on:

"And dash to earth our bravely broken bands."

Then came the wonderful couplet:

"In Afric wastes, where, through the rocky steeps,
Untamed and wild, the foaming cataract sweeps."

In the background of all the confused mass of sounds about him, the impassioned love-music of Siegmund was tearing at his nerves; but amid it all, quite close to his ear, he heard again that peculiar voice which he identified with his Spirit of the Waters. He looked up. In the doorway stood Else, and, by her side, embracing him and the Croatian in one comprehensive glance, full of light and mockery, stood—that Spirit herself!

"Ah! there you are, Werner!" said Else. "I've been looking for you. You know, I always think of you first of all when something very delightful happens; I never can rest till you share my enjoyment!"

He had risen at once, when he saw them, and advanced to the two young women.

"Only think of it! Whom should I come across here, but my Lena, my vanished Lena! Here she is, her own, real, living self!" And then, suddenly assuming a formal, ceremonious manner and voice: "My husband—Countess Retz."

Countess Retz! Countess Retz! It went through him like a dagger-stroke. This, then, was what his Spirit of the Waters, with her serious, heavy-laden soul, had come to! She had sold her youth and beauty to an aged man. Sad, sad indeed! But whatever may have been the motive, necessary or not, the framework which she had chosen, or acquired, to set her beauty in was one that became it most wonderfully.

She had on a white dress which had a long train, and was fairly loaded with lace; she had glittering diamond sprays in her hair, on her shoulders, on her bosom, and seven rows of pearls round her neck. The splendor was great, but it made Werner feel as if he were going to choke. It suddenly extinguished in him, never again to revive, as he fancied, a memory which had always been sweet and dear.

He felt that it would be a great satisfaction if he could tear away all that garish splendor of diamonds and lace, and have her once again before him in that poor, dripping, cheap little dress, pale, melancholy, all alive with youthful spirit and fire, however depressed for the time by adverse circumstance, and so pathetically helpless!

But, even more than by the brilliancy of her costume and adornments, was he disturbed by the brilliancy in her eyes. Never in his life had he seen eyes of such inexorable clearness, eyes which seemed endowed with such ability to sweep aside all agreeable ambiguities or equivocations. There were some women's eyes which seemed to flash sometimes with fire; Lena's eyes seemed to fill the space they gazed at with light. There was something in them which absolutely humiliated him.

"My husband—Countess Retz."

He bowed. He saw directly that she had recognized him. Will she ignore that episode in their lives? he asked himself, or . . .

She hesitated for a very brief moment; then she held out her hand to him, coldly and indifferently.

"Oh! we've had the pleasure of making each other's acquaintance before this," said she.

"Where—when—how did you become acquainted?" asked Else, whose curiosity was naturally excited, in her warm, hearty way.

"'Making acquaintance' is not exactly the word," explained Countess Retz. "We happened to meet one another once, quite casually. Baron von Schlitzing once prevented me getting into a wrong train, that is all."

He had, while she said the words, a quite distinct and sure feeling that the meeting with him operated in her to dispel an illusion; but he felt quite as distinctly that this illusion had been, up to that moment, a cherished subject of her

fancy, and that the memory of that little romantic episode on the Rhine banks had played as great a part in her thoughts as in his own.

Princess Orbanoff's bosom rose and sank in all its majesty. She saw that the wind was adverse, and that, for the moment, she could make no way; and she withdrew, accordingly, into the music-room. The other three remained alone in the little chamber.

Lena had turned away almost roughly from Werner, and to Else. "Oh! how delighted I am! No, you've no idea of it!" she repeated again and again. "How delighted I am, my little Else, my sweet little Else! You are even prettier than you used to be, much prettier! And you've been married seven years—seven years, is it? And you really have three babies? When can I come to see them with my own eyes?

"Oh, whenever you like! I am nearly always at home; only, don't come between three and four; I always take the children out walking then."

"Listen, Else; I've a splendid idea! Will you bring the children to see me, to-morrow morning, mind, not later. And I'll be there with no end of candy and cakes. They must be enchanting, your babies, if they resemble you! *Are* they like you?"

"The two eldest are like me; the youngest is like my husband, and she is much the prettiest."

"Oh! of course, you think so!" laughed Lena. Then, in her old, impulsive way, she took her friend by both shoulders and kissed her. "It's

altogether too delightful to have found you again like this!"

"But why didn't you let me know anything about yourself all this time, not a word, if you really did long to see me again?" asked Else, now. "I wrote to you three times after I was married, and never had an answer. I fretted about it a good deal, and then—"

"Then—you forgot me!" said Lena, with a sigh, but half laughing at the same time.

"Oh, dear me! what would you have?" Else shrugged her shoulders. "When once you're married, you've such a terrible lot to do and to think about. But I'm quite as much delighted at our meeting as you are, indeed I am. It seems only yesterday since we sat together in your big, bare room at Eltville. Do you remember when I first told you all about my husband?"

"Oh, yes, I remember!" replied Lena. "Has he kept on justifying the good opinion which you had of him then? But—take care how you answer that! I quite forget; he's close behind us." Lena's voice hardened as she said this, throwing a glance over her shoulder to Werner. There was something in her look at once slighting and provocative.

The glance she gave him was the reverse of pleasant to him; everything about her was displeasing to him, just then.

But Else replied, in heartfelt tones: "I never need fear my husband's overhearing a single word I have to say." She laid her hand tenderly

on his arm. "I have nothing to say about him which could be anything but a source of joy to him. Isn't it true, old man? One must have known you as long as I have done, in order to appreciate you at your full value. Why do you suddenly turn your back upon us like that, Lena?"

"I fancied you might be wanting to give your husband a kiss; you looked exactly like it."

"I had no such horrible purpose, I assure you!" laughed Else. "But will you please mention any reason why I should not? And, after all, if you think I'm going to let myself be hindered by an old friend like you, you're much mistaken. You can look as much as you like!" Here Else put her hands upon her husband's shoulders, and, drawing him down to her, gave him as hearty a kiss as if there was nobody there at all. Then she looked up to Lena. "Oh! what dark, gloomy eyes! and you're red all over, I declare! I have shocked you, I suppose. What a child you are? Oh! how glad I should be, how glad, to see *you* married and happy! If you were only cut out a little more after the ordinary pattern, you'd be quite the nicest woman in the whole world!"

"Adieu, Else! I really must go," replied Lena, hastily; "my carriage is waiting. I really only stepped in for a moment. There are two large parties yet that I must go to for a while. I only came in because Count Linden told me that you were here, and I wanted to see whether any of your old affection was left. Adieu, dear angel! and be sure and mind to bring me the

children to-morrow, for the candy and cakes and whipped cream."

"Yes, yes; certainly! Adieu! Do take her to her carriage, Werner, and see that she's comfortable. She's one of those who never take any care for themselves at all!" cried Else.

He escorted the young woman out. After he had put her cloak on her shoulders, a gray velvet cloak with white fur trimmings, she turned and looked at him. "A truly comical thing is this life of ours, don't you think?" she said. "What a meeting! Would you have recognized me?"

"Everywhere! And"—he asked, rather shyly and hesitatingly—"and you me?"

"I you?" She raised her eyebrows to her forehead. "Perhaps; I'm not quite sure. It's quite certain that, as I see you now, you're a quite different being from the one I had in my memory." She began to laugh.

He had never heard laughter so strange, laughter full of spirit and life, clear as crystal, but with the same sad, discordant note in it which was heard in her speaking voice, and which—it struck him suddenly and forcibly—seemed to pervade her whole being.

"We have both traveled over a long stretch of country, and both come to a destination that has very little reference to the romance of the starting point. But I have nothing but congratulations for you, Baron Schlitzing!" Cutting mockery, and some personal irritation, too, were distinctly traceable in her words. "The

lines seem to have fallen in very pleasant places for you, indeed, baron."

"As pleasant as they can be, for a man who hasn't a thing in the world to do," he murmured.

"You don't mean to say that you expect people to pity you for that? It was well in your power to have molded your life to different conditions, I suppose. Or, was it not?"

She lifted her brows as high as she could, as she asked the question. And then, before he could bring out a word, she raised her train from the ground with an indescribable movement of quick grace, and hurried down the small stairway, which was covered with green carpet, to her carriage.

The night was getting far advanced, and he heard the rubber wheels rolling off quickly along the silent road. Rubber wheels, indeed! Her whole life now went along smoothly, without any of the frictions of grief or want of any kind; on rubber wheels, it might be said! And, for this she had paid the price which all the world knew and talked about! And, yet, she—the beautiful young widow of the aged Count Retz—*she* took it upon herself to treat him, Werner Schlitzing, slightingly, contemptuously, almost!

CHAPTER XXII.

"WELL, that's my Lena! What have you got to say about her, I should like to know?"

cried Else, when he came back to her. She was now standing by the young Sydow pair, in front of the red marble mantel in the hall. "Isn't she lovely? How well she suits that splendid jewelry, that splendid dress! Isn't she just enchanting?"

"If you want to know how she strikes me, I'll tell you: she's uncanny," replied Werner, brusquely.

"Well, that was the way she impressed me, too, at first," said Goswyn Sydow. "The first evening I spent with her I felt all the time as if I was eating green apples and having splendid fireworks let off right in my eyes. She uttered such lots of witty speeches that it made one's head swim; and she seemed to see everything upside down, one paradox after another. I couldn't help liking her to a frisky mare which you can't get into a regular pace, and which will persist in its irregular gambols. But it seemed to me a fine noble sort of mare, for all that. And I must say I couldn't resist a sort of wish to have the taming and training of her. She'd be very fine if all the tricks were driven out of her, and she were made to trot and canter like a properly brought up creature."

"Goswyn!" cried Erica, opening her large eyes wide with an expression of merry menace on her young face.

"What's the matter, my angel?"

"You're thinking too much altogether about this uncanny Lena. I won't put up with it."

"Are you jealous?" asked Else.

"I? Abominably!" Erica confessed, half laughing and half put out.

"Like all women who haven't the least reason for it," said Goswyn, good humoredly.

"And you, Else?" asked Erica.

"I'm not jealous, not the very least," declared Else.

"My own sweet, faithful heart of gold," murmured Werner—almost inaudibly—a little ashamed.

"Grandmamma is quite in love with Lena," continued Erica; "and as she's just as much in love with me, everybody knows that she will have it that Lena and I are kindred natures. Lena, she insists, reminds her of what I was as a girl; before you had come to drive the tricks out of the little racing mare, Goswyn. Do you see any resemblance?"

Goswyn wrinkled his brows reflectively. "Resemblance in the characters of the two of you? Well, if there is any resemblance at all it is due to the fact that you and she alike grew up from girlhood to womanhood in circumstances which kept you unhappy. But—but, my angel, your circumstances were not absolutely abnormal; it was quite different. And, then, your parents were most worthy, high-toned people. And that sort of thing puts a stamp on a child's life which is never effaced. There's no doubt about this, my Erica. You certainly were a most funny, exaggerated, all but silly little thing; but underneath your high-flying, half-cranky ways there was always quite a good bit of dry, hard com-

mon sense concealed about your person. So *you* were all right. But as to Lena Retz!" he shook his head; "with her it's just the other way round. The uppermost side of her is all rationality, what I call frightful rationality, in all her opinions and actions. But I can't help thinking that what *she* has concealed about her person is a dangerously reckless temperament, which only requires some impulse from without to break out with fire and fury. Her intelligence is as clear as crystal; but I don't think it will serve her much, except to make whatever monstrosities she will probably commit so perfectly definable to herself that she will be the less excusable."

"Goswyn, Goswyn, no woman that I know of ever before put into your head such a deal of philosophical analysis as all that!" cried Erica, shaking her head.

"Can't deny it. She *is* an interesting monster!" said Goswyn, teasingly.

"I'll make her just as much attached to *me* as I possibly can, that's all that I know," declared Erica, and then shaking her forefinger menacingly at her young husband, she said to him in a deep, tragic voice: "You! you!"

"Oh, it's all very well pretending, Erica; you *are* jealous, not a doubt of it!" laughed Else.

"Not a doubt of it!" said Erica, frowning heavily. "I won't deny it: it vexes me horribly when I see him thinking more busily about anybody than he does about me. But if you fancy that I am at all afraid of his falling in

love with Lena, you're quite wrong, Else. He's much too rational a fellow for that. In fact, he's the most horribly rational fellow in this world."

"Unfortunately I have too often too much need of being so," observed Goswyn, significantly, stroking his young wife's head lightly.

They heard old Countess Lenzdorff's voice from the other corner of the hall. "Morality! morality! I don't think you take a sufficiently plain and commonsense view of the question, Enzendorff. Morality is simply nothing more than a compromise, enforced by society, between the two extremes of self-sacrifice and self-love, between the softness and hardness of our human nature."

"Well. *Now* we know all about it!" exclaimed Goswyn. It was as much as he could do not to burst out laughing; his dazzling white teeth shone merrily out from his clear blonde mustache.

"Grandmamma is horrible!" said Erica, with vexation. "She's enough to put any one out of conceit with morality altogether. I know she very nearly succeeded in doing so with me. You want to believe that morality is something that has some beauty in it, and she's always insisting and proving that it's nothing more than a simple, dry, practical, useful thing."

"I think that the best opinion lies just in the middle between the two extremes; at least, that was the view taken by that prudent professor when somebody demanded of him pointblank

whether there *was* a God, yes or no," said Goswyn, humorously. "Anyway, Enzendorff must have been cursing grandmamma by his gods to-night, I fancy, well as he gets along with her usually. He was staring his eyes out at Lena Retz all the time she was here, but couldn't shake off the old woman."

"Is Enzendorff really paying his addresses to Lena?" asked Else, with much excitement in her sparkling eyes.

"I wonder who isn't doing so just now, more or less," said Goswyn, shrugging his shoulders. "But as to Enzendorff, his infatuation is the talk of pretty nearly all Europe. He followed her up from Constantinople to Paris, and from Paris here."

"What do you say to that, Werner? She'll be Princess Enzendorff next, my Lena!" cried Else.

"Princess Enzendorff! That's not settled yet by any manner of means," observed Goswyn. "I don't think Enzendorff has got marriage in his head, up to the present date, anyhow."

"Then what has he got in his head?" asked Else, innocently.

Werner and Goswyn looked at one another and laughed. Then Werner tapped his wife's shoulder lightly and said: "There you are, putting your dear little foot deep in it again!"

"Oh, how could I think, all at once, that any one meant such horrible things?" said Else, in deep vexation, with all her blood shot in her

face. "Detestable gossip! It spoils all my pleasure in meeting Lena again."

"You must have misunderstood me, Else," interrupted Goswyn. "Nobody has a word to say against Lena Retz; all Europe is quite convinced that Enzendorff has, so far, made no way with her at all."

"Made no way with her! Ugh! Do you expect me to be less annoyed because you say that?" said Else, in great exasperation. "I think it's just as hateful to let a man make up to her if it's quite clear that he doesn't mean marriage."

"Perhaps she expects to have her own way after all with Enzendorff, and that she'll rise winner from the game," said Goswyn, reflectively. "I really don't know; the woman is more than *I* can fathom."

"Well, for my part I breathe more freely," said Erica, humorously. "She can't be a very nice person, after all, considering the stories you tell about her. So I'm not afraid for you, Goswyn. If it's as you say, she must be a cold, self-seeking creature."

"Cold she certainly is not," replied Goswyn. "But as to self-seeking, why all intellectual women with unsatisfied hearts always are that, or, to say the least, devoured by ambition. If I know the woman at all, I am sure that she would face starvation gladly for any man that she really loved. But if such a one is not forthcoming, why then she would make a point of making her solitary or desolate life as brilliant

in its furnishings as possible. Ambition is always only a kind of despair with women."

"I can't understand all that one bit," said Else. "I'm very, very fond of Lena, and when anything bad *is* imputed to any one I really do love, my first impulse is to be quite severe with them. Then, the next moment I comfort myself with the idea that there must be some misunderstanding, and that what seems bad may turn out quite good after all. I must study Lena a little more, and then I'll give you my verdict about her. And, now, good-night, children! It has been a very nice evening, but I can't keep my eyes open, I really can't, any longer. Come home, Werner."

"I really think it's quite time we went home, too," said Goswyn, looking at their retreating forms; "especially considering the care which we ought to take of you just now. But grandmamma doesn't seem to have come to anything like an end with her preachings. And as she's going to drive us home—"

"Oh! suppose we take a cab and drive off alone?" whispered Erica, with the air of a schoolboy intending some stroke of insubordination.

He blinked merrily at her. "Yes, suppose we make a strike for freedom!" he replied.

But grandmamma's preaching came to an end exactly then. She sailed up to Erica, Enzendorff following, and the latter said: "How charming that little Schlitzing looked again to-night. A regular jewel of a woman!"

"Yes, yes; it was I brought the two together!"

said Countess Warsberg, who never lost an opportunity of glorifying herself for that exploit. "A model couple, indeed, quite a model couple!"

"Yes," said Countess Lenzdorff, who never lost an opportunity of blowing anybody's illusions out of the water, especially if the owner of them was somebody she disliked. "Yes, a model couple, consisting of two persons who have spoiled one another's lives. It has always been a mystery to me how two such fine creatures as Else and Werner could do each other such a fatal injury as to marry!"

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"What's the matter with you, Werner? Your eyes look like troubled water, after somebody has thrown a stone in it!"

It was the day after Countess Warsberg's dinner that Else so addressed her husband. There could be no mistake about what she said. He certainly did give the impression of a man extraordinarily out of tune. He had scarcely touched food the whole day; and his morning had been spent in rummaging his papers at his writing-table, getting together all his preliminary materials for his history of the "War of Liberation," which had taken him such time and labor to write, and consigning the whole mass ruthlessly to the flames.

"I'm not quite myself to-day," he murmured, without looking at Else.

"Did Lena do anything to vex you?" asked Else, in some anxiety. "Didn't she say something disagreeable when you took her to the

carriage last night? You looked so put out when you came back."

"How in the world should I care what Countess Retz says or does?" he said, somewhat roughly.

"Oh! that's all very well! but I was afraid from the first that you would not get on together at all," murmured Else, in low tones.

"And *I* don't see any reason why we should get on together at all," replied Werner, with a shrug of the shoulders. "But don't be alarmed. I shall always be quite as polite as need be to any one whom you wish to visit us, until, or unless, I have something quite serious to bring against them."

"Oh! that's not enough for me!" said Else, shaking her head quite seriously. She looked very sweet just then, the very perfection of a little housewife and matron. She had taken a slight chill at the dinner, and had on a little dark-colored open jacket over her frock, and a little pale-blue silk kerchief round her neck; she shivered and coughed every now and then. Her husband was really anxious about her; and, in consequence—perhaps, too, because, in his disturbed state of mind, it was a comfort to sun himself a little in her sympathy—particularly tender with her.

"Indeed! That's not enough for you, isn't it?" said he jestingly, and stroking her hands. "Really not?"

"No, not the least!" replied Else. "It might all have been so sweet and delightful, so very

sweet! Only think! I've heard such things to-day! If that horrible Enzendorff is making up to Lena without an honest purpose—ugh! to think of such a thing! How ugly! how hateful! —there's somebody else who *is* courting her with the most serious purpose in the world. It's Linden! What do you say to that? He has given me up altogether, the faithless creature! What do you say to that?"

She repeated this question with such a droll affectation of importance, that Werner, moody as he was, could not help breaking into a laugh.

"What do I say to that?" replied he. "Why, that such a perfectly good little woman as you are must make up her mind to lose all her adorers sooner or later; for the race of the Toggenburg vanished from this earth together with their childless ancestor."

"Oh! what a jumble of nonsense you *are* talking—you and your childless ancestor!" said Else, rapping his knuckles. "But don't you see what I mean? You do, you surely must. Just think how delightful it would all be if such a thing happened! There Linden's property, Bingenheim, you know—such a beautiful place!—and leased now; and there it is, marching with Krugenberg. Why, that was the principal reason why all Nassau would insist upon marrying Linden and me!"

"I know, I know! To think of all I've deprived you of! Poor Else!" sighed Werner.

"Oh, *you!*" she cried, drawing him to her and giving him a kiss. "If you only knew—oh,

well! it's just as well you don't know—all that goes on in my heart, sir, or else there'd be no holding you at all. But do just think! If Lena marries Linden, he'll give up his commission; he'll retire to Bingenheim; and then what delightful neighbors we shall be! It has given me no end of delight to think it all out; but if you don't get on with Lena the whole thing will be spoiled, quite!"

"Well, the two are not married yet," said Werner, with a rough edge on his voice.

"Don't you think she'll have Linden?" said Else, very seriously.

"That's a point upon which I can't enlighten you at all," said Werner. "What he has to offer her wouldn't be enough to satisfy her devilish ambition, decidedly not. And whether he's the mysterious man for whom, if Goswyn is right, she would be ready to go without fuel and food, seems to me, to say the least, questionable."

"What a hateful tone you speak about her in!" sighed Else. "I'm quite sure she vexed you about something. And there was I going to entreat you to take the children to her instead of my doing it, as I've taken such a cold that I really ought not to go out."

"Well, but I really must ask you to excuse me," replied Werner. "Write her a line or two, and I'll leave it with the porter at the hotel. I want to go out and smoke a cigar in the park, anyway."

"That's all right!" Else withdrew to write the note. She gave it to him sealed. "You've

no objection to hand it in sealed like that, and you don't want to know what's in it?" she asked, with a roguish smile.

"Not the least," he assured her; then, giving her a kiss, he enjoined her to have some hot tea at once, to take the best of care of herself, and he left her.

After he had handed in the note at the Countess Lena's hotel, he turned back into the Bellevue Street, in the direction of the park.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THERE was a thaw on. Thick drops fell from the chestnut-trees in the Bellevue Street. The Column of Victory stood out in all its grandiose tastelessness against the background of a deep gray sky.

Werner's thoughts went back to the victories and battles which the column recorded, and in which he had fought his part. The summer and autumn of the never-to-be-forgotten year 1870 came vividly up in his mind again; and, above all, the labors and dangers connected with that beleaguerment of Paris, when they were nearly all the time under fire. Life was a thing full of significance, importance, value to him then; yet, for all that, never was there one moment when he would then have swerved an inch to avoid death. Life, now, was very little more than a burden to him, mere vanity and vexation of spirit; and yet, as often as not, he caught him-

self in the very act of being afraid lest he might catch a cold!

Good Heavens! How far he had gone on the downward track, how very far! What was he now? A moody hypochondriac, or very like it; yea, a Philistine! And the Future? Nothing there except one long, long day after another, each adorned with a more or less good dinner—Sundays, in fact, every one of them—and what Sundays! He felt all the time the kind of fatigue which a thoroughly healthy man gets from staying too long in bed, or being obliged to remain in bed, by medical order, when there's nothing really the matter with him.

Plenty of people drove past him in high spirits, clearly enjoying their lives; pretty women in open victorias, nicely wrapped in furs, and with faces reddened by the fresh air; a few young officers in an open carriage. Well, these people didn't seem dedicated at their birth to a lot of strenuous labors and activities; but at least they knew how to get some amusement out of life, while he—! He turned from the Bellevue Alley into the park.

The network of the branches of the leafless trees, with its reddish or violet-tinged hues, showed sharp against the gray sky; a sweetish odor of decaying leaves rose from the ground; and the green grass-blades stretched up their long fingers amid the leaves. Every here and there a group of gloomy firs and pines arrested the eye in contrast with the reddish-brown or violet-gray of the deciduous trees. The water

in the little lakes was troubled and muddy, and the dull afternoon light, reflected in them, showed itself ashen gray.

There was scarcely a soul but himself walking in the park, and only a few carriages rattled by now and then. He went on till he reached the river, the Spree.

A sort of mad longing seized him to spring, just as he was, into the water; not for the purpose of drowning himself; nothing of the kind. He was not come to that. No, it was only that he longed to have a refreshing cold plunge to restore activity to his blood, and a good swim to quicken his languid limbs. Then he smiled at the extravagant idea; he took a good look at the water, and shrugged his shoulders. Much good would it do him to splash about in that thick brown water, which had got all the filth of the big city mixed up in it and was carrying it down to spoil other waters. And then, with startling suddenness, as if some formula of incantation brought it up, there shot into his brain the thought of—Rhine, the broad, clear, steel-gray Rhine, shining with cool brilliancy under the sunlight, traveling on with its majestic sounds. It was Eltville; and he felt again the warm, perfumed breath of that August night, saw the fairy-like mist of silver which seemed to efface the mere soil and earth altogether, and to lift the whole little town into the midst of lovely, shimmering clouds.

Ah! how beautiful, how wonderful was life then! And now . . .

A hearse, used in Hebrew funerals, drove along the park road by him; black it was, without a trace of other color, and without inscription, mark or sign to relieve its gloom, and with a covering cloth that reached to the ground, till the whole thing looked like a gigantic raven dragging its wings along the ground.

The twilight deepened; all the objects about him looked paltry, dirty; and a desolating dampness seemed to spread itself over everything and everybody.

Yes, Rhine was far off, very far off; and Lena Retz despised him!

Then, in the sudden swift changes of his thought, it seemed as though a pale, reproving specter rose up in front of him, the ghost of his youth—his youth, with its Ideals and Dreams, its restless striving toward the Unattainable and the Highest—his youth, to which he had turned traitor, which he had sold to and buried under mere luxury and comfort wherein he could take no delight whatever!

Ah! where had it all vanished to? That enthusiasm and vivacity of his soul; that firm faith in the exalted destiny of his kind; that hope which sprang up fresh, new, strong with each dawn; that power of flight of the soul which no illusions could lame, yea which seemed to increase in force with the increase of obstacles; that optimism which seemed actually to flourish in the soil of his melancholy and romance; where, where had these all gone? where all that brilliancy of the sunrise of his so rarely privileged

youth? Aye! that sun of his youthful years ought now, that same glorious sun, to be shining high in the skies of his maturity and his manhood, even if it could never have but once the veiled, golden, suggestive beauty of its earliest morning prime. But where was that sun? He saw it not; saw nothing but fog, clouds, half darkness; and his spirit sank under what he saw.

And the worst of it all was that it was so difficult to lay hold of anything, special and tangible, to complain of in the life he had made for himself. It was a diffused and general disease, without particular symptoms. It was this: that prosperity and riches had fallen into his lap, and he had never labored to get the appetite, and only labor could give it, which would have made all those good things enjoyable.

The German man is a creature who flourishes best in simple, Spartan-like circumstances, in struggles with adversities and obstacles which tax to the utmost his fortitude and staying power. But, being a creature of very great specific gravity, which we prefer to call him, rather than *heavy*, he goes to pieces and ruin quicker than men of other races, if the means of enjoyment are, ample and unearned, in his possession. And this is, perhaps, especially true of the members of the numerous class of the nobility not of the first rank. The reason of it is that the "heaviness" of which we speak causes the German to wallow in luxury rather than gracefully adapt himself to it, as the lighter men of the south do.

And, perhaps, behind that reason, is the fact

that the German is so healthy a creature, healthy with the health of the primitive forests of his forefathers, of a health too rude for the finer flowers of civilization which have always something morbid in them.

Werner Schlitzing's degeneracy, if it can be called so, was physical, then, rather than spiritual; it was, in fact, the relaxation rather than the degeneracy of fiber. His ancient idealism still clung to him as latent heat; but the material part of him had become heavier, and dragged him down to earth.

The dreadful thing was this. This man seemed one who had been expressly formed by nature to be the very typic, model, exemplary representative of his noble nation; and, as such, always to be in the forefront of its noblest struggles, always in the very front rank of those who were advancing toward pure and disinterested ends. Whereas, what was he now? That he had flung from him the obligations of the professional soldier was comparatively a slight thing, though the act typified his moral fall. The truly fearful thing was that he had left the greater army of the fighters who represent the Holy Spirit and Intellect of man, and to which he was pledged by every faculty of his soul; that he had become a cowardly loafer and camp follower; if, indeed, he might not better be described as one who slept away his hours in a ditch by the roadside, while the great host of the combatants swept by him, their colors spread to the wind, on their glorious road to death or vic-

tory. But it was a broken sleep. Every now and then his eyes opened, and he gazed on that glorious host with unutterable yearnings in his heart; but no one in those ranks ever turned round to look again at him. From him they expected nothing more in this life; nevermore could he belong to that great company.

How could it all have happened, how? In God's name, how?

Those great catastrophes, analogous to the earthquake, which suddenly transform a man's life from one type of being to another, quite different or opposite, are rare indeed. There had been no such earthquake with Werner. In his case the whole development seemed to be merely normal, if you considered only the exterior circumstances and left the psychical factor out of account. And perhaps it was this which made the unhappy man now feel that this moral inferiority of his lot was in the nature of a finality, which no power, human or divine, could now modify.

The early days of his youthful marriage had been as fresh and sweet as any youthful morning of wedded love ever could be expected to be.

Never did man take away with him from the altar wedded wife more tender, and more shyly wise and thoughtful than the Else Ried of Krugenberg who married Werner Schlitzing. The poor fellow knew that right well; and he had then and there registered a vow in his sincerely grateful heart that whatever he could do to make her happy should faithfully be done. And, ac-

cording to their original plans, their honeymoon was to have been spent in traveling through Italy.

Else, in fact, wanted to indemnify Werner for all that he had given up for her sake. But the project fell through. In the first place, Werner could not possibly ask for a sufficiently long leave twice in the same year; and, again, Italy was unsafe that year because of an epidemic that prevailed there. So Italy was postponed to the following year, and they entered without delay upon their own house and home life in Berlin.

And that little home was charming and cozy indeed. Werner took great delight in it and in his tender little wife, and enjoyed his happiness gratefully and thoroughly in the intervals when he was off military duty, which at that time was very severe and exacting. In the seven years of his marriage he had never known days of such satisfaction as those of its earliest stage.

It was not so with Else. In the midst of her new married happiness she was plagued and tortured by frequent longings for her old home, for Nassau and Krugenberg. She felt herself a stranger in Berlin. The acquaintances Werner introduced her to there—they were not numerous—did not display the warmth which she had been used to at home. The social etiquettes prevailing in that capital seemed to her intolerably stiff and absurdly minute. There was not a soul, except Werner, in all Berlin for whom she could care a jot.

So, to indemnify herself for all this social pri-

vation, she made it her business, from morning to night, to contrive one plan after another for his comfort; or, briefly, to spoil him, if she could. That was, at first, by no means an easy thing. She found it difficult to find any leverage in his character or wants which she could use to make him enjoy one thing more particularly than another. She loaded him with presents. He was very grateful for her kindness, and kissed her heartily and thankfully every time she bought him something. But what to do with all the miscellaneous things she honored him with—after that—he had not the least idea; so they were, as a rule, put aside at once in some corner or other, not to be looked at again. The truth is that luxury was an incongruous element, and he felt simply uncomfortable in it. He never seemed inclined to touch the most exquisite of the dishes served at his table, and would, with the most serious countenance in the world, and without saying a word, clear out and put on one side, as if they had no business to be there, the truffles with which Else had had the poultry stuffed for his especial delectation. All the furniture in his new dwelling was too soft; chairs, tables, everything, not high enough; the ventilation insufficient. He always chose the hardest chairs to sit on, and, whenever he had a chance, would tear the windows wide open in the middle of winter. On one of those occasions Else caught a severe cold, and he was almost beside himself; he nursed her like the tenderest of mothers, and cursed his own stupidity and thoughtlessness.

But, with the best of good will, he was often thoughtless like that. The fact was he had no idea of the protecting care required in the case of a little lady who had been so petted and spoiled as Else Ried. He made her do the most impossible things; as, for example, walk instead of ride home after the theater; or, if the weather was very bad, wait at the corner, till the right street car came, in the pouring rain, with an umbrella over them—*her* umbrella, of course; as an officer he could not have one. And this umbrella he would hold over her delicate little head with the most patient tenderness; and then, when they got into the car, deposit it, dripping wet, upon her knees.

Else was always rather reluctant to do anything to open his eyes to the absurdity of these little economies and discomforts; to point at, for example, how much more proper it would have been for the man-servant to come to the theater and get a cab for them, instead of remaining at home and improving himself by studying Schiller's "Robbers." He was so terribly cast down, whenever she said a word, at finding that he had "treated her so badly."

That was a thing which he never did if he knew it. Whenever she wanted anything, and let him know it, he never refused her, if what she desired was in his power to secure; but he scarcely ever divined any want of hers of his own accord. And if ever she did permit herself, in the shy recesses of her mind, to long for any special pleasure, which she could not bring

herself to ask for, it always escaped his notice. Else now and then spoke about it laughingly, when it was quite too late for him to do anything in the matter to gratify her. Then it was always: "But, Else, why in the world did you say nothing about it?" To which she would reply, with a little tender pout: "Oh, dear! if one has to ask outright for a thing it quite spoils one's pleasure. You might have guessed all about it, sir!"

Then he would stare at her, with those big, blue-gray, idealist's eyes of his, in astonishment, and was about as miserable as a young fellow could be. Dear me! How *could* he guess that she wanted any such thing? and how could he possibly have known that it could in any way give pleasure to a living soul?

Things of that sort—it was, generally, about some social occasion, a ball, or the like—were no pleasure to him; but he was fond of going to the theater, or to concerts. But crowded parties were a horror to him. He couldn't help being glad that Else and his Aunt Warsberg did not get on well together, and that they very rarely appeared, in consequence, at that lady's parties. It was quite change enough for Werner to drink tea, now and then, with one of his married comrades. Then came his entry into the Staff Academy, and his military studies absorbed him almost entirely. And, how delightful it was to return from his cold, bare room at that institution to tea at his cozy dining-room at home, and enjoy his meal there with that youthful, hunter's appetite which he had not as yet lost! while

a little wife, who was a perfect model of beauty, kept encouraging him to go on with her cheerful, affectionate glances. How delightful it was, after the meal, to have a little passage of conjugal tenderness with her, before they went together into their comfortable parlor, and he smoked his cigarette and plunged in his interesting book, with the delightful feeling that she was never very far off from him.

That delightful feeling of her proximity to him! Delightful indeed! There seemed a very perfume in the air when she was in the chamber, and the mere atmosphere seemed as if it had something caressing interfused with it. It did him good; to such influences the pores of his sensibilities were really open, far more than to truffled poultry and luxurious easy-chairs. Yes, her proximity was wholly delightful to him; it seemed to warm his very heartstrings when she came up to him and laid her hand on his shoulder. And after he would kiss that hand, without lifting his eyes from his book, with the half-conscious tenderness of a child, caressed by its mother in its sleep, and returning the caress. And, when he had sat there reading for a couple of hours or so, without saying one word to Else, he would suddenly lift up his eyes from the volume, look at the clock, clap the book to, and, taking hold of Else's arm, say: "Wasn't that delightful; isn't it always delightful, wifie?"

Then there came an evening, when he lifted up his eyes from his book rather sooner than usual. His attention had been drawn away from

his volume by something that had struck upon his ear, a little sound, it seemed, of somebody who was in great trouble and doing her best to prevent its breaking out. It was Else. She was sitting in a corner and quietly sobbing. "For God's sake, pet, darling, angel!"—he brought out, in his agitation, his whole budget of pet names, and it was an ample one—"what *is* the matter with you?" He took her upon his knee and kissed and caressed her.

"Forgive me, dear old man—I—I—oh, I really can't help it! but the truth is, I don't know what to do with myself, it *is* so slow, *so* slow!"

The result was that, after that evening, instead of reading to himself, he read out loud to her. And, when, this being arranged, he proposed one book after another for this purpose, it came out that her literary information had very wide and serious gaps in it indeed. She was ashamed of it, but he laughed her out of the feeling, saying tenderly: "Oh, you dear, silly, sweet, blessed little lamb! Can't you understand what a delight it is to me to be the first to take you up to the glorious upper regions where our great poets dwell. You shall traverse that Empyrean with me, flying from star to star, till you are giddy. And then I'll bring you back to earth again!"

Unfortunately, it took a very little flight to make her "quite giddy." At first everything went splendidly. He began his readings with "Egmont," which was an excellent idea of his. And his success with this first effort was over-

whelming. He read uncommonly well, simply and articulately, with warmth and intelligence, but with none of that declamatory obtrusiveness which always produces an equally painful and ridiculous impression in a small room, and which, God be thanked! is fast disappearing, even from the stage.

Else's work—she was sewing—fell to her lap. Her cheeks were on fire. She loved Clärchen like a sister; and, when the tragical end came, she wept like a child. And Werner was so moved, so elevated, by her enthusiasm, that he felt almost as though he had written "Egmont" himself. And now, German of the Germans as he was, he could not rest till he had introduced her into his heart's inmost intellectual shrine, Goethe's "Faust."

Things went tolerably well, so far as the First Part was concerned. It is true that she went to sleep at some passages—the walk in the garden, for example. But, as it was one o'clock in the morning before the reading was finished on that occasion, he could not reproach her for that. And when the tragical end came she shed all the tears and showed all the agitation which the most exacting Goethe-worshiper could have required.

But then came—the Second Part. He could not but be aware that this would offer some difficulties to her understanding, but he was so possessed with his own notions, and had led himself so foolishly astray in his desire to drag her along with him into his beloved realms of poetry, that

he could not deny himself the pleasure of reading out that part of the work too.

He had hardly begun it when she evinced such a decided repugnance to it that he had to stop.

He thought that he would get her into a more amiable frame of mind toward the work if he took her to hear Schumann's "Faust," a composition with many defects, no doubt, which he was not insensible to, but which, for all that, was a special favorite of his.

When the performance began Else did not seem at all taken by it; but that seemed quite natural, he thought. Then, as the music went on, he became so utterly lost in it that he forgot who was by his side altogether. Then, when the finale came, and that soul-shaking prayer in the Tercelto of the women—

> Ah, forgive the poor, poor soul
> That knew not what should make it whole!
> Whose worst of sins was to forget
> Thy Mercy that ne'er failed Man yet—

came cutting into his very heart, he felt the need of sharing his emotion with the creature so dear and so near to him, and turned to Else. Oh, Heaven! It was as if some one had suddenly emptied a big bucketful of cold water on him! The dear little woman was munching chocolate lozenges; and she held out the box to him with a yawn, whispering to him: "It's awfully late, dear old man; it isn't good for you to go so long without something."

And that evening ended badly. Poor Faust! Unhappy creature he always was. And, this

time, he was so unfortunate as to be the occasion of the first breach in the unity of their sentiments, of which that pair had clear consciousness.

Werner helped his wife into the carriage when the concert was over—he had come to understand that a carriage was a necessity to her—in dead silence. His purpose was to swallow his vexation without wasting a word upon the subject, but it was a long way from the concert hall to their house. And the question which he had made up his mind to suppress somehow forced itself to his lips.

"Else, Else! have you really no mind or ears to tell you how wonderful and great that work really is?" he exclaimed. "If the music said nothing to you, surely the wonderful poetry should have quite taken you out of yourself! That ending of the last part of "Faust"—set to music by Schumann—shows us the poet's power of imagination, taking him far, far beyond the limits which we wrongly believe are set to man's narrow understanding. Nothing more beautiful, more exalting, more sublime, has ever been said in words to man by man than that wonderful passage! At the moment when Goethe had this inspiration Religion came down to Poetry, and Poetry went up to Religion, to be married thenceforth forever."

Else shook her head and laughed. "I don't know whether it's you whose head is turned, or I whom am a stupid; but all that is just as if you were speaking Chinese to me," she replied.

If he had been a wise person, he would have let the matter rest there; but he was not a wise person. He began to plane and bore, carpenter-wise, and give her a screed of philosophic doctrine about Art in general, including Poetry, interrupting it, now and then, with the question: "*Don't* you see now?"

But she didn't see; and, presently, she began to feel very vexed because she didn't see; and more vexed still with him for insisting upon her seeing when she could not. She became just a trifle sullen; and at last exclaimed: "For God's sake, do come down on your feet again! It makes me perfectly miserable to see you wriggling and wrestling between heaven and earth like that! I can't help it, but you do really seem to me to-day as though you had simply gone out of your mind!"

Then he said no more.

The scene culminated in floods of tears. And, after, came a reconciliation, and no end of tenderness. But it left a certain unpleasant flavor, or echo, behind it—of Discord.

The following evening, Werner, wishing, in his magnanimous soul, to regard all that had happened in the matter as canceled, took up the "Faust" again. It was his noble purpose to leave out most of it, and give his young wife the benefit of only the most beautiful and popular passages. But he had more to learn, in these difficulties, than he thought. For lo! Else made a face exactly as a child does when offered medicine; and then she went and sat down on his

knee, and said: "Oh, dear! Do let the musty old volume alone! You've been so nice to-day; *don't* spoil it all now. *Please* play a game of piquet with me instead!"

Werner did not say a word. He put the book away, and played piquet with her like a lamb. And, dating from this, they played piquet every evening, except when they had a few friends, which was not often, or when they went out, which was even less often. And, when it came to piquet — whatever might be the case with "Faust"—she could give him points. And she enjoyed her superiority like a child. If he had been more in love with her, or if his character had been stronger than hers, he would have taken it all coolly, and have begun his educational efforts, after a while, in a quite elementary way, so leading her from small beginnings upward. But, being what he was, he gave them up altogether, now and forever.

Not that he meant to do so, at first. His first impulse, to which of course he yielded, was to ride the high horse a little. He felt hurt, and resolved to wait till Else asked him again to read something to her. But Else did not ask him. Else's sunny temper made her utterly averse to anything like a scene; her habits and her temper were such that life with her went on smoothly and without friction. To all forms of mental and moral disturbance, therefore, she had the strongest repugnance. And she was willing to give up everything and anything to avoid those evils. Besides, she was quite without any par-

ticular desire to extend her literary acquirements. And, if all that "stuff" only served to cause trouble and worry between them, why she would rather have nothing whatever to do with it.

In this way, Werner's attempts to impart culture to his young wife came suddenly and irrevocably to a premature end. And, thenceforward, his and her intellectual and spiritual interests were permanently sundered. The result was that the young husband seemed to lose his way in his relations to her, and his mood became one of discouragement. What could he do to make her happy, as he so honestly desired? To this question he could find no answer, none.

He became very sad, and would have been even sadder but for the fact that he was in the final stage of his military studies at the Staff College. These so absorbed his attention, that it altogether escaped his notice that Else was beginning to look very unwell.

Old Baron Ried happened to visit Berlin just then, and drew Werner's attention to his daughter's condition. The physician was called in, and imperatively prescribed change of air. Else's longing for her home was almost uncontrollable; and Werner, in his anxiety and tender feeling, and constant desire to let her have her own way, interposed no difficulty as to her going there.

For a few days after he was thus left by himself he felt something of the discomfort that the skin does when the temperature of a room falls very rapidly to a much lower point. But that he got over very quickly. He found that to do

without her was far too easy a thing to deserve the name of sacrifice. But she, poor girl! longed for his presence from the moment of their parting. And the longing went on and increased.

During the course of the summer he made repeated, but short, visits to Krugenberg. This was quite expensive, but he began to be familiar with the idea—it had taken a long time—that expense was no object now with him. He began, at last, to be quite sensible of the many conveniences and advantages wealth afforded, and to take advantage of it accordingly.

In the autumn, Else brought a little boy into the world.

Old Mme. Schlitzing, who had hoped to be with her little motherless daughter-in-law, whom she so tenderly loved, at this trying time, was unfortunately detained by illness at Wernigerode, which town she had inhabited since her widowhood. Thus, in this time of trial and anxiety, Else had nobody but Werner to look to for loving care and tending.

She had a bad time of it at the baby's birth. Werner's nature was, as we know, almost softer than man's should be. And he was deeply affected, indeed frightened almost to death, by what he saw her undergo. So he nursed his young wife to recovery with a careful tenderness of which, perhaps, no other living man would have been capable, and for this purpose procured a long leave of absence from the military authorities. Her convalescence was a slow and tedious affair. It was only by very slow degrees that

she became able to drag herself about the house again. She was now much paler than formerly. And her person gained enormously in charm and loveliness. She seemed to carry with her an exceptionally large portion of that magical attraction peculiar to young mothers. And it may be imagined how powerfully this affected Werner's romantic temper.

It was a delightful episode this, in the life of the pleasant old mansion; for Else above all. No strangers there; only beings bound to each other by ties of love. The old father-in-law, Else, Werner—and that important addition, a little helpless creature in a cradle.

A charming episode, a charming interior! While out of doors were autumn storms, falling and dying leaves smelling slightly of violets, white strips of mist with the sun fighting them; indoors, on the other hand, were long, white-washed corridors hung with innumerable antlers, and heavily wainscoted, with an odor of cold stone-work and lime about them; and, on the other side of the gray doors leading to these, delightful odors, perfect comfort, airy rooms with large windows, furniture in not too great quantity; everything arranged for convenience, scarcely anything for show; the only decorative element in the apartments consisting, first, of lovely old porcelain arranged in primitive glass cases standing in dark corners; next, of family portraits, and, finally, of stands for plants, for which the gardener provided an unfailing supply of the best flowers of the season.

"How delightful it is to be all together like this, and what a dreadful pity that it will be over so soon!" sighed the father-in-law. And Else echoed, "A dreadful pity!" and then both sighed in unison.

Werner, poor fellow, smelled mischief in the air, and did his best to get away. But one thing or another always occurred to prevent it: a slight indisposition of Else; bad weather, what not. Else nursed the little one herself. Out of the question to expose her to the fatigue of the journey. The idea of traveling with a tiny thing like that on the edge of winter!

Then, one day, the old gentleman came to Werner as a suppliant. It had come to light that the steward, to whom he had confided the absolute and uncontrolled management of the estate, was a confirmed scoundrel. Theft, on a large scale, had just been brought right home to him. It seemed only too plain that a large portion of the income of Krugenberg had, for some years, been wrongfully dealt with and was irrevocably lost. The old gentleman, it appeared, had signed quantities of papers without reading a word of them. And now he had been breaking his head all that morning over accounts and estate books, and could make neither head nor tail of them. Wouldn't Werner be so kind as to help him in the matter? With his clever head he'd be able to separate the wheat from the chaff in a moment. And if he only would just go about a little among the people on the property and see what they were at?

What could Werner do? It would have been inconsistent with his sense of duty not to lend his father-in-law a helping hand at such a pass. So he set to work. Night after night he sat late over the books, and investigated the state of affairs with the persons employed on the estate. He discovered many peculations that had been going on for years. He put financial order into the chaos, properly distinguishing capital account, gross profits and net profits. He ascertained with some precision which were the more and which the less remunerative products of the estate, and which part of the *personnel* employed on it ought to be retained and which ought to be got rid of. Having been brought up on his parents' property, he had almost sucked in with his mother's milk, as they say, all the practical points connected with agriculture and the administration of landed property. And he had a quicker and more decisive eye for everything connected with it than a mere townsman can ever acquire, however deep may be his study of the theory and science of the subject.

Else's admiration of his doings knew no bounds, and she expressed her pride in him lavishly. The old gentleman overwhelmed his daughter with praises for giving him such a son-in-law, and declared that he was nothing short of a blessing to the family.

His wife and father-in-law did not formally state the problem before him, still less make any direct request that he would consider his position, but on the course which things generally

ought to take. But he was called into requisition from morning to night about one thing or another, and became indispensable. And, in an incidental way, they suggested much.

But there was his military career! But, after all, what was a soldier's career in those times of a peace that might be protracted, God alone knew how long? If the country were in danger, his return to the colors would be a mere matter of course. But to go on serving to no better purpose than rising slowly to captain's rank, and then to major's, that surely was to deliver himself over to mere barren worry and trouble in comparison with the useful and profitable field of work that was open to him there at Krugenberg. Of course, no sort of moral compulsion should be laid upon him; and if the sacrifice was too great not another word should be said about it. He ought not to be either forced or talked into such a course; to attempt it would be quite wrong.

It was one evening, a little before the expiration of his leave, after a severe day's shooting, followed by a tremendous gallop across very heavy country. The preserves shot over had been a long way off, and he had ordered a horse to be brought there to go home with. Then came dinner, at seven o'clock, an exceptionally good dinner, and then—Else's dressing-room! She had dismissed her maid, and the two were alone. Else was combing out her hair. Such wonderful hair! She wore it in simple, thick coils on her head; and when these were loosed it

fell down, in swelling profusion, considerably below her waist. Werner sat back in an easy-chair, smoking cigarettes and reveling in the sight of her. The stove was lighted, and its warmth was grateful in the cold, autumn air; but, at the same time, the atmosphere it made was heavy and relaxing. The wood crackled and spluttered as the fire took hold of it. There were some flower-glasses, with resedas and roses in them, on the toilet-table at which Else was seated, and their perfume mingled with the odor of the burning wood. It was a comfortable arrangement altogether.

Then Else came out with her entreaties again, and more definitely. She began by saying that she knew it was asking a great deal of him, a *very* great deal—nobody could know that better than herself; but, the long and the short of it was, she couldn't help herself, she couldn't indeed! To leave her old father alone now was something too terrible for her to face; and, as to managing the property, why the old gentleman was quite past that now. If Werner found it impossible to do what they wished, Krugenberg would have to be sold; there was no help for it.

She put all this to him with inexorable clearness, and then suddenly broke off short. He made no reply, but sat there looking in front of him, with a face full of gloom, with his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hand, a man perplexed upon an anxious seat. Else couldn't stand it. She jumped out, went behind him and

put her arms round his neck, crying: "Oh! it's too bad! it's too bad! to put a pistol to your head like that, my poor, poor Werner! But papa is dinning it into my ears, morning, noon and night. He thinks there's nobody like you in the world, and looks upon you as his savior, and the savior of Krugenberg, too. But you are more to me than everything else on this earth, and if your military career is indispensable to you—and certainly if ever man was made for the army, you are—I'd rather ten times over that Krugenberg went wherever it has to go!"

He made no reply, but stroked her soft, warm arms, arms which seemed, in their satin-like brilliancy, to reflect more light than they absorbed; then he put her hands, one after another, to his cheeks.

She bent over him and kissed him on the forehead. "My poor Werner!" she whispered, "here have I given you a sore, sore heart again!"

She was simply enchanting. So great were the gifts she had lavised on him, good measure, pressed down, running over, that he felt himself overwhelmed. And he never ceased to be haunted by the distressing thought that he was as much her debtor as her husband; alas! even more so. If he had loved her as she loved him, he would have had more strength in weighing her desires, would have felt himself justified in opposing them when necessary, however it pained her. But, as things were, he felt himself weak as water. She gave him so much, and he returned

so little. The balance *must* be struck somehow, whatever it cost him!

There was a painful inner struggle. But it ended in his renouncing his military career, in spite of prospects of rapid and high promotion much more brilliant than was usual in his rank and at his age.

His heart was nearly broken when he did it. But what the world said was: "That fellow knows how to take care of himself!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

His mother's answer to the letter in which he informed her of his having renounced the military calling and chosen another — as he phrased it—was a long time before it came. And when it came it tasted bitter in Werner's mouth.

The old lady wrote with a dry brevity. She expressed a hope that neither he nor Else would ever see occasion to regret the inconceivable decision he had come to.

This letter made Else very angry, indeed. And from this moment some tension entered into the relations of the daughter-in-law and Werner's mother which could not be got over, notwithstanding the fact that Else, always sweet and loving, again and again held out the hand of peace to the old lady. Not, indeed, that the latter meant to thrust away, or ever did truly thrust away, that dear little hand.

No: it was something which the old woman did her very best to overcome; but a cherished dream of her life had been rudely dissipated, and it was too much for her. She did all she could to bear the altered circumstances with dignified composure, but she never entirely succeeded. And whenever she was, for a while, under one roof with Werner she succeeded least of all.

She came several times to Krugenberg in compliance with Else's pressing invitation, and every time she made up her mind that she *would* be happy and contented there. And every time it was the same; she couldn't stand it, and hurried off after a very brief stay. Spoil her as Else would, it was the same; not even the little tendernesses of her sweet little grandchild would do. Away she *had* to go.

Else felt deeply wounded at the way in which the old lady fled from Krugenberg. "I've done my very best to make her feel at home with us," she complained to Werner after one of her mother-in-law's too brief visits. "I can't think *what* it is. Our life here is as nice and sweet and happy as any one would wish. I can't imagine anything more delightful. What *is* it drives your mother away from us like that?"

Werner made no reply to this. He knew only too well what it was drove his mother away from Krugenberg. It was the intolerable spectacle of the difference between her expectations and hopes in his regard and that which he had settled down to: the sight of her

son's downfall, the terrible fact that her Werner, her bright, noble boy, had come to be nothing but his wife's husband, the most brilliantly best off son-in-law in all Nassau; and that he seemed to thrive and prosper and feel at home in this life of lounging worthlessness. It was this that drove the old woman away as with whips and scorpions.

Enjoy it, thrive in it, prosper in it? Ah, there she did him wrong! Certainly he could not deny that he seemed to enjoy it; nay, he did really strive to enjoy it. Bound hand and foot as he was, what could he do but try to make the best of all the material features, at least, of his position, if he didn't want to go and dash his brains out against the wall for sheer weariness and despair? But thrive in it, enjoy it! No, indeed! That was beyond him.

When his mother was at Krugenberg he took the greatest pains to seem happy and pleased to have her there, while, in truth, it was just as much wretchedness to him as it was to her. When the carriage drove away with her he always had a divided feeling of pain and relief. Relief that those eyes so filled with sad disappointment, so humiliating in their expression of disappointment with him, were no longer there to vex him with their too searching glances. Pain, hot, burning, intolerable pain, because, on every one of these occasions, it seemed to him as if his mother took away with her another and yet another fragment of that older self of his which was on its lingering death-bed.

Oh, if he could but have hastened to follow her into his old freedom, independence and poverty! But no! There he had to remain, idle, worthless, *fainéant*, letting himself be fattened up, and wasting himself in efforts to persuade himself that no fellow in the world was so well off, and that he ought to thank his stars for the improvement in his circumstances!

Oh, these years at Krugenberg! These years of desolation, emptiness, and horror at Krugenberg! At first, everything went as happily as clock-work. Old Baron Ried never tired of boasting of his son-in-law's administrative talents. But, after a while, those praises became less and less frequent. Something seemed to arrest their course.

The net income which resulted from Werner's exertions did not answer the old gentleman's expectations; indeed, was very considerably lower than that which his dishonest servants, in the execution of their nefarious designs, had managed to squeeze out of the estate. That the fellows had done this by forcing results in every possible ingenious way, to the prejudice of the soil, and that economy was absolutely necessary while the land recovered itself, unless the whole thing was to go to irretrievable ruin, was what Werner could not drive into the old gentleman's head. He began to let this and that one among the sub-stewards report his views upon the unsatisfactory state of affairs. He began to interfere at critical moments, and disastrously, with his son-in-law's management. He began to

criticise in a teasing, petty way, Werner's excellent purpose of doing the best for the landowner *and* the land. He allowed subordinates to influence his mind more and more every day, and began to assume an exasperating air of meritoriously patient endurance of Werner's doings, and to praise him for his "good intentions." And the thing came at last to a painful scene between the young and older man, which ended by the latter assuring his son-in-law that he had nothing to reproach him with; that it was not to be expected that he could be suddenly transformed from an able officer in the guards into a practical agriculturist; and that all he, the old man, had to ask of him—Werner Schlitzing—was that he would make his daughter happy.

The poor old man was so confused in his head, as very obstinate old fellows are apt to become, that he actually believed himself to be speaking quite considerately and kindly to Werner when he delivered himself of these extraordinary remarks. But, when he had done, Werner, without wasting a further word in reply, left the room and went out into the woods. There was a cold autumn rain on and it came dripping down over his face and ears, and the dead leaves were falling in showers from the trees. Werner wept like a child; he took hold of the trees and tried to shake them in his vexation, raging at their base as the wind and rain did at their crowns; he broke off heavy branches from the younger growths, and stamped in the puddles with a sort of

frenzy. He declared to himself that he would break with it all and away from it all now and forever; that he would fling all his father-in-law's money at his feet; take his wife and child in his arms and go, some where or other, with them to make a new existence for himself, however humble; and that he would, in the first place, take refuge with his mother at Wernigerode until he was gazetted to some new regiment, as he hoped to be. He would do this—that—only . . . ! Then, in the midst of his angry passion, it suddenly struck him that, whatever he might decide as to the more distant future, for the present moment he was bound hand and foot, absolutely and pitiably helpless, *could* do nothing but digest his father-in-law's outrages as best he might. He had for the moment forgotten. Else was expecting her second confinement in a few days, and she was in a very troubled and depressed state of mind. It was quite out of the question that she should be exposed to agitation of any kind that could be avoided; that was his first duty. So it ended in his going back, like a repentant school-boy, in some hurry, lest he might be too late to dress for dinner.

His father-in-law had been watching for his return, and received him with an air made up of reproach, indulgence, and tenderness.

And he ordered the butler to put a special bottle of champagne in the ice for dinner.

It may be supposed that there is nothing which a human being cannot get accustomed

to if he only has time enough, even to drinking at dinner the champagne of a father-in-law who thinks that there's only one thing in the world which you are any good for—that is to say, making his daughter happy. But Werner found it quite a difficult thing to do, poor fellow! and that champagne tasted to him like medicine to the bitter end.

Resolutions such as those which Werner came to that day in the woods in the streaming autumn rain—violent, convulsive, revolutionary resolves like that—are like thoughts of suicide. If their execution has to be deferred, it is apt not to come off at all.

If his life had been a thing which still retained any sacredness or value in his own eyes, he might have plucked up energy enough to extricate himself with one decisive, vigorous stroke from all this complicated wretchedness. But life, in all its aspects, was now a matter of indifference to him. The conviction took deeper and deeper root in him every day, unfortunately, that he was a man who had utterly lost his way in life, and that it was now too late to mend the matter.

The only thing he had really to see to was that Else's innocent little life should be carefully guarded so as not to share the despoilment and ruin of his own.

Therefore he determined to make compliance his rule. He applied himself to the task of learning to lounge and idle away his hours like any other amiable nonentity. He made no

further resistance to any amount of petting and courting Else chose to offer, and followed her like a lamb into the whirl of society which had been her own proper element from the time when she was a little thing.

She belonged to all sorts of social sets. As her father's daughter she made one of the higher aristocratic class, of course. And she was of the wealthy Frankfurters by virtue of her mother, who had been not only a conspicuous and lovable beauty, but also the child of one of the burgher patricians of that town of finance. So Else was more than at home among all these old associations of blood and friendship. In fact, relatives and friends were much the same to her. But Werner was a stranger among them—was so, and remained so.

Ah, how all this past came up again in him in this January thaw, with its suggestion of spring in its air, as he went along among the dripping trees and muddy roads of the park. He lived over again that whole time in his thought, year by year, day by day. His father-in-law's rough words, the visits among the neighbors, the long, long dinners, the luxurious food, the strong wines, the refinement, the conventionality, the artificiality of it all. Then it struck him vividly how he had suffered morally under all this; how these influences had gradually told on his idealistic and ascetic disposition to the injury of his strength of soul. He thought of the festal days at Wiesbaden and Frankfurt he

had had to go through; of the long drives from Krugenberg to the nearest railway station, the overheated railway cars with their reek of burning coals; then those celebrations. The men—Ah, me! It was the men who affected him most painfully of all, almost, indeed, drove him to despair. Heavy fellows, of quite polished exterior, with ever so much more knowledge of the world, and its pleasures especially, than he possessed; punctilious in all outward observances, but without a particle of genuine conscience. In fact, perfectly unscrupulous, in satisfying their greeds and passions. Good-humored fellows enough, indeed, not without tact and mother wit, with no exaggeration about them, without an idea or an aspiration. And, what was terrible, one and all of them having on their faces that indefinable look of depreciation for Werner, the officer of the guard, who had sold himself, the "kept" son-in-law. And then the women! Oh, those women! Beautiful, certainly; luxurious in build and habits; elegant, primitively simple flesh and blood creatures, with the stimulating fire of the Rhine wine coursing through their veins, with full red lips, and slow, languorous glances that drew you slowly and surely to their side.

And these women were of different kinds and schools and opinions, if such grave words may be used of them. There were not only these luxurious and thoughtless ones, the mere pleasure-lovers, who were the majority. Among them were some who gave themselves the air

of being "thinkers," and tried to give their lives of pleasure the support of some sort of Epicurean principle or theory. In former days principles and theories were invoked to restrain lives, but—*nous avons changé! tout cela!* With a goodly number of these "theorizing" ladies Werner was well acquainted; "gifted natures," as people were fond of calling them; ladies who were enthusiastic devotees of the later anarchic theories, which make the individual all in all and leave no place for the moral principles which alone make society coherent and possible; ladies who went pilgrimaging every year to Bayreuth in order to get their nerves irritated into a suitable state of excitability for the coming autumn and winter season.

Until he enjoyed the privilege of social intercourse with these strange samples of their sex Werner had never had the least idea how much he was behind the times. They completed his education for him. They lent him books which he made it a point of duty to return to them after he had read them, and from which he gathered that he had been all his life in reality nothing but a poor-spirited Philistine, who had hitherto, greatly to his discredit, as he ought to feel, simply adhered to traditional obligations and principles. But that conformity had been mere waste of time. He would have spent it better —according to these doctrines—in riding roughshod over every scruple of his own heart, and over every other person's heart, that stood between him and any gratification he might be

bent on. He learned from these writers that mercy and love of your neighbor were pitiful contemptible scruples, a sort of moral scrofula that had come up under the influence of Christianity, that worst enemy of the free development of the human race. He learned that the sentiment called duty was nothing but an artificial beautification — if the word may be permitted—of the moral cowardice which sacrificed everything to conventions and traditions; he learned that all claims to fidelity in the relations of men and women were simple foolishness and feebleness, and an improper diminution of human freedom. He learned that when lovers began to tire of one another, this was due to some transformation of their physical substance; their cells, or skin, or solar plexus, or something for which they were no more responsible than for the movement of the solar system outside them.

Fidelity, indeed! When all these great and vast new systems of truth had been at last revealed to us, showing how impossible a thing it is! Ridiculous! Absurd!

Poor Werner had but a very scanty knowledge of the various speculative attempts made in these latest centuries to find short cuts to happiness across country—so to speak—in lieu of sticking to the broad high roads in State and Church which were made first, and have since been kept in repair, by Christianity. If he had been more versed in these things all that wild talk and wilder print would have failed to move

him. They would have only drawn from him a careless, skeptical smile, and not at all have shaken his conviction that humanity would turn a deaf ear to all these invitations to make new "eras" or "societies" for itself, and know perfectly well how to defend itself against those who should try to force its hand in that regard.

Werner had been brought up and educated in those simple, severe and stern sentiments, duties and relations which may be said to represent the still subsisting patriarchalism of the social system. His intellect was in some sort, therefore, surprised and confounded; he was altogether taken aback by these new doctrines. It was something like a simple countryman hearing, for the first time in his life, that there were actually men in the world who do not believe in the existence of a God.

The impression at first produced upon him by these new theories was of something unhallowed and uncanny. Presently, however, he began to waver in his absolute fidelity to traditional views. In a little while he began to feel that these sat upon him like an old-fashioned suit of clothes. He began to be a little ashamed of his hereditary ethics, and to look upon them as baggage which had, perhaps, materially hindered him so far in his journey through life and the world.

In a word, he began to enter on that dangerous path of moral and mental analysis, which *may* lead—whither? There had been many a man before him—if he had only known it—

quite as clever as he, who had gone further than he was preparing to do in the abuse or misuse of their reasoning powers. And what had been the result, in fine, of their moral insurrections, of the morbid protests against, and analyses of, the existing moralities and systems of society? This only—unless they had degenerated into lunatics or positive criminals—that, at last, they had been forced to discard their speculations and sum up the whole matter, in its speculative and practical exigencies, in the simple formula: "Comply! Conform! Obey! Submit!" But Werner knew little of all this at that earlier date. However, it was all to be made inexorably clear to him by later experiences, by later and higher illumination; which, however, was unfortunately not there to shine upon his path, and guard his life, when those ladies led him that dance over fen and moor and wild heath with their wicked, will-o'-the-wisp lights.

At that earlier date it seemed something like cowardice to him to put his thoughts away in his pocket without following them up to the end. Only a coward would allow his prejudices to run away with him from the battlefield of thought. And if the moral obligations, hitherto held sacred by him, had no better foundation than prejudice, could it be the part of a man of spirit to go on conforming to them?

CHAPTER XXV.

It might have fared ill with Else s domestic happiness if he had happened, at that time, to be exposed to any really serious temptation. But none such occurred; no temptation of the overwhelming kind that makes life seem quite worthless to infirm creatures, unless they give way to it. Consideration for Else remained his governing motive, after all, in that earlier stage of their marriage. All the ugly theories his speculative soul played with remained there inoperative and unassimilated, like an undigested poison in the stomach. And, like such poison, they awaited the quickening or stimulating influence of some further substances or ingredients, presenting themselves for digestion, in conjunction with which they would develop all their power to injure and destroy.

There was no one of these theoretical ladies, these fair nihilists of speculation, who pleased him more than another, however patiently he might listen to their nonsense about turning the world upside down to improve its health. The whole batch of them had not a single particle among them of the sweet perfume of true womanhood, of that mysterious, attractive, seductive, winning Something—no one has ever been able to define it—which may be called the Poetry of Womanhood; and of which no man, worthy of the name, can tolerate the absence.

Werner was no person to be taken in the snare

of ladies who wore their dresses so very low, and made such a very liberal display of their—opinions. At the bottom of his heart he was afraid of them. They seemed to present womanhood to him in the light of some dangerous, working ferment or leaven, which so muddled and muddied the waters that they would, perhaps, never be clear again.

But the other, and quite different class of women, the joyous and lovable little fools! What of them?

There are some human creatures who are endowed, like mollusks, with a thick shell, which resists the stroke of all temptations, little or great. Werner was not endowed with any such protective apparatus. His skin was so thin and sensitive that it felt every little breeze and every little pin prick as few ever do. It was morbidly sensitive to pleasant and unpleasant sensations. No man was ever born with less turn for profligacy, and he was in no danger of contagion from the views and actions of the men of pleasure by whom he was surrounded. But he was keenly alive to the specific charm of womanhood, and women felt it. And, whenever he was in the clutches of despondency, he could not help feeling satisfaction at finding how easy it was for him to win the sympathy of the sex, nay how frequently it came to him spontaneously and without any solicitation at all. It became a source of pride to him to observe how his superiority in this respect roused the envy of the men about, who thought themselves so very superior

to him every way. And, so, before he realized it, that sort of incense and admiration from the other sex became almost a necessity of life to him. In fact, it was the only thing which had power to drag him out of the attacks of melancholy which grew stronger and blacker with every day in his soul.

All this superficial spiritual coquetry with others did not one whit affect his feelings for Else. On the contrary. After every one of these light forays into those stupider regions of the *pays du tendre*, he returned with increased affection to his sweet young wife; who, when compared with other women, seemed to him more and more to wear the character of a frolicsome, warm-hearted young saint. Else, good, sensible creature, never for a moment imagined that there was more than there really was in any of these fugitive dallyings. She used to laugh heartily at these "successes" of his. She had that innocent, unaggressive sense of personal superiority which sets a woman above the level of jealousy, and constitutes the best protection for her husband, if he be worth anything, and for herself too.

Accordingly, this absolute, unsuspecting confidence of hers was something that, now and then, he felt like a heavy load on his shoulders. Those "intellectual" ladies were always preaching the doctrine that repentance was mere weakness. But Werner, poor fellow, could no more put the tip of his finger into moral pitch without repenting than he could fly. To look into Else's

pure, tender eyes, and feel that he had ever so small a speck of sinful thought on his conscience, was what he never found himself able to endure. And he always declared to himself that "it" should never occur again. But Fate was too strong for him, or he too weak for Fate.

Then, one fine day, Fate altered its mind in his regard, and put an abrupt stop to these levities. Old Baron Ried fell ill with acute rheumatism and was, presently, all but totally disabled by it.

For some time after that Else was transformed into a mere sick-nurse, and only a fragment of her was left for her husband. The invalid suffered in his temper more than in his bones, and, grudging everybody else a moment of her time, kept her night and day by his side.

Werner's mission in life seemed now to be reduced to the single function of reading the newspapers to the old man and pushing him about in his wheel-chair, duties which had strictly to be their own reward. For, far from getting any thanks for it, he had, on the contrary, as often as not to pocket all sorts of disobliging remarks.

This phase of his existence lasted two years. When the old man at last consented to die, Werner and Else were both of them quite worn out, miserably run down, in a really pitiable condition. And if Werner felt some relief at the occurrence, nobody could blame him.

When the old man's affairs came to be settled it turned out that what was left to Else was very much less than was expected. Her father's

management of his estate, after Werner retired, had been simply senseless and destructive, and the property had been so diminished in consequence that it now barely sufficed to keep them, Werner and Else, respectably. Indeed, they would have been put to it to live quite suitably to their position, had it not been for some property which Werner came into just at that time. However, he felt, as far as he was personally concerned, nothing but satisfaction at his failure to inherit wealth from his wife's father.

And now, after this long suspense of his activities, in this new state of comparative freedom, he hoped and expected that his energies and spirits would take a new departure to efficiency and cheerfulness. But, alas! it was not so. Instead of that, he was now to go through even worse experiences.

There came upon him a sort of raging desire to distinguish himself, to justify his life to his fellow-creatures by some exceptional work, to show them, after all, *what* was in him.

His first step was to offer himself to a constituency for election to the German Parliament. But he failed miserably. And he nearly broke down altogether under this fresh humiliation. After this defeat residence in the Rhine country became quite intolerable to him. Much as Else suffered in giving up the home of her youth, it was she who finally proposed, of her own accord, to let Krugenberg, and come to stay there only for a few summer months, and that they should go to reside permanently at Berlin.

She had now for a considerable time come to see how wrong and unadvisable it had been to put a stop to his military career. And, accordingly, there was nothing in the world which she would not have done to put some fresh interest in his life. She hated Berlin with all her heart. However, that did not signify. She said to herself, in her own cheerful way: "If one of us has got to suffer, it had better be I."

But if she expected that the change would result in the opening of any new field of work to Werner, she was quite mistaken, as she saw only too soon. And, indeed, how was it to be reasonably looked for that Werner should now find part or lot in any of the world's work, being what he had now become? What sort of position, or office, or vocation did he really *want*, if it came to that? He would have been puzzled to answer that question exactly if it were driven home to him.

And now came that worst and most deeply depressed of all the phases of his life, when all his efforts to do and be something seemed to him futile even to absurdity, and provoked his own sardonic laughter. He got it into his head that he was a sort of limb amputated from the body politic, or general. And, of course, how ridiculous it was, or would be, for any limb to try to grow again as part of a body from which it had been surgically separated!

So life became to him, in idea, something with which he had closed his account forever. Any ordinary man would have forced his way into

some walk of life, some employment, *something* more than mere passivity; but Werner was no ordinary man. He had a certain incurable shyness, or reserve, that was quite extraordinary. And this defect now increased almost to a nervous disease. He hated putting his foot over the threshold of his house. Any form of strenuous exertion made him almost sick to think of. He no longer sought or conceived the possibility of any cure of, or issue from, his chronic melancholy. In fact, he came to fancy that "melancholy" was a principle so inherent in the lot of man that any other feeling, any views except the pessimism it inspires, were simply ridiculous.

In this perilous passage of his soul his hand went, now and again, almost involuntarily, to the revolver. But he never went further than to play with the edge of that thought. High-flyer as he was, a certain Philistine sense of what was befitting and respectable, which was in his very fibers, would alone have sufficed to keep him from doing more, even if there had not been his devotion to his wife and his children to restrain him. But he asked himself, more and more frequently, the question, "What *is* the use of all this torture? what is life good for, anyway?" And the more he asked it, the more he despaired of any answer.

Often, in the midst, or worst, of his depression there came upon him a wild wish that some overwhelming passion of feeling might come to carry him off his feet into action, something which should have real grandeur in it, something which

should stun men into admiration. Oh! if he could but once—once, once feel that he was really alive, alive and working, feel it in every fiber, every nerve! Ruin might come after that, if it pleased, utter destruction, for aught he cared!

But such violent inner movements could not be frequent. Routine soon held him unresisting in its toils, and his life became little more than a walking sleep.

But—a few days before the moment when we find him in the park, that January day—something that we know of had come to cause him frightful agitation; and yesterday had raised that agitation to the highest pitch. How could she dare to wound him like that! He felt his ears burning with the recollection of her words, as though he had been struck over the face with a whip. He was almost beside himself when he thought of it. He felt as if he must begin to run, run as fast as his feet could carry him, run to the ends of the world to get out of men's sight. He felt a crazy impulse to clutch at somebody or something—smash, throttle, somebody or something!

Then, suddenly, he stood quite still in the park. It seemed to him that somebody had put a weight of lead on his breast, making all further movement impossible. He put his hand to his forehead, and asked himself: "Can this be madness? Am I ordained for that, *too?*"

Then, in the agitation, not so very far from madness, after all, of his soul, wild thoughts

went through him, more like fragments of a dream than thoughts, indeed. He heard the rustling sound of Rhine; he saw the one and the same face twice, and with two expressions on it; the first time it was cold and mocking, the second time it was soft and tender, with large eyes shining with high, enthusiastic purpose. The mocking face had vanished utterly, and only the tender one was there. He saw it plainly, every lineament of it, with a clearness only possible to hallucination perhaps, as he had formerly seen it in the shadow of that niche at Eltville. He felt two little hands on his shoulders, he felt two tender lips on his forehead. And, now, he heard a sweet, vibrating voice say:

"Wake, dreamer, wake! You did not think it worth your while to come to me, to free me from my prison. But lo! I have come to you, to liberate you from your bonds. Wake, dreamer, wake!"

Was *that* what his soul had been longing for? Was *that* to be the happiness which should raise him to the highest level of energetic, passionate power; which was to restore to him that sense of boundless power, that region of illimitable hope, which had been the privileges of his youth? His blood coursed wildly in his veins, every pulse, every vein, throbbed as with that earlier force.

For a moment only. The vision faded. The glorious Figure that had come before his mind's eye, the imagined rapture—all, all faded away into nothingness!

He rubbed his eyes. Where was he? In the

too, too real world. In Berlin, in the Charlottenberg Alley, with a dripping thaw everywhere; an unmistakable odor of mud; a sort of false suggestion of the odors of spring; puddles; melancholy twilight; the red glimmer of the lamps just lighted.

He stamped violently with his foot. What right had she to look down upon him? She, who had sold her youth to a man eighty years old? She, who now allowed a cynic like Enzendorff to hang about her, and coquetted at the same time with an empty fool like Linden, to provide well for herself and make her social position secure, if the worst came to the worst? She! Oh! how repulsive, how unclean, how petty was life! And then he murmured gently to himself: "Die, love and joy! die, love and light!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

At last he turned his steps homeward. As he was on the point of entering the yellow parlor he heard a peculiar, slightly veiled, vibrating voice. It pierced him through and through. Could it be possible, he asked himself? Yes, he was not mistaken. It was the voice of Lena Retz. She was seated in one of the easy-chairs, with one child on her lap, one at her right and another at her left, and was telling the little people a story. A single lamp, with a big red shade edged with lace, was on the table by the side of which she

sat, and its subdued, colored light fell direct on the group. Else was absent for the moment.

He stopped short at the door, and studied with a painful attention the young woman's face and figure. She had thrown off her hat and cloak, and had obviously come to stay. Her dress was plain enough now, some simple woolen material; but when she made a sudden movement there was the sound of rustling silk underneath. And her pale face changed its expression with wonderful quickness from mutinous gayety to soft, yielding tenderness.

It was quite clear that the story with which she was absorbing the whole attention of her little public was something very remarkable indeed. Little Lizzie, who was not yet turned two, was on her knees, and was staring at her with all her might, her eyes as wide open as possible, and evidently not knowing *what* to make of it. Little Dinchen, who was by Lena's side and had thrown her arm round her, was quivering with impatience, and her little feet were dancing as if she were on hot coals. Rodi, the six-year-old boy, a most lovely blonde fellow in sailor's costume of blue, was leaning with both arms on the easy-chair in a serious frame of mind, and trying to keep his sisters quiet that they might hear it all better.

"Papa!" suddenly cried little Lizzie, with her sweet, small twitter, in a state of high delight. Lena was suddenly dumb.

"Oh, please! more, more!" beseeched Dinchen, folding her hands with a dramatic gesture. "It

is *too* interesting!" The child had a wonderful way of picking up grown-up people's expressions. "*Oh*, papa!" she went on, "only think! Tom Thumb is riding on a tomcat through Berlin, and he's got him by the whiskers instead of reins!"

Lizzie now clapped her little hands and laughed in strong approval of that style of equitation, and looked with beaming eyes at papa, expecting him to laugh too. And lively Dinchen hopped first with one foot and then with the other, and then all the three of them threw their arms round Lena's neck and almost throttled her with their loving caresses, crying: "More, more, more!"

But Lena shook her head. "That must do for to-day," she told the children. "One of these days I'll come and see nobody but you little people; I'll come to the nursery and stay there. All that I can tell you now is that Tom Thumb soon got down from his tomcat a door or two before your mamma's butcher, and sent Tom in there to steal a sausage for him. And that must do, now!"

With these words, she held out her hand to Werner, without rising from her chair or putting little Lizzie off her lap. Her brilliant eyes had now quite a different expression; there was a peculiar softness in her glance. Its expression was almost that of shy entreaty for forgiveness.

The children drew down the corners of their mouths and an outburst of crying was threatened, when in came Else.

"At last you're back, old man!" she cried; and then, with a glance at Lena: "What do you say to this delightful surprise I've prepared to-day for you?"

"Do you really hold the reins of chance, or destiny, in your little hands, Else?" asked Werner, in his most amiable tones. The softness in Lena's eyes gave him a faint sense of happiness.

"Oh! chance is driven with no reins, and obeys no human creature," said Lena, laughingly. "His Highness Chance is the courier of Providence for special occasions, and too often makes a mess of the messages of his master. Else, on this occasion, made use of a much less important personage to forward the summons that brought me here."

"Lena, Lena! take care what you're about!" cried Else. "Now don't you begin with your rudeness again. Do you know who the uninteresting emissary really was who left that note for you? It was Werner himself!"

"Was it, really?" laughed Lena. "That's too delightful! Well, you may just as well be informed of the depth and length of your wife's treachery, Baron Schlitzing! So listen!" She pulled a note out of her pocket, and read:

"DEAR LENA—I wonder what in the world you did, yesterday, to my poor husband? He's in such a state of mind that I don't know what to do with him. If I could safely have shown my nose out of doors, I should have brought the children to you, as arranged yesterday, and read you a severe lecture for your misdeeds. But, as

it is, I can only entreat you, if you have nothing better to do, to come this evening to us, and do something to make up for your abominable conduct. I couldn't help seeing last night, at Aunt Malva's, that Werner and you were going quite the right way to get quite a wrong idea of one another.

"But I don't mean to allow it. It would pain me. You *must* learn to know each other better. If you can't come to-day, do to-morrow—any time that suits you, to dinner or afterward. I am really sick and obliged to stay at home.

"THY ELSE."

Lena read this letter in comically pathetic tones, emphasizing some words strongly, and darting a glance at Werner, now and then. And when she had finished she held out her hand to him with a sweet smile, and said: "Well, it seems that we have no choice in the matter, Baron Schlitzing, we must really 'know each other better.' The commander-in-chief has issued her orders in the affair, and we'd better give in with the best grace we can!"

Werner kissed the hand she held out to him, and asked himself how it was that in the last quarter of an hour the world seemed to him altogether changed for the better.

"Well, this is a famous piece of luck, and I think I've managed capitally. What a good thing that you had no other plans for to-day!" said Else, triumphantly.

"*Had* I no other plans for to-day?" asked Lena.

"No! had you, really?" said Else, opening her eyes wide.

"Yes, I had, really!" laughed Lena, "a whole heap of other plans; but none so good as this."

"Now, Werner—do speak the truth—*isn't* she nice?" cried Else, patting her friend's shoulder. "There's nobody in the world can be so nice as Lena, when she gives her feelings fair play!"

His only reply was an awkward smile, and Else went on: "And now, tell us, what were all those plans for to-day you've given up?"

"Well, first, dinner at the Wesels; then we'd planned to go to the opera; then to the French Embassy."

"Lena! it makes my head swim!" interrupted Else. "And you mean to say you've given up all that for a spoiled evening, with a couple of tiresome old things like us?"

"Oh, dear! If you only knew what real delight your few lines gave me!" said Lena, in a half-whisper, nestling close to her friend.

Miss Miller, the children's nursery-governess, now came on the scene to take the little ones to supper, and there ensued a quite affecting leave-taking.

One little thing after the other cried to the new aunt: "You'll come again soon, won't you —quite soon? You've promised to come to the nursery for us, for nobody else; don't forget!" At last they got the little pack out of the room.

"And now, Lena," Else entreated—she seemed bent on showing her friend off—"if you are really nice you'll play us something on the piano. Why, she plays wonderfully, Werner! Haven't I told you about it? No? Really! Well, if she's

good she'll let you see for yourself. My husband loves music above everything, and the poor little tinkle, which is all that I can bring out of the keys, is very unsatisfactory to him. Now, Lena, *please* play!"

"Oh! if it will give you any pleasure, I will, gladly," said Lena. "But my hand is out of order, quite out," she pointed to the fourth finger of her right hand. "However, as my good will is great, and your indulgence, no doubt, quite as great, we'll try what we can do, anyway."

She seated herself at the piano, which Werner had politely opened for her.

It was a fine Bechstein grand, with a warm, singing tone. It had been a wedding-present to Else, and very little used; it was nearly as good as new.

She began a prelude of Chopin, quite piano, and rather unsteadily.

She was no consummate artist, but she had qualities often wanting in female artists of the greatest distinction who, too frequently, seem to be bent chiefly on proving that they can get quite as much noise out of the instrument as any man of them all. But Lena did not care in the least about playing like a "man"; quite otherwise. Her playing was feminine to a degree; seductive, tender; and her touch was lovely, at once light and yet deeply penetrating. She seemed, if one might so speak, to coax the sounds out of the keys. Unfortunately, she jumbled the more bravura passages a little. Her playing was unequal, consisted of elements not adjusted

to a complete, harmonious whole. It was so with her, throughout, poor girl!

After the prelude, she gave them a nocturne. And then took her hands from the keys.

"Oh, go on!" cried Else; "don't be so stingy! Isn't it true, Werner—doesn't she play charmingly?"

"Nay, Else! don't put a pistol to your husband's head, like that!" said Lena, with a blush. She was getting excited.

"Nay, nay, countess, do pray grant me your gracious permission to speak my mind for myself!" cried Werner, who began to thaw.

"*Well*, then?" She looked mockingly at him.

"Oh! if you question me in that tone you'll scare me so that my thoughts won't be able to come at all!" he replied. "I can only say that I'm simply charmed with your playing—simply charmed!"

"She plays much more prettily than Ryder-Smythe," pronounced Else; "isn't it true, Werner?"

"Certainly the countess gives me far greater pleasure," he replied. "The American youth's performance seems to me like that of an ourang-outang, or gorilla of genius; or, at all events, like what an animal of that species might conceivably be brought to do under some supernatural training. The gorilla would have all the distracting fluency, cleverness and brute force that Ryder-Smythe has. But he has not a particle of tenderness, true sentiment, idealism—all, in a word, that constitutes the difference between

man and other animals. Instead of all that, he has a certain demoniac fire, a certain complacent violence. He treats the piano like some sort of living creature which it gives him pleasure to ill-treat, while the countess—" He stopped suddenly.

"While *I?*" she asked, teasingly. "Oh, dear! my poor little playing doesn't give any room for saying any more of such clever things, I'm afraid!"

Werner turned red, and Else said: "Don't upset him like that again! I'm quite sure he was going to say something quite nice to you; and now you've put it out of his head!"

"Oh, Heavens! what a pity! Can't you think of it again, Baron Schlitzing?" coaxed Lena. "I am so fond of having nice things said to me!"

He could not help smiling. "Well, *you* caress the piano with a sort of tender, compassionate embrace, as if it were some soul in prison which could find its voice only under your liberating hand."

"Now, wasn't that charmingly said?" cried Else, looking up at her husband in high admiration.

Lena only laughed, and Werner said: "I had not the least idea how gentle and tender you could be before I heard you play; and now I ask myself whether you are capable, under any circumstances, of treating a human being as well as you do the piano?"

The young man had had a good deal of practice in phrase-making, of the sweet variety, in

his intercourse with the "intellectual" ladies, previously mentioned; and he availed himself of it now.

Lena looked at him curiously and reflectively. But, instead of replying, she started off with a melancholy andante from one of Schubert's sonatas; and then modulated into Schumann's C Major Fantasia. The weakness of her fingers was quite unmistakable in the more difficult passages of that very difficult work. Her hand might almost be said to limp a little. But there was a certain charm even in this little defect. It was something like a little lisp in the utterance of a beautiful and thoughtful woman.

Her playing took such hold of Werner that he drew near, and threw himself into a chair where he could see her face as she played. Its expression had become much more intense and oblivious of outer things. She was paler than ever, and her eyes were half closed. Her mouth trembled slightly with repressed tenderness. There was not a particle of grimace or affectation in her whole bearing.

And, as he gazed upon her, he could not help strongly thinking that, restless, vivacious, uncertain creature as she seemed, all her soul might possibly, under some circumstances, be enveloped wholly by some flame of unusual strength, light and warmth, some fire that might really deserve to be described as noble and sacred.

Then, all of a sudden, he felt a constriction of his throat. Why, *why* could he not help recalling to his mind, now again, that union of hers

with an aged, outworn spouse? Why *would* it come up again and spoil the image of her altogether?

One might almost fancy that Lena felt at once that some sentiment, antipathetic and hostile to her, was in the air, and not far off. Her playing became confused, and in a few moments she found it impossible to go on. She took her hands from the keys with an impatient little sigh, and looking with surprise at Werner, said: "Oh, what a gloomy countenance! What *are* you thinking of? The agreeable things I said to you last night? Well, I was very sorry for them afterward, I was indeed. I had no right to jump to unkind conclusions about you like that, without knowing any particulars of the case. I see that, and I've been very amiable, unusually amiable for me, in my efforts to atone for my headlong utterances. But they seem to have missed the mark with you. It's quite clear that it's only for Else's sake that you can bring yourself to treat me with a little humanity. Directly her back is turned, you're just as bad as ever!"

"Nay, I beg of you, countess!"

"But where *is* Else?" asked Lena. It was quite clear that it gave her small satisfaction, just now, to be alone with him.

"Else is gone in to the little ones. She always makes a last tourney of inspection in the nursery after the imps have been put to bed."

"Take me to the children. I should like to bid them good-night too," begged Lena.

"Another time, Lena," cried Else, who came

in at that moment and heard her friend's request. "The brats are pretty well asleep by now, and supper is served. Supper, ladies and gentlemen, supper. Give Lena your arm, Werner. I hope she feels quite at home and will enjoy it. It's quite true I haven't much to tempt her with."

No, it was not much: Tea, cold meat, baked potatoes, butter from Nassau—wonderful fresh butter—Rhenish fruit compotes and preserved apricots. But how comfortable it all looked under the hanging lamp, how cozy and sweet!

Lena's eyes were riveted to the table as though she had never seen the like before. She was enchanted with all this homely comfortableness, and could not find words sufficiently fond and kind to express her delight.

"How funny you are!" laughed Else. "You seem just as astonished at our simple domestic arrangements as anybody else would be at the greatest rarities on earth!"

"But it is the greatest of rarities to me," said Lena. "You can't think how sweet this domestic atmosphere is to me, and how comfortable I feel here in your house, Else! I have lived through so much and seen so much, no doubt! I have had privileges that I never dreamed of, have become personally acquainted with so many interesting people, with a goodly half of the celebrities and personages of Europe, I may say; but there is one thing I never have had in all my life. And that is a share in what is the greatest luxury of all, the warmth and poetry of true domestic life. I've been a more or less frozen-up creat-

ure in the midst of all that splendor, and I'm only too thankful to have the chance of thawing a little at your warm hearth!" The tears came into her eyes as she said this, but she laughed off her emotion at once, and, turning to Else, said: "Another potato, Else, child. I don't think there's anything in this world quite so good as a baked potato, and I'm as hungry as a soldier after a big fight. *Isn't* a soldier always very hungry after a big fight, baron? You ought to know, who were one of the performers in the great German drama of 1870. You were, weren't you?"

"Certainly, countess," he answered, with a smile. "I made one in that campaign; and I feel warranted, therefore, in asking you to speak a little more respectfully of that greatest moment of the century; at least, so far as our Germany is concerned."

"Oh! I didn't mean any disrespect to it, indeed I didn't!" said Lena.

"I'm glad to have your assurance of that," said Werner; "without that I should not have felt at all certain."

"Oh, your great German campaign is something which, of course, impresses me to the utmost, as must one of the most wonderful episodes in all history. But all war is a mere horror to me, nothing but a horror, a horror!" she exclaimed.

"And to me too," agreed Else, with a shudder.

"But for all that," continued Lena, "I'm very glad that I've come into the world before that

age so many long for, when all danger of wars will have been set aside forever. Those privileged times, I expect, if they ever come, will witness a great decline in the level of masculine force and character. For, after all, the most attractive masculine quality is courage, to me, at least. Perhaps the reason of that is that I'm the most cowardly creature myself in the world."

Werner laughed, and Else asked: "Another egg, Lena?"

"Please," replied Lena, holding out her hand for it, and then, as she cracked the shell with her little silver spoon: "*That's* settled. War *is* a horrible thing. Don't you think so, Baron Schlitzing?"

"No; I think it's a very fine thing indeed!" said Werner.

"Oh, well! when a man has staked his life on the game, as you have, he has a sort of right to think so and say so," said Lena; "and as you may very probably have a chance of doing so more than once before you die, I'll overlook the barbarism of your views. I suppose you did feel nothing but exaltation of mind when you were in the thick of it all, judging from what you said just now?"

"Yes, indeed! nothing but exaltation; and I'll say that as strongly as I can, at the risk of encountering your ridicule, countess," Werner observed, somewhat awkwardly. "I was twenty years old then—let that serve as some excuse for my illusions—the words Fatherland, Country, were somewhat new to us then; we Germans had

had no better word than 'home' in our mouths for some time. And the long and the short of it is that those words 'Fatherland,' 'Country,' worked like magic on my imagination. I was penetrated through and through by a sense of the sacredness of our purpose in that campaign, of the grandeur of the national uprising; I was proud to have a share in so great a work, it made me feel important in my own eyes. Just try to realize all that, countess. A twenty-year-old ensign, proud of a share in a national uprising, giving himself airs in consequence! Why, you can't help laughing at the idea, can you, countess?"

Werner had never lost his fear of seeming ridiculous.

"What do you expect me to laugh at?" asked Lena.

"Why, at the idea that there ever was a moment in my life when I could seem of any importance to myself!" said Werner. Then, shrugging his shoulders, he added: "That's a blunder I never fall into now, I assure you!"

"Well, I think you make a very great mistake in that!" said Lena, in a tone of humorous remonstrance. "We never should accomplish anything, on a small or a large scale, if we didn't attribute a little importance to ourselves when about it. That notion of self-importance has a root of madness in it, if pushed too far; but, after all, it's the only thing that saves humanity from creeping about on all fours. The madness I speak of is known in the vernacular as Idealism."

"Oh! my Idealism is all spent and gone!" said Werner, gloomily. "It's some time now since *I* did anything else but creep about on all fours."

"Werner! how can you say such horrible things?" cried Else, reproachfully.

"Why, what would you have?" he grumbled. "It's nothing but the simplest truth. I generally keep it to msyelf; but sometimes it will out, in spite of me! Then"—he went on, without observing how deadly pale his little wife had grown—"if anybody had foretold to me then, in that year seventy, what a pitiful Philistine I should develop into, I should have thought he raved. Father of mercies! how glorious it was then! It was the most glorious epoch of my life, quite!"

"Werner!" said Else, faintly.

Now he looked closely at her. "What's the matter with you?" he asked. "What makes you look so wretchedly, all of a sudden?"

"How can I help looking wretched, when I hear you say such things?" she murmured.

"What things? All that about the war?" he exclaimed. "Oh, you mustn't take it so, you dear little affectionate lamb, you! All that has nothing to do with the happiness I've had with you, old woman. You ought to know that well enough! But the war *was* fine, grand; I really can't help saying so. Not merely because of the victories, and of the glory it brought us. No, its real grandeur was for quite other reasons, quite! We all of us rose far, far out of our na-

tive mediocrity in that memorable time," he exclaimed; "all our thoughts, all our sentiments, took on a largeness and grandeur of which ordinary life knows nothing. That radical, underlying grandeur of humanity, which one has to take on trust in times of peace without seeing anything of it, we then saw manifesting itself a hundred times every day. We really then had a chance for once in our lives of seeing to what a pitch of intensity man's greatness of soul may be wrought, to what tension its strings may be drawn without snapping. People speak of the brutal coarseness of war, and how it degrades man to the level of the beasts. Well, I can only testify that I never was one of such an immense mass of my fellow-men, in whom all the lower sentiments were all but so entirely wiped out; envy, vanity, self-seeking, covetousness, and all that. While it was only a bare three weeks after peace had been proclaimed when you saw all those ugly tendencies working again as actively as ever, in spite of all that enthusiasm. Why, when the war was going on we never thought of such basenesses! It was 'each for all, and all for Fatherland!' "

When Werner uttered these spirited observations he seemed quite a changed creature. He looked seven years younger. And every moment seemed to transform him more and more back again to the image of that young idealist, with the warm blood coursing through his veins, whom a pale girl in parting from had, in the overflow of her grateful soul, kissed on the forehead.

And this was really the first time, since he had come together with Lena again, that he could be said to have addressed an observation directly to herself.

But Else, on the other hand, was quite distressed and uneasy at this retrospective enthusiasm of his. "Don't agitate yourself so," she entreated. "You won't have a wink of sleep again all night!"

But he had begun, and nothing could stop him. "Oh, what does it signify whether I sleep or not?" he exclaimed. "I've slept away nearly half my life, as it is! It does me all the good in the world to think and talk over those times again. It's the only time in my life, at least, when I, in my modest sphere, was able to do something, to be something, to accomplish something! And we men must have some field of activity or other, if we are not—"

He stopped short, with a startled movement. Else had suddenly burst into tears.

"If you had read Jean Paul, my Else, you'd have known this much which you don't quite yet," said Lena, trying, a little awkwardly it must be confessed, to jest the matter off. "'Woman's life can be quite well filled with loving, but man must be up and at something else at intervals, besides.'"

"It's a great pity, then, that I didn't read up Jean Paul before it was too late!" observed Else.

The general amiability and good temper were certainly somewhat imperiled, and might have failed miserably and altogether, had not Else's

thoughts been suddenly diverted from the painful direction they had taken by the entry of the man-servant, who handed her a parcel. It was two hours since it arrived, he said, but the maid who took it in had forgotten it.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ELSE turned the parcel about in every direction and examined the handwriting of the address. Then she suddenly gave a little wild cry of delight. "From Asta, from Frankfurt!" she exclaimed. "It's the horseshoe cakes! She always sends me horseshoe cakes as a memento about this season. Please cut the string, Werner. That's it!"

And then she began to unwrap something very industriously from rustling paper, which proved to be cakes, shaped like a horseshoe and with a glaze of sugar on them. The poor things looked as if they had suffered a good deal on the journey, and the sugar glaze, particularly, had almost entirely crumbled off. But that did not prevent Else welcoming them with every manifestation of delight, and she broke off a piece of one of them without delay and bit into it with her sound white teeth.

"Won't you try some, Lena?" asked Else.

"Thanks, no. After your good supper I've no fancy for stale biscuits," replied Lena.

"They taste splendid," said Else, gravely.

"Yes, they taste of your youth," said Werner,

tapping his young wife's cheek, on which the tears were still hanging. He would have liked to set the "horseshoes" in a gilt frame, so grateful was he to them for dissipating the little burst of misery which he had so imprudently occasioned.

"He's quite right," said Else, with great seriousness. "Those horseshoe cakes have a history attached to them. Oh, you know it, Lena?"

"Indeed I don't, not a bit."

"Well. Horseshoe cakes were my first love, they were indeed."

"Really?" asked Lena, much amused. "What do you say to that, Baron Schlitzing?"

"Oh, I don't think it will turn out as bad as it looks, countess," laughed Werner. "But tell us all about it, darling."

"I don't quite like to, before Lena," said the young woman, with a roguish look that showed she meant anything but what she said.

"Oh, I say, Else!" laughed her husband.

"Well, then, on your responsibility," she said, and went on: "I was fourteen years old then, and at a boarding-school at Frankfurt, and I had quite a passion for horseshoe cakes and very little pocket-money. Besides, it was strictly forbidden to smuggle sweets into the school. It was then that I made my first conquest—our writing-master. He was a big, red-haired fellow, and he had his red hair arranged in a sort of screw over his forehead, and he wore blue spectacles and green cravats in the bargain.

He used to give me such sentimental, sidelong looks that it was not long before all my schoolfellows used to make merry over his 'enamored glances,' as they called them, Asta first and foremost. She was my greatest friend just then. It was she who betrayed to him my passion for horseshoe cakes. Then, goodness knows how it all happened, I don't now; one day, the beginning of March it was, I was taking the air as innocently as you please in the chestnut avenue—and Asta was with me—and there came the writing-master. He had a big parcel in his hand, and he gave me a glance which, I am sure, was enough to melt the very spectacles on his nose. He untied the parcel, and the smell of the horseshoe cakes — delightful things!—reached me at once, and—well, to cut it short, and you may just think about it as you please, I bought those horseshoe cakes with a kiss. Yes, it's a fact. I gave him a kiss, and wiped my mouth with my pocket-handkerchief without a moment's delay. And I assure you the cakes were delicious. Then we made a treaty. Every Saturday afternoon he was to bring me horseshoe cakes, and he was to get one kiss for them, and Asta was witness to the compact. Then, one Saturday afternoon he comes along without horseshoe cakes; hadn't been able to get any, and yet he wanted his kiss. But I was quite firm. 'Certainly not,' I said; 'no cakes, no kiss!' And then we made him a deep courtesy, Asta and I, and ran off laughing so that we didn't know what to do

with ourselves. And when the others saw us they insisted upon knowing what was up, and we told them; and there was every girl in the school laughing till they could hardly stand. Hm! But the sad thing was that the thing came to Madame's ears, and the writing-master was sent to the right-about. I got off with a severe lecture. But my passion for horseshoe cakes is so well known, that whenever I show my face in Frankfurt I'm regularly snowed under with horseshoe cakes, like Tarpeia was with the bracelets; and we all still have a good laugh about the price at which I sold my first kiss—cheap, wasn't it? for a horseshoe. But I tell you I think I made a very good thing out of that trade."

Else had reeled off her little story, with all her simple, natural drollery, without taking any notice of her friend's face, and now looked up at it. But she didn't find there the unqualified amusement she expected.

"Why, you don't laugh at all!" she exclaimed; and then, turning to her husband: "I've shocked her, I knew I should."

"No, no, no!" cried Lena. "I'm not so stupid as that comes to. Shall I tell you, Else, what I was thinking about while you were telling us your little story?"

"Well, what?" asked Else, still somewhat puzzled, and almost put out in consequence.

"I was thinking of the difference in our bringing up. When I was fourteen years old I had already grown too far out of simple childhood

to be able to give my writing-master a kiss for cakes. A kiss was always something that meant mountains, even when—"

Else, still somewhat irritated, did not let her finish her sentence, but struck in: "Well, then, if that's so, it makes me all the more curious to know, if you please, who it was that got *your* first kiss."

Werner could not help it. His eyes fastened themselves on Lena directly, and all the blood shot into her face. The scarlet blush made her look quite young again, as young as on that day in Eltville, when he held her dripping form in his arms and warmed her back to life again on his breast.

"My first kiss—" she stammered, confusedly, and could go no further.

Then Else leaned forward with both her elbows on the table, and asked defiantly: "Do you really mean to say that you kept it for your husband?"

Lena recoiled with a quick shiver, just as if she had received a sudden blow. She drew a deep breath before she could bring out a word, and then said: "The first kiss Count Retz had from me, was when he was on his death-bed." Then, avoiding Werner's eyes and Else's both, and fixing her gaze on the table-cloth, she went on—her throat showing marked signs of constriction as she did so—"Yes, for the first time it was, when he was taking leave of me forever. We had become much attached to each other. And, before the end, he said that it was a great

grief to him that I was not his daughter. But I hardly felt any difference, adopted child of his though I only was. I mourned him and missed him as if he had really been my father." She rose from her seat. "And now, good-night, Else," said she, drawing the young woman to her bosom; "good-night, and accept my hearty thanks for having me here to-night. Such a pleasure has been a rare thing in my life. Don't be too sorry for it, hereafter, that you have afforded me the gratification."

"Too sorry for it!" cried Else. "How could that ever, ever be possible." She was terribly ashamed and cast down now. "Oh, forgive me, Lena, forgive me!"

"I have nothing to forgive," said Lena, clasping and kissing her again. "God protect you, my angel!"

"And you must come again soon, quite, quite soon!" Else entreated, in her most coaxing way.

"Yes, indeed, quite soon, if you will permit me!" said Lena. "Why, you haven't the least idea how delightful it is to me to come! And now, adieu!"

"No, no; wait till the servant fetches a carriage for you!" begged Else.

"Oh, such a few steps it is to the hotel, I can walk very well! The streets are well lighted, and I'm fond of walking."

"Well, Brunn (their servant) must go with you," decided Else, reaching to the bell.

"Will you permit me to escort you?" said Werner. "It will give me pleasure, and I'm

afraid Brunn won't care for it at all." His eyes seemed filled with sympathy.

"Oh, well, if you put it that way—" Lena shrugged her shoulders and smiled.

"How prettily he behaves to you! I never saw him behave so nicely before," said Else. "I am so pleased that you are beginning to get on well together. Now, come again soon, Lena, I entreat you, as soon as possible."

The same odorous breath of spring, which had been merely pain to Werner that afternoon in the park, was in the trees of the squares when they emerged from the Leipzig Place—Werner and the young woman. In the afternoon it had distressed him; now he drank large draughts of it with satisfaction.

The sky was one light cloud, mist rather than cloud, and the light of the stars penetrated it easily.

At first they went along, side by side, without a word. Then Lena looked up to Werner suddenly, and said: "Baron Schlitzing, this evening has taught me that my conduct to you last night was not merely ill-bred, but positively unfair and unjust. And, after this frank confession, will you allow me the privilege of putting a question to you?"

"All the questions in the world, countess."

"Well, then, how was it that you gave up your military career, loving that vocation as you did?"

"How was it?" he repeated, hoarsely. "That's

a long story. Else was quite miserable in Berlin; she couldn't stand the climate; she was like a dear little transplanted tree, and couldn't thrive in the new soil."

"So it was purely on Else's account that you left the service?"

"She entreated me to do so."

"And if you had refused?"

"She would have submitted; but I should have caused her much suffering."

Lena Retz opened her eyes wide. "What a thing to say! Do you suppose that any one can go through life preserving strength and integrity of character without causing suffering to somebody? The bitterest trials which a man of worth has to undergo are precisely those which come from the duty or necessity of paining those he most loves. Weakness is always most dangerous in us when its nearest neighbor is goodness of heart."

"Yes; but—" said Werner, "but in the case we're speaking of, where there was no clear right or wrong; I was puzzled to know what *was* my duty."

"Your duty was to look the consequences of any course you took square in the face, and to make up your mind whether you had strength to bear them," said Lena, reflectively. "And I think that is so whenever you take some step of more than usual importance. But, how awfully I'm preaching to you! Please don't laugh at me!"

"Oh, pray, countess, quite the contrary, I

assure you! You've no idea how much good that serious tone of yours does me. I should like always to see you as serious as that. And, besides, I should be so thankful to tell you all about my life, thankful for you to understand it. I can't do that with Else; she has pain enough without that. Poor angel! So I swallow it all, all the time, and it makes me ill, quite ill. If I were not afraid of boring you, I should like to tell you the whole story from top to bottom. And then you'd see how it is that bit by bit I've become such a pitiful, contemptible loafer, how little I can help it, and how much I suffer under it."

"I look forward to your telling me all about it," she replied. "I couldn't help being quite wretchedly sorry for you when you said all that about the war. But you are still so young. You surely will be able to discover some sure and firm direction for your life. The suffering you complain of cannot be more than transitory, it will surely pass."

He looked at her gratefully. She spoke with such heartfelt sincerity and conviction that he wanted badly to believe it was as she said, almost, indeed, did so. And, even if what she prophesied could not be, it was a comfort to hear such things.

"Perhaps you will be able to discover some medicine for my sick life," he said; and she answered, sweetly:

"Well, I'll try."

By this time they were in the hall of the

hotel. She was just about to enter the elevator when she looked back at him over her shoulder and laughed: "What do you say to this? It's just come into my head: I was to dance the cotilion to-night at the French Embassy with Enzendorff, and Linden was to take me in to supper! What excuse am I to give?"

"You must say that you were suddenly taken ill," laughed Werner. He was as pleased as a child.

"Nothing of the sort. I shall say that I gossiped with Else and you till it was too late—let come what will. Telling fibs is not in my line at all. Good-night!"

She stepped into the elevator and was carried off, as if by magic, it seemed to his fancy. And "Good-night" she called to him again in her vibrating voice as she shot up, and he looked up the shaft and exclaimed:

"Good-night!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FROM that evening Lena's intercourse with the Schlitzings was that of a member of the family rather than of a friend, so close and confidential was it. Hardly a day passed without her coming in, for one reason or another. The simple, unpretending delight it gave her to partake of the domestic life of her friends, and her gratitude to them for the privilege of being one of them, would have been quite moving to any one ac-

quainted with all the facts; but it would have been even more alarming to any one deeply versed in knowledge of the human heart.

Very soon she was quite as much at home in the nursery as Else herself. She could spend hours in telling stories to the little ones, playing at dolls and soldiers with them; and wonderfully dramatic and intense were the situations she invented for developing and displaying the characters of Miss Doll and Mr. Soldier. When any one of the children fell sick, she installed herself at its little bed and petted and nursed it as if she were its mother. She generally turned up at half-past nine in the morning, to see little Lizzie giggle and scream and splash in her bath. And it was her greatest delight when she was allowed to perform all the rest of the ceremony herself, to take the little white, kicking thing out of the water, rub its little body dry, and, at last, after no end of kissing and teasing, tuck it up in its warm little bed again. Poor Lena!

And she lavished the same indefatigable and motherly tenderness on the young mother too. She managed to procure her all sorts of amusements, introduced her to leading personages, dragged her out of her mouse-hole—as Lena called it—and forced her to go out and enjoy herself. She overhauled all Else's wardrobe. Else could scarcely be said to have gone out into the world at all since her father's illness began, and all her things were old-fashioned and smacked of Wiesbaden; while Lena was fresh from Paris.

Berlin, up to this time, had not at all realized how beautiful Else Schlitzing really was. Else herself had had no idea of it. She was innocently delighted with the conquests she now made, and with the general homage she received; but her greatest pleasure was always in thinking what Werner would say to it.

She was now "celebrated" as she had never been since the days when the Pearl of the Taunus was the spoiled favorite—no, nothing could spoil Else—of all Rhineland. And the Rhinelanders in Berlin were, naturally, those who took the chiefest pride in their Queen Else, and made a little guard of honor, attending upon her wherever she showed herself.

Lena's delight at her friend's success knew no bounds. She never seemed to care for herself at all, or give a thought to her toilet.

She never seemed to suspect that she always looked like a great picture from a master-hand, the picture of an aristocrat of the first water, all the more wonderful because of a dash of gipsy poetry which heightened her aristocratic flavor. Or, if she had any suspicion of her imposing appearance, no one could guess it, so little importance did she seem to attach to the admiring enthusiasm which followed her everywhere. She received the attentions of which she was the object with equal seeming indifference—Linden's homage, so evidently that of a suitor for her hand, and Enzendorff's more ambiguous but impassioned enthusiasm. Her own sex, in their envy of her, stamped her as a coquette, a cold

coquette, too, said the ladies. Perhaps their anger was founded mainly on the circumstance that they were obliged to stick to envy, whereas they would so very much have preferred contempt.

Else was always foremost in defending her friend from both charges, of coldness and of coquetry.

"There isn't in all Berlin a more affectionate and unpretending person than my Lena!" she insisted. And well Else knew it. Wasn't Lena ready to give up a cotilion with a prince of the blood any evening, to spend it in simple, quiet, affectionate talk with Else and her Werner?

That, on such occasions, Werner's attention was entirely taken up by Lena didn't jar on Else in the least. On the contrary, she was glad to see that he could talk freely again to somebody, delighted beyond measure at his increased cheerfulness since Lena was so much with them. And she was too inexperienced to know that all remedies, for all situations, which are so very drastic and quick in their operation, are apt to have disastrous after-effects.

And Werner, too, would have been infuriated if anybody had ventured to draw his attention to the fact that, in his relations with Lena, he was traveling somewhat dangerously near to regions of feeling which are all danger. He sincerely believed that his feeling for her was one of honest comradeship, so to speak. She was no more than a good comrade, with whom it was, he quite admitted to himself, pleasant to be; but

that point was merely accidental; she was a good friend, to whom he was able to pour out his heart; to whom he was able to show how and why it was that his life was such a failure and mess; who was able to bring to all he said a man's intelligence, which was very agreeable, and a woman's sympathy, which was very much more so.

He found that she incited him to renewal of endeavor, and, yet more, to renewal of hope. His interest in men and things, which had all but died out, began to revive.

He never tired of chatting with her. Her culture and her education were really deep and wide; but the great point of all was her native intelligence, so unusually clear and strong. Her judgment was almost unfailing, and it was wholly free from pedantic self-sufficiency, being at once serious and surprisingly quick, and very pleasant in its manifestations. And her criticisms being, as often as not, wrapped up in what looked like witty nonsense, never offended.

In fact, she was so mortally afraid of anything like preaching, any sort of intellectual pretentiousness, everything which, in England, people call, shortly, "priggishness," that she sometimes fell into the opposite extreme of grotesqueness and caricature in her ways of putting things. But this defect in her, if it was such, soon ceased. She became simpler and simpler every day; the pattern of her became less and less motley; the brilliancy was subdued; and her spirit seemed to soften and, by the same process,

become gradually endowed with a more peaceful and higher illumination.

There was scarcely a thing which Werner was not able freely to discuss with her. In the close society of Count Retz, one of the keenest intellects of his time, she had thoroughly learned the distinction between true and false modesty, between true feeling and affected. And his teachings herein did no more than develop her own natural bent. She had eyes which were inexorably acute to observe any moral situations open to criticism; but her charity for offenders against social rules was great; flavored, however, with the contempt inevitable in the case of any woman who holds the flag of morality as high as possible, and recoils with disgust from the bare idea of its infraction; as was the case with Lena Retz.

Her opinions, on all political and social subjects, were anti-revolutionary all round. In fact, she was so conservative that she was all but Philistine on this side of her mind. She saw human weaknesses in the dry light of pure judgment, and never failed to insist that they should be handled with a gentle but a prudent and firm restraint. For any poor, shrinking sinners of her sex who made no boast of themselves, but very much the contrary, she had always some word of tender and compassionate pity. But for the high-flying women of culture and position, who traded in theories of the passions, and were always on the lookout for something to "satisfy their hearts," she had the

deepest disgust. And endless was the scorn she poured upon such creatures in her talks with Werner. Those who knew her only superficially were usually made quite uncomfortable by the apparent predominance of her head over her heart. But her heart flew to her head very easily; and, then, she permitted herself a little debauch of emotion, in which she would enchant everybody by her lavish and warm display of feeling. There was generally a speedy reaction after this, when she was drier and more sober than ever, and was quite angry with herself for letting her heart get out on her sleeve as she had done. But, in spite of these occasional and brief outbursts, Werner was disposed to agree, in some measure, with the Berlin ladies who pronounced her cold. However, he did so with an important difference. Her "coldness" was no defect in his eyes; rather one of her merits. It was equivalent to sobriety and judgment, and of specially high value to him, pursued as he was all the time, as he only too well knew, by the opposite fault of a too great readiness to be kindled into flame and fire.

He had certainly become a new man since she entered so largely into his life. He began again to forge plans for his future, to read books on various subjects, in order to discuss them with her, and he went with Else and her, now and then, to the theater. Before then he used to let the groom take off the edge of his horse's temper before he rode it; but now he exercised on the most fiery horse every day at the riding-school,

in the company of Lena and Linden, under the pretext—of Else's devising—that he was chaperoning them. And, when Linden had no time, he rode alone with her.

What did the world say to it all? Well, the "world" noticed nothing of it, and would not have said anything if it had.

And Else? Else was as proud as possible of this bond of friendship between Lena and Werner, and persuaded herself that it had been brought about by herself alone; she looked on the sympathy which the two felt for one another as a feather in her own cap. Anybody who should have come forward to arrest the march of events, and interpose a warning as to the consequences of these somewhat thoughtless doings, would have been simply repulsed by her as a worthless slanderer, judging things by the standard of his own mean, vulgar nature, and incapable of understanding the spotless and inviolable purity of really noble people.

Even Lena, who was by far the most sensible of the three, had no presentiment of danger. How could she? She knew the purity of her own heart; she knew that if ever a woman was sheltered from wrongdoing by the utmost principle and pride of morality, she was that woman; and she loved Else as fully and as fondly as one woman could love another.

But one thing she did not know. She did not know how easily passion can slip through any cordon of sentinels; how unsafe from its inroads is the very purest of hearts; how many and how

skillful are the disguises it assumes to steal into the very citadel of life. She had no idea of its dangerous twistings and windings; how it masks itself under a thousand different noble sentiments and feelings. She had no idea of its insidious way of presenting itself as a simple innocent, innocuous thing, lulling into slumber the most incorruptible conscience under one pretext or another, carefully guarding the secret of its own character and power, but steadily pursuing its own terrible object and purposes all the while. Lena knew a great deal; but of all this she knew absolutely nothing.

How should she? She was now eight-and-twenty. And, with the exception of that little episode at Eltville, and the emotions connected with it, nothing had ever happened to her to make her heart beat quicker for a single moment.

And how could she attach any serious importance to that old story? She felt herself, now, so very much Werner's superior in force of character, yes, and in knowledge of the world too; why, he was something like a child in her hands. All this was true enough in its way, still—

* * * * * * * *

"You're the best creature in the world, Lena!" said Else, one day, to her friend; "only, there's one bone I have to pick with you, and that's about your shocking behavior to poor Edmund."

"What's the shocking behavior?" asked Lena.

"Why, you just keep him dangling at the end of a thread; you won't cut it and let him go, and don't intend that anything shall come of it!"

"Oh! well, say it out! You mean that I am playing the coquette with him?" asked Lena.

"You know that I never will allow anybody to say a word against you; but, in this matter, you do seem a little blameworthy, to speak the honest truth! And I can't understand what you are at!"

"What I'm at is simple enough. It's to provoke the envy of the other Berlin ladies at my having such a highly respectable adorer," said Lena, as seriously as possible.

"It's to regale yourself with the sight of the squirmings of your victim, Lena," laughed Werner.

Else had made the notable discovery that Lena and herself were distantly related; and, in consequence, had insisted upon it that her husband and her friend should consider themselves cousins, and address each other by their Christian names.

"Don't say such hateful things, you!" said Else, shaking her head at him. Among her many pathetic peculiarities, one was the habit of taking everything too seriously and literally. She went on: "I can't believe it possible that Lena would feed her vanity at the cost of another person's sufferings, and certainly not when that other is such a dear, good, noble-minded fellow as Edmund. If she's leading Enzendorff a bit of a dance, it's no more than the man deserves; still I can't imagine how anybody can see any fun at all in doing it with a man of his sort!"

"I do find Enzendorff amusing, for my part," Lena declared; "a chat with him is far from unpleasant, I assure you! There's a good deal in him that annoys me, I confess; but still I don't feel any antipathy to him. He's a man of great discrimination, and is not wanting in a certain sense of justice and right; keen-witted men very rarely are. And he has never done or said anything to me that I can take exception to. He follows me about a good deal, there's no denying that; but his conduct to me has never deviated in the least from the strictest propriety. And I'm not exactly an angel, my dears. One has one's little vanities. And the respectful regard of such a notorious despiser of women as Enzendorff is a little flattering, after all."

"Don't you be so confident and certain that it's all right!" replied Else, with the amusing air of maternal superiority and guardianship which she had adopted toward her more mature friend. "Selfish, spoiled men like Enzendorff are never quite to be trusted. And the wretch thinks himself irresistible; not without some reason, too, if all that people say is to be believed!"

"Well, I congratulate those ladies who allow him to fall at their feet, if such there are," said Lena, dryly. Then she paused a little, shrugged her shoulders, and went on: "I can understand a woman's marrying a cynic; that's simple enough, for there are cynics and cynics, there's cynicism and cynicism. But what I can't understand at all is a woman letting a cynic make

love to her. But, of course, an idealist is quite different." As she said these words, her eyes seemed to be looking at something quite far off, and some feeling seemed to subdue their usual brilliancy. "Only, I fear greatly that there are some situations in which a man's idealism is not exactly fireproof, however aspiring it may be."

"With all respect for the soundness of your judgment, Lena, I don't think you put idealism in men on a sufficiently high level," objected Werner.

"Oh! I had not the least idea of depreciating the capacity of men for idealist thinking and striving, not the least," said Lena. "I don't mean to divide men sharply into sheep and goats. Heaven protect us from a human race in which the idealist, whoever he is, would not be more or less of a Philistine when turned inside out!"

"Oh! is that how you look at it?"

"Yes, *that's* how I look at it; and, as that is so, I think that the best thing is to have as little to do with romance as possible, and keep to settled morals, settled rules and the straightforward paths of respectability."

"That's exactly what I think!" said Else, in her sincere, emphatic way.

Lena continued: "I once asked the Cardinal" —she nearly always referred to the deceased Count Retz as the Cardinal—"his opinion as to the course which persons should take, persons of both sexes, in complicated situations; and I put

to him a number of cases of that kind. His answer was to this effect: 'When I'm playing whist, and am puzzled what card to play, I stick as close as I can to the rules of the game; it saves me breaking my head, and doesn't leave me open to criticism. Play according to rule!' That was his contribution to my enlightenment. And I'll tell you a strange thing. When he was on his deathbed, his eyes sought mine, and when I bent over him he said, almost inaudibly, 'Play according to rule!' And he died with those words on his lips."

"He was a sage!" cried Else. "Play according to rule! Now shall I tell you what that means on the present occasion? It means this: Behave like a rational creature, and marry Linden! Isn't it so, Werner? Isn't it the very best thing she can do?"

"Oh! don't drive her to the wall! Give her a little time!" rejoined Werner, with a certain sharp edge in his voice.

"Your husband expresses my feeling exactly!" cried Lena. "Do give me time, a little time. Hm! You accuse me of keeping Linden on a string, of meaning nothing, of coquetting with him, or what not. Shall I tell you what it means? All the coquetry only comes to this, that I'm trying to get used to the thought of him."

"Poor Edmund!" murmured Else, compassionately. "I can't imagine why you find it so hard to finish up the matter and marry him!"

"Well, it's amusing beyond measure to hear that from you!" replied Lena, laughing, but a little vexed too. "Why in the world didn't you have him?"

"I?" laughed Else, merrily. "Of course I should, if this insupportable creature here"—she pulled Werner's hair—"hadn't come between us. I'm as certain as I stand here, that I shouldn't have thought twice about taking Linden, if I hadn't fallen in love with my old monster here. And I did that almost as soon as I set eyes on him. He took much longer about it, the villain, and he hasn't quite caught up with me yet. But, as you have no such conclusive reason for declining Linden—"

Just then some little feet were heard pattering outside the room.

"That's the children coming in from their walk!" cried Lena. "I'm expected there; I've brought with me a little puppet theater. And we're going to represent the play of Bluebeard. Something unusually fine, I assure you. The scene where he's polished off at last is magnificent!"

And she rustled off to them.

It was in Else's yellow parlor that this highly significant conversation had occurred. It was not so staring yellow as usual, as nearly all the pieces of furniture in the room were covered with all sorts of ingenious rubbish. They were making great preparations, in fact, for a bazaar, in which Else was to co-operate with Lena in getting off upon an unfortunate public all sorts

of stupid articles, at the biggest possible prices, for some charitable purpose. And, with this noble end in view, Else had been racking all her most secret repositories, and putting together things which she had won in raffles, and cotillion favors; the collection of her youth.

All of them, taken together, did not amount to very much, in quantity; and, as to quality, the less said of that the better. Lena had had a good laugh at the "old messy things." The countess had brought Else, as some set-off to these monstrosities, some splendid old embroideries, ecclesiastic vestments in their earlier state, which Lena had been lately using to conceal from view the vulgarity of a couple of easy-chairs at the hotel. The two friends had settled that these embroideries should be used to bind some books—a very handsome binding it was to be—and Werner had cut out the pasteboard for them. Else could not sufficiently admire his patience and cleverness. "All that is due to your influence," she assured her friend. "Before that he used to lie on the sofa half the afternoon, and brood over metaphysical problems, as they call them."

Else's eyes followed Lena as she left the room. She shook her pretty head quite gravely, and said: "What do you think, Werner? Do you think she'll marry him, after all—Linden, I mean?"

"What I think," he replied, with less courtesy than usual in his tones, "is that you give yourself a great deal too much concern about things

that are not your business!" And so saying, he pushed away from him the pasteboards he was working at, or rather playing with, and jumped up.

"What's the matter with you, Werner?" Else asked.

"I've pricked my finger with the wretched prong," he said; "it's nothing."

And then he, too, left the room.

END OF PART ONE.

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You needn't bother with the other chapters in the book—doubt as to Pearline's ability, fear as to the damage it may do if it does the work, &c. There's nothing in them. Any woman who uses Pearline can tell you that.

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- - - AT THE - - -

CHICAGO EXPOSITION

WHAT THE RESTAURATEURS AND CATERERS WHO ARE TO FEED THE PEOPLE INSIDE THE FAIR GROUNDS THINK OF

BURNETT'S EXTRACTS:

CHICAGO, April 2d, 1893.

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Gentlemen: After careful tests and investigation of the merits of your flavoring extracts, we have decided to give you the entire order for our use, in our working department as well as in all our creams and ices, used in all of our restaurants in the buildings of the World's Columbian Exposition at Jackson Park.

Very truly yours,
WELLINGTON CATERING CO.
By ALBERT S. GAGE, President.

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N. E. WOOD, Manager,
New England Clam Bake Building.
F. K. McDONALD, Manager,
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WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION.
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H. A. WINTER, Manager.

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Caterers for the "Golden Gate Cafe,"
Transportation Building.
"TROCADERO,"
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"THE GREAT WHITE HORSE" INN CO.,
WORLD'S COLUMBIAN
EXPOSITION GROUNDS.
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"GREAT WHITE HORSE" INN,
THE GARDEN CAFE,
WOMAN'S BUILDING.

COLUMBIA CASINO CO.,
THE GOLDEN GATE CAFE,
NEW ENGLAND CLAM BAKE CO.,
BANQUET HALL.

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Wholesome soap is one that attacks the dirt, but not the living skin. It is Pears'.

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CHORDS AND DISCORDS

A STORY OF SOULS ASTRAY

ENGLISH VERSION OF

OSSIP SCHUBIN'S

"Woher tönt dieser Missklang durch die Welt?"

BY

A. H. L.

IN TWO PARTS—PART TWO

Issued Semi-Monthly. Entered at the Post-Office at New York as second-class matter.

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CHORDS AND DISCORDS

A STORY OF SOULS ASTRAY

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BY

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IN TWO PARTS—PART TWO

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CHORDS AND DISCORDS.

CHAPTER XXVIII—(CONTINUED).

THE bazaar was a brilliant success. It was one of the most aristocratic of the season, and was held under the immediate patronage of royalty. One of the ministers of state had allowed his reception-rooms to be used on this charitable occasion. The courtyard opening on to the Wilhelmstrasse was thronged from as early as eleven o'clock with the carriages of the highest personages in the land, from royalty downward.

In front of the portico of the grotesque old gray palace, an architectural exploit of the eighteenth century, stood the porter, who had on a bandolier with silver mountings, and a big silver-mounted staff in his hand. He was a dark-complexioned giant, who looked as if he might be a Roumanian, or from some other semi-barbarous southern country. This worthy's function was to direct all arrivals to go to the left, in order to get to the large salon. There was a very big, confused crowd all over the place, consisting, of course, principally of "philanthropists" of both sexes, the female being preponderant.

The salon was, for the mercantile purpose of

the occasion, divided into two parts; a lower part, where articles of utility were on sale, and an upper, for the luxuries and superfluities. The useful things were dealt in, under cost price, by comparatively subordinate members of society. But the articles of luxury were disposed of, at ridiculously high prices, to the uppermost of the upper ten of Berlin.

The table held by Lena and Else was at the extreme upper end of the room, between that of a princess of the blood and the flower-stand. Eight young girls of the very best families attended to all the business connected with these flowers; and, as a sign of their employment, each one of them wore a special flower on her head, and as big a one of its kind as could be got hold of. One had a sunflower; a second had a dahlia, the third some wonderful orchid or other. The prettiest of these flower-girls was beyond question the one that wore a red poppy, which she had stuck on her brown head all askew, in a careless, defiant sort of way. This red head-dress was well set off by the dark-green velvet dress the young beauty wore, and the effect of the whole was as charming as possible. All her movements were so graceful that they ought to have been photographed.

These young girls, for the purpose, as one of the ministers expressed it, "of putting a little life into the shop," had invented a new game. In the midst of the flowers there was a charming object, a tin frog with its mouth open to an unnatural width. Every passer-by was invited—

or commanded—to try and throw a twenty-five-cent piece, or mark, into the frog's mouth. Those who sent it in got a little wreath of flowers; those who failed had to pay a dollar; or as much more as their liberality prompted.

At first, too many marks by far found their way into the frog's mouth; the flower-stand began to wear a forlorn and depopulated look. The sunflower declared that it reminded her of the hair of one of her revered admirers. Something, it was clear, must be done. It was determined that the range of fire must be lengthened. The floor was marked with a chalk-line, within which no one was at liberty to attack the frog with his projectile. And a very young and charming princess knelt down to trace the line.

Then serious differences arose as to the exact distance from the target at which the line *should* be traced. And the little princess, being down on her knees, and not wanting to lose her time, used the interval in making a rough sketch of a head on the floor; and very cleverly she did it. Then the girls saw all sorts of comical meanings and likenesses in the head, every one of them having her own original for it. There was no end of giggling and whispering, and pushing backward and forward. "Let *me* see!" "Gracious goodness, no!" "Oh, how spiteful!" A gentleman came up to look, and one of the flower-girls went with a jump and stood right over this masterpiece in chalk. "Oh, good Heavens! Suppose he had seen it!" They were

quite convinced that the wretched man would have seen the likeness.

"You've saved my life, and I'll never forget it!" exclaimed the little princess, as pert and friendly a creature as well could be, to her young friend, who stood perseveringly on the same spot, concealing the spiteful portrait from view.

"But, my love, the likeness was so speaking; I don't see how he would have taken it amiss," said the sunflower.

Poppy's view was quite peculiar. "There are some people who don't like their likenesses at all when they're like them."

Then the laughing and chattering began again, all together, growing louder and louder, almost shrill, but still not without the melody of highly educated voices.

It was pleasant to see these lively damsels enjoying their temporary freedom from the severe etiquette of their social position. And it was curious to observe how their vivacity, which seemed, now and then, as though it would overstep all bounds, never really did so, but remained always well within the limits of grace and good taste.

The worthy female representatives of the middle class wives and daughters, at the lower end of the room, turned their faces, from time to time, with some expression of disapproval on them, in the direction of these charming young aristocratic rioters. They were astonished at the countesses making such a row.

The next important incident was the coming

on the scene of some foreign prince, who was on his travels. This personage now took up his position in front of the frog and bombarded him with a perseverance worthy of a better cause; and he didn't stick at silver, some of his ammunition was of gold too.

The young ladies still went on laughing, but not so loudly; in fact, only just enough—the cunning young saleswomen!—to encourage the prince in going on with his game. The prince found quite a royal amusement in the situation. But his adjutant, standing behind him, looked, as he probably was, bored to death.

Then, all of a sudden, there was dead silence; all the laughter ceased, and all the chatter of tongues; nothing was audible but the rush of footsteps, all in one direction.

The Empress!

CHAPTER XXIX.

It seemed as though the people in the room had been suddenly multiplied threefold, so great was the pressure around the illustrious lady. In fact, they scarcely gave her room enough to move forward without colliding with them, more or less. There was no chance for any gentlewoman to show how grandly she could courtesy. The "great" people behaved in an uncourtly way; and the "little" people—those of the middle class—perhaps supposed themselves courtly in imitating their betters.

The Empress showed no sign of impatience,

but went forward as best she could through the crowd, sweet and amiable then as always—amiable with that peculiar charm which has its root in the sentiment of maternity, that sentiment which most ennobles a woman. This great and aged lady had something of this element in her that made her quite irresistible to the public. And now, as she passed on, greeting those she knew best as she went by them, it was plain that all hearts went with her.

One of the ladies-in-waiting and a chamberlain made up her suite. The lady-in-waiting was carrying a very big, fanciful sofa-cushion, in the fabrication of which her majesty had taken some part. The chamberlain had got a bouquet with fluttering white satin ribbons, which had been handed to the empress by the committee of reception as she entered the bazaar. The poor gentleman felt very much as though he were some provincial in a little bit of a town taking a congratulatory nosegay to some house for a christening or a wedding. If he had had white gloves on he would probably have given himself up for lost, as a flunky pure and simple. As it was, he looked very distinguished and very melancholy, in spite of his bouquet.

At last the empress reached the tea-room, on the threshold of which a lady of the committee, whose family had been ennobled only fourteen days previous, offered her a cup. This gentlewoman, to show her loyalty, courtesied to the very ground, doing something to make up for the rather *sans façon* manners of the rest of the

company. There were one or two persons who observed, as her form slowly and majestically descended, "Why, she's actually going to sit down on the ground before her majesty!" And the fact is, that she did miscalculate the relations between loyalty and gravitation, and did actually sit down on the ground, and so emphatically sit down on the ground that she could not get up again till some compassionate person pulled her up.

The general public was not allowed access to the tea-room while the empress was there. She had nobody with her there except the ladies in charge of the room, and one or two whom she beckoned to come in and join her circle.

She was soon gone, and the glory of the bazaar began to dwindle and decline. For a little while after she had gone the feeling among those present was subdued and quiet; they spoke in rather low tones, and could speak of nothing but their admiration for this really admirable lady.

All that now followed was more or less merely the winding up of affairs. The flower-stand was now all but emptied. The frog, however, is still doing business. A batch of three young gentlemen come up together, and fire at him one after the other. Countess Warsberg, who had been selling cough-lozenges and orris-root sachets in conjunction with her new friend, Countess Lenz, began with a melancholy air to reckon up her takings, something less than forty dollars. There was no mistake about it. These ladies had had a by no means successful day. Things had

gone much better with another partnership, that of Princess Orbanoff and Thilda Schlitzing, between whom subsisted a friendship most affecting. They had been dealing in cigarettes and cigar-holders. The Orbanoff was, certainly, dazzlingly beautiful in her dark-red velvet trimmed with fur; and, at the moment we speak of, she was in a state of great animation. This was due to the circumstance that she had contrived to get hold of Werner Schlitzing and make him stand talking there with her. She had a little swarm of worshipers about her, but she had singled him out with a tender smile that had been kept for him, and, even in the act of turning her head here, there and everywhere, managed to whisper all sorts of amiable, taking things to him. And, just as it had been eight years before, on that balcony in Schlangenbad, Werner's blood went to his head a little under the excitement.

There are few men who can stand firmly on their feet when a woman throws herself at their head. Werner's bearing toward the Croatian lady was a mixture of careless condescension and almost imperceptible impertinence. Thilda, meanwhile, had plunged deep into a talk about art with Ryder-Smythe. All her packages of cigarettes had been adorned by rough little sketches from her own hand, impressionist landscapes, she called them. And she was almost convinced that the high prices the cigarettes fetched were due to these masterpieces of her adding.

Ryder-Smythe had purchased no less than five packages of her cigarettes; on credit, however, as he did not happen to have any cash with him.

Thilda, however, advanced the money for him, till next morning, when it was arranged that he was to come to her studio and liquidate the debt.

In fact, Thilda, just now, had an agreeable sensation of opulence. It was that little fortune which had come to her from an old uncle, two years before, whose property had been divided equally between Werner and herself. She gave the American "native" a full, true and particular history of this windfall, putting it in a funny light, telling him how little she expected such a thing, and in what little account she had held the "grumpy old fellow" as long as he lived.

The great success of the day was at the table of Lena and Else. Else's old trophies from raffles and cotilions were buried out of sight under the expensive things with which Lena had set off the table at the last moment, Venetian glass, with all sorts of splendid colors and in all sorts of shapes, dolphins, mussels and other graceful marine forms, particularly Anglo-Indian, were in great variety. The coverings for the books had not been finished in time. It had been found necessary to send them to a bookbinder at the last moment, and he had not been punctual in sending them.

Else had been beaming all day with beauty and youth, and lavishing on everybody her delightful and affectionate attentions. And she had hugely enjoyed herself. The table was quite

swept. And she counted up her receipts with high delight. "Nearly four hundred dollars, Lena!" she exclaimed. "Isn't it splendid? Ah! there comes Enzendorff. I must get hold of him!"

"For Heaven's sake, no!" exclaimed Lena, taking such a tight and convulsive hold of her friend's arm that Else had some difficulty in repressing a cry.

"Why, what's the matter with you, Lena? You're as white as chalk!"

"Oh! nothing. But—I can't endure people being dragged up to one by main force!" replied Lena, gloomily.

"Nonsense, Lena! a rich man like Enzendorff must learn to put up with things, and come out properly when one's begging right and left to get a place for poor little children to lay their heads! If I put a pistol to his purse, he can't mistake the proceeding for an act of personal homage, surely."

"One can never be sure of anything, with a man like Enzendorff," replied Lena, with irritation. "You said so yourself, not long ago, and you were quite right."

"Can he possibly have—has he been displeasing you *particularly?*" asked Else, anxiously.

Lena made no answer, but two red spots suddenly appeared on her white cheeks.

"You are not yourself to-day, Lena, not at all!"

"Oh, merciful Heavens! I'm a little agitated, I confess, but there's good reason for it!" She pulled at her gloves excitedly. "I—I—if I must

speak, I've had a lesson; and I see that I must begin to take life much more seriously and severely than I've ever done yet. It is horrible, it is cruel, to see how people grudge a poor lady her little innocent bit of liberty!"

She sat down and began to turn over uneasily the insignificant remnants of their stock of goods.

The bazaar began now to give signs of the noise and confusion attendant upon the last moments of that sort of philanthropic festivity. The tables, with their red cotton draperies, were all but empty. Close to the entrance sat the lady who was treasurer of the society for whose benefit the bazar had been held, with heaps of gold and silver in front of her, making up the accounts with another gentlewoman.

The money was being carried off now to its destination. A few gentlemen now came forward and offered their services to give the last act of the drama a little brilliancy, proposing that some of the things still left on hand should be raffled for.

A pretty little lace cap was first selected, lady's gear, of course. Linden took it about the room on the point of his sword, vaunting its merits, while one of the flower-countesses walked majestically by his side disposing of the tickets.

"My fate!" murmured Lena, almost inaudibly, to herself. Then, turning to Else, with an almost imploring glance: "Else, do you think—do you really think, that if you try hard you can learn to be fond of somebody?"

"Well, if you have really a mind to, just a lit-

tle inclination to, the 'person,' and the necessary perseverance, most certainly; that's to say, if the 'person' is worth the trouble. And in this case the 'person' is," replied Else, warmly.

"Do you think so, really?" asked Lena, doubtfully, turning her head in the direction of Linden's voice.

He was still balancing the little cap on the point of his sword. His prettily carved features, framed in the dark blonde hair, were alive with good nature and the effort to put some merriment into the people about; in which he seemed to be succeeding to admiration. The whole charming bunch of flower-sellers crowded round him, the girls were listening and giggling, and repeating his jokes to one another.

"I can't understand him at all," murmured Lena, the corners of her mouth drooping in a melancholy manner. "Why doesn't he put out his hand into that charming group and pluck one of *its* flowers? With the exception of the two who have royal blood in their veins, there's not one of the little beauties who wouldn't be glad enough to be dragged to the altar by him!"

"Well, it's plain enough that he aims higher," said Else, "and if you have any sense you'll listen to him. I'm so sorry for him. Do just come and look! Everybody about him is laughing, but the poor fellow himself is anything but merry. Don't you pity him just a little, Lena? I can assure you of one thing; when you've become a little used to him, you'll be the happiest woman and wife in the whole world. He plays

his cards badly, and doesn't know how to make you value him. You won't let him seem half the man he is; you keep him down terribly. But, believe me, there are treasures in his heart and mind of which you have not the least idea."

"So much the better," murmured Lena, "so much the better."

"And will you really try, *now*, to behave like a rational creature?" asked Else, roguishly.

"I've almost made up my mind, positively to do so," sighed Lena. Her eyes swept round the room and rested on the spot where the Orbanoff was still looking up, with her warm, languorous glances, at Werner Schlitzing. "How handsome the Croatian woman is looking to-day!" observed Lena. "Your husband cannot tear himself away from her."

"Tear himself away!" Else shrugged her shoulders with good-humored indifference. "She's got hold of him with that tongue of hers, and he can't escape; that's the whole story. He doesn't like the woman at all."

"Are you so very sure of that?" asked Lena, with some irritation in her voice. "She's very handsome, and very much followed, and, unless all the signs deceive, she can warm up very decidedly and be uncommonly amusing in the society of gentlemen. With all her superficial indifference and languor, she has plenty of the Croatian prickly heat in her veins when it's wanted."

"Doesn't make a bit of difference!" said Else, very confidently, with a hearty laugh.

"I never imagined a woman could be so un-

concerned," said Lena, with some signs of vexation. "I admire you, but I cannot understand you! Don't you know what jealousy means?"

"Never had any reason to inquire, so far," replied Else, with composure. "Kind Providence has spared me that, up to the present moment. If I ever were to have any serious cause for jealousy, the matter would be simple enough, my heart would just break, that's all. But, *now*"—with a contemptuous glance at the handsome princess—"I should as soon think of flying. He's only amusing himself a little, if you please."

Lena turned away from contemplating Werner and the princess with a certain rough abruptness. "I am quite worn out," she exclaimed. "The smell of hothouse flowers and cotton nightgowns has gone to my nerves. I must go to the refreshment-stand and get a glass of some wine or other!"

She disappeared. The bazaar drew to its close with increasing rapidity. But the more the tables emptied of their contents, the denser the crowd seemed to grow in some places.

Linden was tired out with his efforts to make people laugh, while he himself was much more ready to shed tears. So he relinquished to a very young lieutenant the task of crying up the beauties of a saddle that was put up. He went up to Else's table. "Have you anything that will do for me?" he asked.

She showed him a particularly ugly frame for a photograph, of Florentine mosaic, in the form of a palette.

He smiled faintly. "I'll take it off your hands," he said. "What do you want for it?"

"Oh, what I want is just six dollars, to make up the round two thousand which we made up our minds to fleece all of you of for the charity."

"Well, there they are," replied Linden, putting three pieces of ten on the table. "And, to tell you the honest truth, if you trace the palette's genealogy, it begins with me. I gave it, years ago, to a little Russian princess, at a game of forfeits."

"I got it from Aunt Warsberg," explained Else.

"Well, it's quite clear that the palette is one of those articles that go from hand to hand as presents, a sort of circular tour; so it's quite in the day's march that it should come round to its original starting point," said Linden; then he continued, in a depressed tone: "I have a special talent for sending out into the world that sort of traveling present. This is the third object with which I have tried to give a good, youthful heart a little pleasure, and which has come back to me in the same sort of circuitous way, after passing from one hand that didn't care much for it to another that cared probably less. I can't imagine why it should be so. Other people can give women the stupidest presents, which they keep religiously; but my presents, and I take a good deal of trouble in choosing them, I assure you, nobody seems to care one jot for; they simply circulate from hand to hand."

"Oh, Mumu! how silly you are!" cried Else. When she felt more than usually kindly toward

him she always called him Mumu. "I'll tell you what; you shan't have the six dollars back, but I shall keep the frame for myself; yes, and I shall put your photograph in it and put it on my writing-table. Will that satisfy you?"

"Too much kindness altogether!" replied Linden, shaking his head; "shows that I'm not dangerous at all."

"Oh! *now* nothing will satisfy you unless you are dangerous to an old married woman like me!" scolded Else. "You self-tormentor!" She threatened him with her finger.

"Heaven forbid! I don't want to be dangerous to you, dear!" he said, laughingly, in his defense. Then he added, very tenderly: "Else, you know that's all over; you know it quite well. A warm disinterested friendship is the very best and sweetest tombstone for a dead love. When that has once grown up one may go about in safety; the love has really gone to its eternal rest, and there's no fear of its ghost walking."

"Edmund, that piece of bombast is not yours, you've got it from some high-flown book or other!" said Else, shaking her head.

"No, it wasn't from a book, it was from Countess Retz, whom I heard say something like it, not very long since," replied Linden. And, as he pronounced the name, the blood shot into his face to the very roots of his blonde hair.

"Lena!" exclaimed Else. "What does she know about dead love, I should like to know? Why, she has never known yet what it was to have even a partial liking for anybody!"

"Are you quite, quite sure of that?" asked Linden, uneasily.

"Quite, quite sure!" said Else.

Linden drew a sigh of relief. "This is no talk for such a place as this," he observed. "I wonder how we managed to get upon the old, old subject! I only wanted to say it once to you, and leave it; though you know all about it without my telling you. When you married another, I suffered horribly for some time. It was a long day indeed before I got over it, and I'd go through fire and water to serve you still. But, praise and thanks to God! the bad part of it is over now, quite past and gone!"

"Hm!" She laughed at him out of those cheering, cheerful blue eyes of hers. "Hm! And you feel yourself imperatively called on to say all that to my very face, you abominable man!"

"Now, Else, be serious. I'll use your own words against yourself. Do you really think that I ought to have been going on breaking my heart for a rational married woman all these seven years?"

"Hm! hm!"—she stretched her neck, in a teasing sort of way, out of her blue silk kerchief with its bits of gold lace—"who knows? Perhaps I shouldn't have taken your fidelity so much amiss."

"But I'm not unfaithful to you," he said, in his defense; "I honor and revere you almost with the same devotion that a Catholic pays to the Mother of God!"

"Oh! I've not much in common with the Mother of God!" said Else, with a laugh.

"Don't you think so? Well, when you have little Lizzie in your arms you often remind me, quite curiously, of the Sistine Madonna!"

"Really? Hm! So you revere the poor Sistine Mother! But even the Catholic faithful are not saved by that devotion from coming into bondage to some earthly love; and the two loves, the heavenly and the earthly, manage to get on pretty well together. And I suppose it's so with you."

"Well, if it is, can you quarrel with me for it?" said Linden, very emphatically, and in tones half way between jest and earnest.

"Shall I tell you the whole, honest truth?" she replied, very merrily. "Well, to my shame, I must confess that when you told me just now of your unfaithfulness to me, it did just give me a little stab at the heart, at first. Yes, it is so, and you may lift your eyebrows up to your forehead as high as you like, it won't make any difference. But, the very next moment, I was abominably glad to know it. And I tell you that nobody in the world will be more delighted than I if you and Lena make a pair of it. I'm your faithful ally, old friend!"

"Yes, yes!" he murmured, "the old story, the old story! Just like those traveling presents of mine! One lady passes, or rather pushes, me on to another. And it will end just like that. I shall just stop long enough at one love station after another for refreshments, and, at the end

of the journey, I shall find myself just where I started from. And *that* is by the side of Queen Else, as her humble, despairing adorer, and the kindly tolerated friend of herself, her husband and children!"

"You mustn't talk such shocking nonsense, you mustn't, indeed!" said Else, a little angrily. "Eyes front and quick march, sir! The world belongs to the courageous!"

"Else, joking apart now, tell me your opinion. Do you really think I have the ghost of a chance?"

"I think your prospects there are more favorable at this moment than they have ever been before," replied Else, warmly. "And there's only one word more to say, and that's the old proverb, 'Well ventured is half won.' Lena is at the refreshment-stand." Then, turning away from him, and, if the truth must be told, forgetting his very existence for a moment: "Why, little people! little people! Are you really come at last, you darling little unpunctual wretches? Oh! how hot the walk has made us, how dreadfully hot! There's red cheeks! And I suppose you all want candies now, chocolate or something? Miss Miller, do, please, loose Dinchen's cloak a little; it is too warm for anything! Rodi, you can do that for yourself. And you, darling, what can you do? The only thing you can do is to give mamma a kiss, a nice, big, soft, warm kiss. One more, and one more again, you sweet little rogue!" This last was for little Lizzie's benefit, whom she had taken in her arms. And

all of it was said with laughter and lowered voice, so as not to disturb the room.

And, perhaps, this world has never seen a prettier sight than Else with her group of little ones around her. Everybody turned to look at the mother and the children, while Else, in her simple way, in utter unconsciousness of the admiration excited by the sweet picture of herself and her young brood, steered her way to the tea-room, that the children might get their chocolate.

A few minutes later Werner came to her. "At last!" he exclaimed. "I really thought I was in for it forever! Is it good, Miss Schlitzing?" This last to little Lizzie on her mother's lap, who was taking her chocolate with devout absorption.

The little thing put down the cup which she had been holding with her two little fat hands, and looked up at papa. On her cheeks were two big splashes of whipped cream; and she began to tell a long story about something with much gesticulation, of which no living soul could have made a word, but which was all plain enough to mamma.

"Are you ready to go home?" asked Werner.

"I've nothing more to do, myself, but I don't know about Lena," replied Else, more interested in her children just then than in any mortal thing. "Let them bring you a cup of chocolate too, it's capital!"

He assented. "Capital, indeed!" he agreed; then, looking round: "Where *is* Lena?" he asked.

"Lena—Lena!" There was a gleam of sly fun in Else's eyes. "Draw your chair a little nearer, I can't scream like this!" she said. "Great events are impending!"

"What do you mean?" said Werner, with some excitement.

"If I am not quite mistaken, the decisive and important moment is come," said Else, in a low but very triumphant voice. "On my way here I threw a glance into the refreshment-room, and saw Lena and Linden in very animated conversation indeed. I am convinced that everything will go as finely as possible. But why don't you drink your chocolate?"

"It is too sweet," replied Werner, letting his spoon fall with a rattle into the saucer.

CHAPTER XXX.

EVENING! Else is sitting in the yellow parlor alone, knitting a pair of white gaiters for little Lizzie. Every now and then she spreads them on her hand to see if they are all right, humming to herself:

> "My sweetheart he's the village smith,
> And he's to marry me!"

Werner has withdrawn to his own room, under pretext of having letters to write. But he is by no means writing letters. He is merely sitting at his writing-table, with his pen in one hand and his head in the other, looking down

in deep thought on the white paper which he has laid before him for form's sake. Every now and then he turns his head and listens—listens. Else had said to him: "If she has engaged herself she'll be sure to come to us with him this evening. She knows how we shall rejoice at it."

Some hours have elapsed since she had said it, two, three, nearly four hours; and Lena has not made her appearance. Werner's heart began to beat more quietly. Then she hasn't engaged herself! No, indeed, how could such a thing be possible? A crazy idea that of Else's, nothing short of crazy, to try and weld those two people together. Never were any two less suitable to one another! Not the least suitable, not the least! The marriage would be sheer misery to both! But Else is always getting stupid notions like that into her head. She is really too silly and childish for her age, the good little soul! What a mercy it would be if she could only get to look at life a little more deeply and comprehensively! But it's no use wishing, it's not in her to do it!

He glanced across the writing-table to the wall where her portrait was hanging in an oval frame. It was the work of a Frankfurt artist, who was once the fashion at Wiesbaden, and done in the antiquated Winterhalter style. It was an Else with shoulders sloping with an unnatural abruptness, *decolletée*, standing by a stone balustrade, and thrown up by a crying background of violet-green landscape.

Bad as the taste of the whole thing was, it was really a likeness. Else's sweet little face laughed out of the canvas with all its own native, healthy, roguish charm.

But Werner was in a vexed and thankless humor, and he turned away with an impatient movement from the picture and from the thought of its original.

Then he began to listen attentively once more.

Ha! What is that? A carriage stops below; there is a ring. He would have liked to rush and open the door with his own hand. But he does what he can: starts up and listens. Yes, it is she: not a doubt of it! Then he hurriedly lit a cigarette to give himself a countenance, and, walking as composedly as he could, and with a smile as careless as he could make it on his face, he went to the parlor to Else. "Well, Else, will they never bring supper up?" he asked.

"To tell you the truth, it's my doing; I've been waiting for Lena," she replied, "and I'm afraid she's going to disappoint us. . . Ah, at last!"

A joyous light came on Else's face. The door was opened and Lena came in, as pale as death, her eyes burning feverishly and with black shadows under them, and her lips of deep, blackish red.

"Well, Lena, am I to congratulate you?" asked Else, rushing up to her friend. But the words died on her lips when she saw the young woman's face. "Oh, heavens, Lena, how you look! For God's sake! what's the matter

with you. You don't mean to say you've sent him to the right-about, Lena?"

"Yes and no—and no and yes," replied Lena, as though her head was confused. "Oh, for goodness' sake let me sit down and recover myself a little. You see, I've come to stay. I've taken off my hat and cloak, and I think for the last time." She fell into a chair and stared before her.

"The last time?" asked Werner. His first sensation had been one of relief and triumph, but he was startled by her words. "What do you mean by that, Lena? The last time?"

"Yes, the last time! I'm going away!" exclaimed Lena, violently. "I've no business here, now, none at all."

"Why, what is all this? So sudden, too," asked Else, greatly troubled. "What reason can you possibly have? What has happened?"

"What has happened? Nothing, nothing!" Lena tore at the finger-tips of her gloves with her teeth, and then pulled them off hastily. "What has happened, indeed! Well, I told you just now that I saw just as well as you do that it was time for me to behave like a rational woman. And I can't make up my mind to do so, I cannot, I cannot!" She burst all at once into a convulsive fit of sobbing.

Else folded her in her arms.

"Oh, you silly, you silly, how can you spoil the evening for me like that?" she said, in tender, reproachful tones, stroking her friend's head.

"I had arranged it all in my own mind. I was going to have such a splendid time over our little fête this evening in honor of the engagement. I made so very sure about it that I had some champagne put to cool on the strength of it. And now— Oh, Lena! But tell us about it. Why in the world didn't you let things go on a little longer without precipitating a conclusion, if you have done so? Or what *is* it? What has Linden been about?"

"Oh!"—Lena pushed away the hair from her forehead impatiently with both hands. "What in the world can one say? Yesterday I had a most painful experience. Engendorff, on whose reserved attitude, or self-restraint, or scruples, or God knows what, I plumed myself so—you know it—permitted himself to say things the drift of which there was no possibility of mistaking. It was impossible for me to pretend that I did not understand them. His meaning was too plain, and I had no alternative but to ring for the servant and have him shown out. I have no words to tell you how miserable I was. I felt so humiliated, so shamed. How could I help asking myself whether there was anything in my conduct which had made him forget himself so. And my conscience does not wholly acquit me. I ought to have had more foresight. But even if I had, he would never have ventured so far if my unhappy position had not been a positive encouragement to him."

"Lena, for goodness' sake don't talk of your unfortunate position; that's mere folly!" ex-

claimed Else, smoothing her friend's ruffled hair. "I assure you that Countess Lenzdorff's tongue has been properly at work, and all Berlin knows all about it, and everybody quite well understood that he'd get into awful trouble if he went too far!"

"And do you think that makes my position one whit the better?" stormed Lena. "What does it amount to? The men will less than ever know what to make of me. *That's* their point of view. And as for the women, they'll all hate me the more because they can't despise me. Berlin society, at first, amused itself with me as an odd, new kind of plaything. Anything new and odd goes down for a while in Berlin. But after a while they get sick of it. If you want to get yourself regularly enrolled in the social ranks you must pay the proper entrance fee. And that entrance fee in my case means sober, normal marriage; something that will rub off my little bit of *prestige* and put me on the general level. Ah! you were right Else, right, right, right, when you advised me to get into one of the regular grooves at any cost! I see you were right, and I—I quite made up my mind to say yes to Linden, only—at the last moment—"

"You did just the contrary?" said Else, quite downcast.

"No, *not* just the contrary. He was so earnest and eloquent, and his heart was so plainly in the matter, that I couldn't bring it over *my* heart to do so. I—well," she shrugged her

shoulders, "I didn't give him a definite answer. I told him I would do my best to find out what I really wished and thought about the matter, and that in a couple of months he might speak to me again. That's how matters stand, and to-morrow I'm going away; I've come to say good-by."

"But, Lena," cried Else, "if things are so, you ought plainly to stay here and try to see and know more of him."

"Know more of him?" Lena laughed a little bitterly. "Why, I know him already, inside and out. No! It's not him I have to try and know more about. Do you know why I want the two months, Else? I want to spend them in trying to know a little more about myself. I'm a *terra incognita* to myself, I really am, and I'm making fresh discoveries in that region every day."

She looked gloomily in front of her and stroked Else's hands tenderly. "Else! Else!" she murmured. "Such a sweet, sweet time it has been for me with you here! The hours I have been privileged to spend in your dear home have been the most delightful in my whole life! It is so sad, so terribly sad, that I must go." She drew her friend to her and kissed her passionately.

"But why must you go? I can't see the slightest reason for it," said Else, softly. "Do say something, Werner." She turned to her husband, who had been sitting there without uttering a word or giving a sign.

"If I am to say what I think, I don't see any reason for it either," Werner declared.

Lena drew a deep breath. "For one thing, it would be disagreeable to meet Enzendorff constantly in society," she said.

"But, Lena," exclaimed Werner and Else almost together, and as if speaking with one voice. "It's Enzendorff who ought to be ashamed of himself and go, not you."

"Alas! nobody can see into my heart," said Lena; "and I can't speak to other people as I can to you. However, I might manage to get over the point of the necessary alteration of bearing to Enzendorff, and people might think what they liked about it. But it's something quite different, much more important, that drives me away. It's Linden. If I had the courage to send him to the right-about altogether, or keep him standing far enough off, it would be all very well. But I know how it would be. Else would be always inviting him to meet me, in order that I might know him better." She laughed.

"Most decidedly Else would," said Else.

"And then everybody's eyes would be upon us, and there'd be the question; are they engaged, or are they not? Do what we would we should be compromised and *nolens volens*. I should have to put up with him as my *fiancé;* he'd get into the position, whatever I might do. And I'm determined not to submit to it. No, no, no! I will have my two months to think it well over. If, after that, I can say yes to him

with the conviction that I'm not doing wrong, I'll say yes in God's name; and then the poor soul will be out of his pain. For there's one thing I can confidently assure you of. When once I'm Countess Linden, I shall do my duty; I may die of it, perhaps, but I shall certainly do it. I'm an honorable creature; and I would never receive so much, as I should from Linden in that case, without at least being able to render some sort of equivalent. That's why I must have plenty of time to think it over. Oh, Heaven! Oh, Heaven!" Then with a sudden revulsion from the tragical tones and bearing with which she had been speaking, she turned laughingly, and with a sort of defiance to Else. "Else, I have a request to make," she cried.

"I'm curious to know what's coming now!" exclaimed Else.

"Well, I'll out with it. You surely have a few photographs of Linden?"

"Very much at your service. Every stage of his career almost, from the knickerbocker boy onward," confessed Else. "Go and get the album, Werner—the one on the corner table."

Else threw the album open. "There you have Linden as cadet, as lieutenant, as lawn-tennis performer, as jockey. You don't often come across as handsome a fellow; you can't take that away from him, anyway."

"That's true enough; I can't take that away," agreed Lena, shaking her head with extreme seriousness.

"And that's the least of his good qualities,"

said Else, warmly. "He has such a good heart."

"Hm! Good it may be, but it's not very deep," said Lena, positively, and looking attentively at the portraits.

"Oh, it's quite as deep as any heart need to be. The only thing is that you can see the bottom of it more readily, because it's so pure and clear," said Else, defending her old friend.

"I'll tell you a little story," said Lena; "a stupid little story, about something that happened to me not long ago in Paris. Last New Year I wanted to get a Japanese vase to please a young girl, an artist, who had been quite wasting her efforts for some time in giving me lessons in painting. The little present wasn't to cost more than fifty or a hundred francs; rather the smaller sum if possible. But the vase would have to be something quite tasteful, as it was for an artist. I drove to the little St. Thomas, in the Rue du Bae. I had seen an advertisement in the *Figaro* that a collection of Japanese curios was for sale there. So I drove over, and I looked at one thing after another for such a time, with the help of a polite clerk, who turned out to be a great connoisseur. I saw lots of pretty things priced, not only at fifty, but at thirty, twenty francs; but they were not what I wanted. Everything wonderfully pretty, no doubt, but with something wanting. Now, after I've looked at things for some time they all seem to go wrong, and I go wrong, too: I get toothache, or eyeache, or something or other;

at all events, I feel as if I had my hands on imitation velvet, or as if I were hearing the Moonlight Sonata played on a barrel-organ. All of a sudden I pointed to one particular vase. 'That's what I want,' said I. It was a vase much like the rest—only, not quite; it had a good deal fewer zig-zagy designs, and one side of it was higher than the other, and there was something absolutely indescribable in the color, something that seemed to do my heart good the moment I caught sight of it. 'Madame has a happy hand,' cried the clerk, 'real old Satsuma.' He looked at the price-mark. 'Three thousand francs,' he murmured. It was laughable, wasn't it? I had to sing small and decline the vase, and the clerk said: 'Well, madame, it *is* hard! Madame can't get along with stupid, every-day things at all, I see.' 'Well, if a person can't, there's nothing for it but to possess one's soul in patience and wait for some happy accident or other to satisfy one,' I replied to him, and went my way."

Lena stopped short rather abruptly.

"What has your story to do with Linden? I don't understand, not a bit," said Else.

"Don't you really?" replied Lena, with some impatience. "Well, if you must have it, Linden is the every-day sort of article that I can't get along with, that's all."

"H'm! And you propose to wait a little longer till the better accident turns up?" asked Werner ironically, but with a strangely tense look.

"No!" said Lena, almost roughly. "I've quite given that up. What I propose—and what I've determined to do—is to be a reasonable creature and try to get used to second-rate articles. Else, an idea! Do you know what? Just you take all those photographs of Linden out of your album and write out an inventory of all his good qualities at the back of them. I'll take the whole collection with me on my travels, and promise you sacredly to study them every day and try to get all his good qualities well into my head. Perhaps I shall have learned my lesson in the two months. There shall be no lack of industry and good-will on my part, I assure you."

"Oh, there's no getting you to be really serious," said Else, exasperated. "However, we'll see what can be done."

At that moment the servant announced supper.

"The last time!" said Lena, sadly.

The champagne which had been put to cool in honor of her engagement was drunk by them "to their next happy meeting!" And, at the same time, the tears flowed down Lena's cheeks. And Else told her, majestically, that she ought to try and be a more reasonable creature.

After supper Lena begged to be allowed to see the children once more. She kissed them all, and put on each one's pillow a toy which she had brought away from the bazaar.

She took her leave of Else on the threshold of the nursery.

God protect and watch over you!" she said, in a low voice. "I thank you for all the kindness and love you've given me. People don't mean much, usually, when they say that sort of thing; but you know what it means on my lips. And it's the simple truth that there never is one moment when I wouldn't gladly lay down my life for you. Stay where you are! Don't come further with me! The door of the nursery is what best suits your sweet, sweet person to be framed in. And, when I am far from you, it is standing there that your dear presence will come before me always. Adieu!"

"I shall come to the station, for all that," Else called to her as she went. She did not take that farewell quite as seriously as she should. And she was very sorry for it later.

* * * * * * * *

Lena left Berlin the following evening, giving out that it was necessary for her to be present at the wedding of a niece of the departed Count Retz, in Paris.

No one was informed at what hour she was to start, except the Schlitzings. She was anxious not to have a crowd of indifferent faces buzzing about her at the last moment.

Else did not come to the station. Little Lizzie was taken suddenly unwell and the mother could not leave her. But Werner came. He was stamping uneasily up and down the Potsdam station when Lena made her appearance.

She was wrapped from head to foot in a large sealskin cloak, looked very handsome and dis-

tinguished, but terribly pale, and, in spite of her warm wraps, as though she was frozen to the marrow.

She was followed by her maid and man-servant. "Where is Else?" she asked, the moment she saw Werner.

Werner explained why his wife could not come.

Lena sighed. "I am almost glad that she did not come. Leave-taking is so painful. Once is quite enough."

Werner handed her a wreath of roses and a small parcel. "It's from Else," he said.

She pressed the wreath with a sort of tenderness to her face. Then, lifting her mobile eyebrows to her forehead, she examined the little package doubtfully: "What's inside?" she asked.

"You'd better look."

It was half-a-dozen photographs of Linden. Else had noted down on each of them one of his good qualities.

Lena laughed, but there was not much merriment in the laugh, and then let the portraits fall indifferently in a pocket of her cloak. "Tell Else that I will do all I can, my very utmost!" she murmured; then her throat seemed to tighten, and she could not bring out another word. She hid her face among the roses.

"And what are your plans for the immediate future?" asked Werner, who was himself far from being on a bed of roses.

"Heaven only knows! First of all, I'm going to Paris, you know. Then, I don't care where.

I'm just as much a stranger in one place as another!" Then, with a sudden access of passion, she exclaimed: "I'll tell you what! I can't make up my mind just now whether to set a high value on that heroic exploit of yours that day at Eltville or to regard it as a piece of tasteless obtrusiveness."

He looked at her with astonishment and perplexity. That was the first time since the renewal of their acquaintance that she had spoken directly about the little episode.

"Oh, I say, Lena!" he murmured.

"I had a right to do what I pleased with my life, I suppose," she went on, gloomily. "I was of age!"

"Lena, don't blaspheme!" he said, seriously and warmly. "It seems to me that, taking things all in all, you ought to be satisfied with the way life has shaped itself for you. I wonder what you want."

"What I want! what I want!" she murmured, almost inaudibly. "I should like to feel happy, to be really happy—if it were only for one single hour, one hour!"

His heart began to beat. He would gladly have looked into her eyes to see what was going on there; but she kept her face averted from him in a marked manner.

"Take your places!" cried the guard.

"Adieu!" she cried, holding out her hand.

He kissed her glove.

"A kiss for Else and the children!" she cried;

then quickly, and without looking round at him again, she got in.

He thought she would show herself at the window. But she did not. A mad longing to look on her face again seized him. He put his foot upon the carriage steps to get in after her.

One of the guards pulled him back sharply. It was the last moment. The train dashed out, creaking and groaning, wrapped in a veil of white smoke.

Werner stood immovable on the spot as if somebody had struck him over the head with a club. He felt confused, like a man half awake in a dream. It was some time before his faculties returned to him. And, when they did, his whole consciousness seemed merged in an all-pervading sense of desolation, loss, impoverishment.

"I should like to feel happy, to be really happy—if it were only for one single hour, one hour!" he murmured to himself.

That old terrible thirst of his own soul for some great movement of the heart that should be of power to lift him above the lower things of earth came upon him with greater torture than at any previous moment.

"Once, once, once, if only once!" he murmured to himself.

And Lena was sitting as far back as she could in the corner of her compartment, weeping, weeping, weeping as if her heart would break.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SOME weeks had elapsed since Lena's departure from Berlin.

After her arrival in Paris she wrote Else a letter full of the most laughable drollery, and the most moving affection. Then came a letter from Madrid, then one from London. The letters were shorter and shorter, seemed to have less and less purpose in them; then they ceased altogether. She said not a word about Linden in any of them. To Werner she sent the same kind, stereotyped message in every one, in a postscript. But she took care to send a special and suitable message, full of tenderness and thoughtfulness, to each of the children, such as each of the little persons would appreciate.

At first Werner used to ask Else, from time to time, whether any news of the traveler had come; then he stopped asking altogether. He scarcely ever mentioned her name. And, if it was brought up by anybody, either he kept out of the conversation altogether, or said something dry and indifferent.

Else used then to look at him sadly, and shake her head; she could not understand him at all. Once she observed: "I used to be so glad you and Lena were such friends; I thought you were

really fond of her; and now you are always saying such hard things of her. She is a really fine creature, in her way!"

"In her way—yes, I quite agree," replied Werner. "But it's a way that's too much for my nerves; after a certain quantity of it. I am glad to be at peace again, Else. Give me a kiss."

"You monster!" replied Else; but, for all her exasperation at his injustice to her friend, the kiss that passed between them was unusually tender, on her part especially. Indeed, it would be not much amiss to say that the exasperation gave rather a flavor to the tenderness.

Else did not understand, and did not try to understand, the working of her own feelings; but the fact was that she herself felt as if, with Lena's departure, she was relieved of a certain pressure. And, during the first days after it took place, she went about like a creature made up of bird-song and sunshine. Werner did all he could to play a good second to her high spirits, went with her into society, and, when at home, tried to be as much a child in their talk and amusements as she was herself.

But that did not last. In fact, each day, after a certain moment, saw a change in him to greater and greater depression. Else attributed this depression, which seemed to her more sudden than it was, to a bad cold he took in the beginning of March, when he came home wet to the skin from a ride in the Grunewald.

They began to fear an attack of violent rheumatism, or, perhaps, an inflammation in the lungs.

However, it went no further than a sharp attack of grippe, with considerable fever and pain in the limbs; but the strange thing was that he could not get over it quite and recover his strength again. He lost flesh and appetite, became more melancholy every day, less and less able to rise out of himself.

His medical advisers suggested change of air. And Else proposed that he should at last make that long-planned and postponed journey to Italy. He advanced all sorts of objections at first, but, at last, agreed. The first arrangement was that both of them, Else and he, should go; then one of the children fell ill; one or other of the three was always down with sickness, more or less. Else's maternal anxiety was aroused. She could not bring herself to go and leave the children.

Besides, the physician gave it as his opinion that it would be better for him to travel by himself, perhaps. The trouble was in his nervous system, and what he required was amusement and rest both, rest as complete as he could get.

The idea of the journey began to be quite acceptable to him. And he began once more to cram up his guide-books as he had done eight years before. That was at the outset. Then came an access of nervous anxiety, which made him put off the journey from day to day. He found it difficult to make up his mind one way or another.

At last, one fine April evening, he really did make a start.

At the last moment he found it scarcely pos-

sible to tear himself away. When the decisive moment came Else was much braver than he. "Amuse yourself well, dear old man! Stay as long as you like; but do bring me back a happy face when you come home!" she said, when they took leave of one another.

It was on the threshold of their dwelling, for she was averse to the idea of going with him to the station. Then she kissed him twice, thrice very fondly, and finally pushed him off with a little, tender, energetic slap, which was a favorite form of caress with her, and generally reserved for his benefit only.

His eyes had moistened, and strange sensations went through every fiber of his frame, when he left her and went down the stairs. She remained on the threshold, gazing after him as he went. When he had reached the tenth step below, and she was about to turn back into the hall, he turned round suddenly, dashed back to her with a couple of leaps, and took her in his arms. And now she burst into tears. He drew her back into the hall, kissed her again and again, and did not know how to show her tenderness enough. "Oh, you angel! you dear, unselfish angel!" he exclaimed. "It distresses me more than I can possibly say that I've tortured you so, these last few weeks. I don't see how I can possibly part from you. Our lives have grown to be so interwoven with each other! I didn't know how close till this agonizing parting came to show me!"

"Is that so?" she said, in low tones, smiling

through her tears, with her own charming, child-like smile, which contrasted so pathetically and sweetly with the furrows that had come too prematurely to her pure forehead. "Does the parting really give you a little pain?"

"Pain! I really don't know how to stand it. And I don't know what's the good of it. It can't make much difference, after all, if I start to-day or to-morrow. I shall wait a few days. The children can have every attention paid to them here. And we'll write to my mother to come to Berlin, to help in taking care of them. She'll do that for me, I am quite sure; though she's not altogether satisfied with me, I know; and then we'll set off together. We're in arrears up to this very moment with our wedding-journey, you know we are."

She looked at him very attentively. She seemed to hesitate and reflect for a moment. Then, suddenly, in the midst of his agitation and affection, he had a distinct perception that his heart was beginning to slacken, and that, in the very bottom of that heart, there was more fear than hope that she would fall in with his suggestion.

"Oh! it's all nonsense—mere folly!" she exclaimed, pulling herself together. "The real truth is that I'm glad to get rid of you for a little while!"

"Are you so heartily sick of me as all that?" he joked, somewhat awkwardly.

"No, dear!" she replied, "not the least bit in the world sick of you, and well you know it; but

I'm just a little bit tired out, Werner. The separation will do us both good. I shall have plenty of leisure to take stock of the past and see how, perhaps, I might have done better than I have. And you—*you* will—when you are so far away, will, perhaps, learn—" She stopped short; she could not find words to express what she wanted to say.

"How necessary you are to me," murmured he. "I've learned that lesson quite well already, believe me, my dear, noble, brave little guardian angel!"

Some movement was heard on the other side of the parlor door.

"Oh, Heavens! we shall have the children out again if we don't take care, and then we shall have to go over it all again, and that would be a fine thing!" exclaimed Else. "Adieu! Be off with you! Adieu! And, once more, stay away as long as you want, but let me see some joy on your face when it meets mine again!"

One last kiss, and then she pushed him from her, this time more energetically than before.

He got into the cab which was waiting for him below.

The lights of the street-lamps were flickering in the lengthening spring twilight, and throwing spots of pale-green on the branches of the trees in the Leipzig Place, where the leaves were beginning to come shyly out of the sheaths of the buds.

He looked up once more to the windows of his home, and then sighed deeply. All sorts of

thoughts and memories chased one another rapidly through his brain. Stupid little proceedings which he had been formerly guilty of, and which had long passed away from his mind, came strangely up in it again; then came a fit of longing to turn and go back again; then one of those strange moods of his in which he could not, for the life of him, say *what* he wanted; then a terrible mixture of anxiety and melancholy; all these serious changes of feeling he experienced in that ride to the Anhalt Station. And he was there before he had shaken himself fully back into the real world again.

Like a man in a dream, he went to the ticket-office, took his ticket, and saw to his baggage. He had no time to waste, his train was soon to go. He went pretty quickly up the broad, dirty stairs that led to the trains. There were the rails, like a set of ruled lines on the ground, leading out so quietly and yet so significantly into the distance, far away into the wide world —and liberty! His breast began almost involuntarily to expand; he threw his shoulders back, he stretched himself to his full height. Then—ah! what *was* it? What *was* this that he could not shake off, do what he would? This burden on the soul that seemed to weigh his very body down to earth; this constant sense of some wound within, of calamity to come? He could not but reflect upon the difference between now and then, and with what gladness and elation he would have sprung into the train, that was to carry him away, eight years before. What

was this burden that he had to drag along with him morning, noon and night, which made every movement pain, and which was so firmly fastened to his life that he could not rid himself of it now without cutting deeply into his flesh and opening his very veins? Unhappy man, what?

Most of the rails were occupied by trains. At the head of one of these a locomotive snorted and creaked, all hidden in white vapor, and looking like some mysterious monster wrapped in a veil. This was Werner's train.

Baggage trucks were being rolled here and there; small groups of travelers began to approach the carriages. Plenty of joking and laughter was going on, and, among the other sounds, was that of a few resounding German farewell kisses; then somebody sneezed, and there was more laughing.

Werner looked round. The noise nearest him proceeded from a wedding patry. The two young people, who had just been made one, were the central, unmistakable figures of a large group consisting of parents, brothers, sisters, and other relatives, near and distant; the whole tribe, on both sides of the house, seemed to have been collected to see them off. Werner's sensations were quite peculiar. He looked a little closer at them. The young husband was a nice-looking fellow enough, who carried himself well, blonde, with a smooth-shaven face leaving only a mustache with an aggressive sort of twist in it, evidently a soldier's face. Werner could have

sworn to him, among a thousand, as an officer out of uniform. The poor fellow was a good deal agitated and excited, and, as was only too obvious, a little ashamed of his emotion. He wiped his eyes furtively, now and then, and was quite unable to conceal that he was over his head and his healthy red ears in love with his young wife. As to her—well, the most indulgent of the readers of character would hardly have been able to give her many good marks. She was nothing more than a little lively brunette, full of vivacity and self-consciousness, but her features, though they had not yet lost their youthful roundness, showed a distinct tendency to sharpness of outline which did not promise well for monsieur her husband in the days to come. The little lady showed by her style of dress and all her movements that she not only wanted to concentrate the attention of everybody upon herself, but also to make them feel what a superior creature she was to them all.

"The vain little toad! What an unhappy, henpecked creature he'll be!" thought Werner.

Just then the bridegroom seized her by the arm and drew her back a little to save her from being violently collided with by a porter who was carrying along some baggage in rather a reckless way. How carefully and tenderly the poor fellow did it, as if she was the most precious, the most fragile, the most sacred of all the things, animate and inanimate, on this world's surface! And what a look of indifference it was that she repaid him with!

"What's the matter with you now, Albert? Am I in some mortal peril again?"

It hurt Werner to hear her. He could not help thinking of the afternoon of his wedding-day, when he and Else went off together from the little station near Krugenberg. His mother's pale face came up before him again. The old lady clung to Else's side as though she could not bear the thought of parting with her, and, every now and then, gave her son a look which was full of scrutiny and warning. Then, there was Else's tender and sweet confusion. All her male adorers and female friends had moved in force upon the station, and were there, *en masse*, to bid her good-by. And endless was the laughing and chattering. And, a little while before they went off, the ceremony was crowned by the sudden bursting forth of Mendelssohn's Wedding March. One of Else's greatest admirers had ordered the band there without letting anybody know, and he had hidden the musicians out of sight in a little clump of trees close by.

It was late in October when the event took place. The tendrils of the wild vine, with which the station was wreathed, were blood-red, the storms of the dying year had loosened them from their stems, and they were tossing about in the wind against a background of slate-gray sky, and scattering their decaying leaves into the puddles on the ground.

Then the two were together in the compartment. And well he recalled the strange sensation of uneasiness, almost of being shut up in a

sort of prison, which, for the first few moments, overcame him. It was not that he was left alone with Else. He had been often enough left alone with her since their engagement. No; it was the sudden feeling that the two were now shut up together, and away from their kind for life—in marriage. For a little while he could not find a word to bless her or himself with. They sat mum opposite one another for fully ten minutes, mum as wooden dolls. Her sweet, shy little face became sadder and sadder. She fastened her eyes upon his with a fixed look, which expressed partly a sense of injury and, still more, entreaty and—suddenly burst into tears!

Oh! then his presence of mind came back to him directly, and he lost no time in taking her into his arms and in consoling her with caresses and kisses. As it began so it went on. The girl never had any difficulty in finding a way into his heart. But he had a head, too, and she did not possess the secret of interesting and bringing that head with her as well.

Poor Else!

He came back with a start to his immediate surroundings.

The smoke veil in which the locomotive was wrapped became thicker and thicker.

The young, newly-made wife, with the too sharp nose and voice, was embraced again and again by her relatives. The young husband released himself gently from his mother's arms, and said, with the compassionate air of an exe-

cutioner in love with some victim he is about to decapitate: "Come, my angel!"

The man with Werner's baggage came up to him, and asked: "First-class?"

A few moments later Werner was leaning back in the corner of a compartment, with nothing to cheer him but red velvet cushions.

He had the unpleasant feeling, restless and discontented at once, of a man who gets up in the middle of the night to take part in some celebration or other, and who cannot help asking the question whether it's worth all that trouble.

A yearning for the comforting warmth in which everybody enveloped him so carefully at that home which he had left behind came upon him with great force. He saw his children's faces one after the other; Else!

He looked out of the window; a confused mass of houses seemed to shoot past him, an irregular row of windows more or less lighted up. Then the houses were fewer and fewer; then they shot up in solitary units, standing apart from completed terraces in the midst of land as yet unbuilt on. It became more and more gloomy. The street-lamps failed altogether, even the outlines of buildings could no more be traced; nothing could be seen but the lights in such windows as had them. Then all was dark; the whole earth black; and, above it, just one atom less dark than the earth, the vault of the sky!

Everything dark; only here and there a little glimmering point of light in some house below, and, above, the uncertain glimmer of a few stars.

It seemed to Werner's fancy as though the whole world was filled with will-o'-the-wisps, dancing jack-o'-lanterns, earth and sky alike. But those that were on the earth vanished from his sight; those that were in the sky remained fixed, but were not less will-o'-the-wisps for all that. All the lights were false, or at least uncertain.

His first stoppage was at Munich. And wretched enough the hotel appeared to him. He seemed to have no elasticity in him, and his solitary meals were most depressing. Every moment his thoughts went back to his home, taking him violently with them, and everything seemed a weariness to the flesh. A rapid run through the Pinakothek and Glyptothek showed him that painting and sculpture were of not much use to him in his present mood, so he went back to the hotel and wrote a long and tender letter to Else. He informed her that if traveling didn't suit him better than he had found it do so far, he should probably find himself once more at his home with her again in a fortnight. It was quite a piece of good fortune that he had not taken tickets for a long round of places everywhere. And he quite positively would not, in any case, go further than Venice.

Then, when autumn came, they would go off somewhere together, the whole batch of them. This gadding about alone would never be of any good to him. He was spoiled altogether for bachelor life. He felt the want of the wife and the bairns every moment.

And he went on to tell her that he kept asking

himself this question all the time, "And they call this taking one's pleasure, do they?" It was more like a perpetual dose of medicine.

CHAPTER XXXII.

VERONA!

He arrived here early in the morning. And his sensations so affected his fancy that it seemed to him as though he had been suddenly borne upon a sunbeam out of the north, with its still clinging winter, into the south and the spring, so fairy-like was the light, so brilliant in its mixture of white and blue.

And the light, as well as all it shone on, was soft and tender. There was, as yet, nothing of the loud, obtrusive, aniline-blue that comes with the advanced summer of Italy. There was still a slight moisture in the air which enveloped all the contours of things in a sort of golden, glimmering glory.

He could not sit still for a moment. All day long he went wandering from one place to another, with fever in his pulses, overwhelmed and intoxicated with beauty. How noble it all was! What wonderful pictures in every direction!

The Piazza d'Erbe—the vegetable market! A motley collection of white, gray, red umbrellas, and, underneath them, a confusion of golden oranges, vegetables and flowers; all swimming in a sea of light that seemed as though it posi-

tively had nerves and sensibility, all surrounded by buildings of almost capricious originality, but a noble and dignified originality, too; buildings from which the hand of time had nearly effaced the frescoes that once were vivid, so that in their later vagueness they now seemed no more than the echo of their earlier glory of color, or a mere memory, faint as that which dreams leave behind them.

Old churches; many old churches! In one of these, music; music that seemed to fill the building to overflowing! And the light so subdued and mystical, half revealing, half concealing all within. And the light and music so blending in the fancy, that the harmonies of the organ and the voices seemed to be something growing out of the influences of the place rather than produced by human instrumentality. Painted windows, through which this light came, made mystical in its transit, light of all the colors of the rainbow, light which seemed to hover like a Presence over the heads of the kneeling worshipers!

The priest elevated the Host. Behind him shone the lights upon the altar. A slight shiver ran through Werner. Suddenly, the will-o'-the-wisp lights which had seemed to crowd round him on his journey there came thronging about him again. The whole church seemed to be filled with them. And the conflict between worlds real and unreal threatened to break out again within his soul, in spite of Italy.

The day was Sunday. He had not realized it before he went into the church. How long it

was since he had cared whether it was one day or date rather than another!

It was to the Cathedral that he had paid the visit we have just been speaking of. After leaving it he went to look at other churches. In all of them the same odors of incense, wax candles, and old walls, with something of the perfume of the glowing spring forcing its way to mingle with the objects and influences within.

He took no guide with him; a *valet de place* would have made it all too real, disturbed the half dreamy state which he preferred to remain in. He did not desire to study things with pedantic, or, indeed, any sort of accuracy. He preferred that they should pass through his system like a melody not attentively listened to, but merely rousing vaguely pleasurable sensations, as though he were but gathering material for future dreams.

He went, vaguely also, into the midst of one crowd of worshipers after another, spending a few minutes at one high mass and a few minutes at another, and profiting a little unscrupulously, as tourists do, by that peculiarity of Catholic devotion which exempts it from being troubled by the obtrusive curiosity of those superior tramps.

As a matter of course, he went to that sight of sights, that special glory of Verona, the tombs of the Scaligers, with their wonderful inclosure of chain-work; and, like everybody else, was fascinated by the strange, ghostly, mutilated statue of Can Grande, with his charger and its

remarkable trappings. He visited the old Arena, and was duly impressed by its grandiose old gray-brown walls under their canopy of blue sky. In the middle of the august old ruin a company of Cingalese acrobats happened to have pitched their tents, an incongruity fascinating to him. He went to the Canossa Palace, with its wonderful fresco ceilings by Tiepolo, and its Loggia, with its noble view of the Adige; he visited the steep Justi gardens to see their eccentric confusion of rose-trees and cypresses. Ah! these cypresses, so severe in their blackness, relieved only by that subtly small edge of gold which makes an outline of palpable brightness amid their gloom! How strange the effect of those cypresses, in the midst of the pervading odor of violets and roses, which seemed the very breath of the rushing spring! And, fighting with that breath of Life, as if representative of the claims of Death that would not be denied, the reek of yew and damp moss with its suggestions of the churchyard.

He dined. And, if matters had been propitious, he would have gone afterward to one of the two theaters. But alas! At one of these there was to be "The Ironmaster," at the other "La Fille de Madame Angot." In Verona! It was out of the question. Nothing better there than a dramatization of one of Ohnet's half rubbishy novels, or an opera-bouffe. In Verona!

So, as the theater failed, he determined to go back to his hotel and write to Else. He retired to his room, and, after doctoring the dried con-

tents of his inkstand with a little water, began to pour out all his enthusiasm in an essay—for letter it was not—to which production he gave the superscription and title, "Dear Else."

There was no blotting-paper at hand, so he waved the paper to and fro a little to quicken the drying of the rather closely-written matter. As he did so, his attention was so forcibly struck by one and another sentence, that he stopped and read the whole thing through, and could not help blushing over it a little. It was all warm and heartfelt enough, but antiquated in expression, with here and there old-fashioned twists in the style, with something too much, also, of a dead set in its purpose; there was something, too, of the guide-book, dry, pedantic. And, now and then, some highly poetical simile was dragged in by the head and shoulders into the dry incongruities of the descriptions and enumerations and inventories with which the paper was principally filled.

His face reddened when he thought of what Else would say to those high-flown things!

She always used to laugh heartily at him when he attempted, as she put it, to get up and hover about in the higher spheres.

He bit his lips. His first impulse was to tear up the document, but he could not find it in his heart to do so, so he simply laid it aside. It might do, after all, as the commencement of a diary of his visit to Italy. Perhaps the scribble might bring back with it, in those gray, desolate days which he foresaw in the future, something

of the charm with which he was now surrounded.

When he had got over this little struggle, he rang for the waiter and ordered some blotting-paper, that he might not have another stoppage in his second attempt. And he now wrote Else a good-humored, sober communication, full of such details as he knew would amuse her, and which lay altogether outside the region of his enthusiasms. And, at the end of the letter, he thanked her for having forced him to make the journey.

It was true that he felt terribly lonely, and could not, do what he would, rid himself of his longing for home; but, for all that, the shaking up had done him some good, and he was gaining in spirits. It was really all of it quite too interesting and lovely; and, in a few years, when the children had grown a little, he thought that he would like to spend a winter in Italy with his family; and Else would see what a splendid guide he would make. And when he had all his dear ones with him his enjoyment would, of course, be doubled. Then, a few tendernesses by way of finale, the signature, and the letter was finished.

After he had got through with it he went to the window and looked out.

The twilight was closing swiftly in. One of the street-lamps was suddenly lighted. Through the air there came one last dreamy clang of bells, the monotonous sound of slow footsteps, and the dull, half sob and half sigh of some love-song,

with a guitar accompaniment, sung by some one in the distance.

Werner turned away from the window. His melancholy seized him again with a sudden grasp. He felt tired, desolate. But this was not the same feeling of pain at being separated from his family which he had found it so difficult to combat in the first day or two of his journey. It was a feeling quite different, as far asunder from that longing of the husband and father as one pole is from another. And he understood this only too clearly and too well.

The atmosphere of the south and the spring had made him thirsty. And what was it he thirsted for? Human sympathy, some one with whom, indeed, he could be wholly one in sympathy; the happiness which comes of that companionship, and of that companionship only. And for this sympathy, this unity, this companionship, his soul burned with an intense yearning which he had never yet known under northern skies. And, in the glare of this longing, the milder light of his desire for Else and his children seemed to be quenched.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE days came and went. Venice, Ferrara, Modena, Bologna; all these cities he had now visited and delighted in.

His enthusiasm with all the multitude of beautiful things he was constantly enjoying

rose higher and higher with every place he visited. But, together with this enthusiasm, there was that sense of restlessness, that craving and yearning, which was anything but a longing to be back in his home and with the inmates of his home again.

It might be said that his soul was haunted, even pervaded, by a noble and beautiful melody; but the harmonies which were necessary to its support were utterly wanting. So that this inner strain was, indeed, rather strain and pain than music.

Was there some poison in this Italian atmosphere—so his sick fancy questioned—that it thus roused into baneful growth again roots of vague desires which, he had hoped, had long since been wholly extirpated from his being?

He had now been five full days in Florence. In Florence during early May! The whole earth has nothing more beautiful than this union of spring with the City of Flowers, and yet—!

It was not that he was unable to throw himself with interest into these wonderful surroundings. It was not that he had sat down idly folding his hands now that he was there. On the contrary, he had been actively studying, and feeding his admiration on, the beautiful things of the city.

He rose every morning at six, and strolled along the Arno to watch the town as it slowly woke up to its day's work. He sallied out at midnight to feast on the moonlit beauties of the Piazza della Signoria. He wandered about from

one beautiful thing to another; but that feeling of dissatisfaction, that inner and vague discontent, went with him everywhere.

The conclusion had been forced upon him that the journey had not brought about the result which it had been undertaken for. His nervous system had, so far, been injuriously rather than beneficially affected by it. He had come, therefore, to the resolution of turning back without going on to Rome. And this resolution he had already communicated to Else.

It was his purpose to begin the return journey with the least possible delay; indeed, at the moment we meet him again in Florence, it was his idea to start on the following morning. That day, therefore, he had been sight-seeing with unusual energy from a very early hour.

He had sauntered about inspecting one thing after another for full three hours in the Pitti Palace and the Uffizi. He was able to consume much larger portions of art at one meal—if the expression may be allowed—than most people can do; but whether he could digest them is another question.

He had never had any of that training which enables a person to discern and criticise art with full intelligence of the purpose and technique of any given work. But he could not avoid making his own classifications and discriminations. These, however, were based on personal preference rather than any principle of criticism. If a work had anything to say to him personally he enjoyed and approved

it. Color, therefore, and dramatic intensity were what attracted him most. To composition and drawing—the more technical elements of art—he was comparatively indifferent.

For the rest, what principally influenced him, by way either of attraction or repulsion, was the general purpose of any particular work, rather than its specific values, as the critics call them.

The sober realism of the artists of the Dutch School, with their small canvases or panels, repelled him. He was quite insensible to the high technical value that distinguishes so much of their work. The grandiose cynicism of the Bacchanalian scenes of Rubens was offensive to susceptibilities which had never shaken off the influence of early and rather narrow religious training, however much these scrupulous elements in him may have been weakened by philosophic theorizing. And the Rubens work was just as little calculated to satisfy the high-flown poetic idealism which had been too strong in him for both the religious training and the philosophy. And, now, when he saw a delicate young girl standing before one of that master's orgies in colors, with an expression of astonishment on her face, but, also, evidently bent upon learning all about the work, subject and values both, as a conscientious young tourist should, he felt himself growing hot all over, and would much have liked to go up to her and take her away by main force.

However, this repugnance was not excited by

Titian in the least. Quite the contrary. He felt nothing but enthusiasm for that master. In Titian everything was governed by poetic feeling, and the result was poetry itself. Even the ardor and fires of earthly enjoyments became sublimated and poetized under that hand. The artists whose productions he appreciated least of all were the earliest men, the primitives as they may be called—the Cimabues, the Giottos, the Angelicos. And if he studied the remarkable productions of these early pioneers with close attention, it was because he knew that Lena had a special affection for the art period when Beauty was not yet dominant over Religion.

There was one picture, however, of the somewhat later pre-Raphaelite era which riveted him particularly, and the study of which, whenever he stood before it, inspired him with deeper and deeper reflections every time. This was Botticelli's "Spring."

On this day before his meditated departure he left the Uffizi and went to the Academy to pay a special visit to this work that so fascinated him.

The picture is one which sends a thrill of horror through the observer, even in the midst of any enjoyment it may afford. Indeed, its power may be said to consist in the fact that the study of it causes a sort of collision between the two opposing principles of disgust and enthusiasm—enthusiasm for its pure poetry, disgust for its underlying cynicism—both of which principles

are equally represented within its four corners. In fact, the work is the most decided representative of that conflict of tendencies between the unruly sensualism of the Renaissance and the ardent purities of the earlier Christian asceticism.

There can be no more curious subject of speculation than the purpose which the painter had in view when he composed this picture. What means that white figure in the center, with the pale, tired countenance crowned by a wreath of superb spring flowers? What do those Graces signify, with their inimitable sweetness and fascination? What means that flying nymph, with the flowers dropping out of her mouth, who looks round as she flees—looks round at that demon who is introducing the principle of life into the world in the ghastly form of expectoration from his evil mouth?

Werner had read that Botticelli, in a fit of repentant horror, had flung his pictures into the burning mass of the Pyramid of Vanities, erected by Savonarola for the sacrificial purification of Humanity, which was being swallowed up in the pestilential bogs of debauchery. He could well understand the impulse which actuated the painter in this destruction of his labors. But he could not help grieving bitterly for the works of art thus lost to the world. Nor could he help asking himself what could have been the subjects of these pictures which had thus been held unworthy of longer life. It was, perhaps, a natural curiosity.

He stood, lost in thoughts of this kind, before

the Botticelli, but was suddenly startled by something. It was a strong smell of musk.

"Oh, what a fortunate chance! How very delightful!" he heard a rather loud voice exclaim close to him. He looked up and his eyes met the fine eyes of the Princess Orbanoff.

She had on a straw hat, with staring, red feathers and a light gray English costume, made in Vienna, and fitting her figure tightly; an arrangement which did every justice to the fine, if slightly overfilled, outlines of her form. By her side was a very dry and yellow Something, feminine in sex, with the sour corners of Its mouth drawn down, and a profile which was as sharp and unconciliatory as a headsman's ax. *It* was a rather elderly lady, in a loose fitting, dark blue Foulard dress and a rather grotesque hat, which was, however, within the limits of the fashion of the moment.

"Allow me to present you to my sister-in-law," continued the princess, bowing rather stiffly to Werner, who was speechless with astonishment. "The Baron Schlitzing—Princess Irene Orbanoff" (this in French). "My sister does not understand a word of German," added the princess. "My husband is hunting about in every direction for any ecclesiastical curiosities that may be for sale. He wanted me to go with him, but I flatly refused." She laughed as she said this, a little scornfully.

"I am extremely pleased, too, princess, at this opportunity of renewing our acquaintance," said Werner.

"My sister-in-law is not a little difficult to live with. But what can you expect? She is an old maid." The Croatian said this hurriedly, and in a rather low voice. "But she's not at all hard to manage. You must tell her that her profile reminds you of Michael Angelo's 'Night.' The story goes that the Emperor Louis Napoleon made this remark to her thirty years ago, at a ball at the Tuileries. Pray don't forget! When you want a watch-dog to keep quiet you must throw it a bone, you know. Ah! excuse me, dear (speaking French now, and turning to her sister-in-law). I was asking Baron Schlitzing about his family. He doesn't speak French quite fluently. They are all right, baron?"

"Thank God, yes."

"I *am* so pleased to meet an old acquaintance like this!" the Croatian lady went on. "Florence is killing. It bores me to death!"

"I'm sure I find it most interesting, for my part," said Princess Irene. "I am so passionately fond of art, and, above all, of Michael Angelo!" And, as she said the words, the Russian lowered her yellow eyelids modestly.

Princess Ilka blinked at Werner, to suggest that now was his time; but all he said was: "Michael Angelo interests me, too, very much, but I understand painting much better than sculpture. The artist who most takes my fancy here is Titian."

It would appear, from this, that Werner had no particular wish to keep the watch-dog in good temper.

This turn of matters did not suit the princess at all. "You have no tact at all!" she said to him, in German. She was one of those women who take it as a matter of course that any man in whom they interest themselves at all, must at once fall desperately in love with them. When this system is perseveringly carried out it is not at all unlikely to bring in returns some time. A man of more than average politeness may find it difficult to discover a courteous way to dispel the lady's illusions.

Besides, in the present case, it cannot be denied that Werner had not too carefully guarded the Croatian lady from falling into this favorite delusion of hers. She might be forgiven for imagining that he did take some more than common interest in her.

"Do you intend to make a much longer stay in Florence?" he now asked Princess Ilka's sister-in-law, turning away rather decidedly from the princess herself.

"Certainly until my brother's return," that lady replied.

"Yes," struck in Princess Ilka, "we shall have to wait here till he has got together enough church trumpery to satisfy him. It's simply killing! When there's not even a theater open; nothing but a sort of winter garden, where people smoke, and you can only go under the escort of a gentleman. Will you chaperon us there?"

"I assure you that you would not find it worth while," he replied. "I've been there, and was

nearly bored to death; the only time I have had the sensation of boredom in Florence."

"Hm! Well, you'll go with us, at all events, to the Villa Ceraschi?" said the princess, insinuatingly; "they say that's something wonderful."

"The flowers there are certainly remarkable," he answered, absently. Something or other grated horribly on his nerves. Perhaps it was a rather hot wind that was blowing, quite a little sirocco. Perhaps it was the laughing glances of Princess Ilka.

"So, you've been there already?" cried the princess, in a voice of disappointment.

"I think I've been pretty nearly everywhere," he declared, "and I'm beginning to feel that I've had enough of it, and my idea is to go home again, to-morrow, or the day after."

"Really! Do you mean to say that you won't go on to Rome? I should have supposed that Rome would have been perfectly irresistible to you just now, a perfect magnet!"

"How so?"

"Countess Retz is there."

"Really! my wife's great friend? I had not the least idea!"

"Really not? What injustice we may do people!" The pulses of the Croatian lady began to beat more rapidly.

"Not the least idea in the world," said Werner, positively, who felt as if everything was going round. "Besides, the matter has really very little interest for me," he went on, hastily,

but by no means truthfully. "May I be permitted to ask, princess, whether *you* have any idea of going on to Rome?"

"Most assuredly!"

"That's almost enough to make me waver in my resolution of going back directly," he assured her.

"I wonder if you are speaking the truth?" asked Ilka, flattered, as so many women so easily are. "How much we may wrong people!" she continued. "I really suspected that you were following in the wake of that green-eyed bean-pole!"

"You don't say so, princess!" He seemed quite changed, all of a sudden. He smiled in a most amiable and conciliatory way, as a man is apt to smile upon a woman who is detecting him in some inadmissible feeling, and whom he wants to throw off the scent. "I've been a good deal entertained by Countess Retz's conversation, and she is an intimate friend of my wife. But, to speak quite frankly, she is one of those persons whom I cannot at all understand a man's falling in love with. She's a good sort of comrade, however. Are you quite certain that she is in Rome?"

"Whether she's there at this very moment, or how long she means to stay, I cannot positively say," the princess went on. "It's just as likely as not that, at this present speaking, she's steaming off to Constantinople or Kamtschatka. She's one of those creatures who can't be quiet anywhere. All I know is that I received, quite

lately, a letter from a friend at Rome, informing me that the countess was there then. But, the idea of my being the first to tell you about it all! It's really too comical! But don't you think these pictures here in the Academy rather more tiresome than at the other places? Can't we find something more amusing in the place?"

Princess Irene proposed the vault where the famous tombs of the Medici are.

Werner was not at all disposed to protract this chat with the ladies; was a little sick of it, in fact; so he took out his watch and expressed his polite regret that he must leave them, as he had an appointment to breakfast with a friend from Germany.

The princess asked him, in her most flattering way, to spend the afternoon in doing something or other together with her sister-in-law and herself. "We'll fetch you with the carriage about four," she said, "and then we'll drive somewhere and settle something about Rome."

"With pleasure, princess!" he cried; he would have said anything to get away. "It's all the same where you take me too. If it pleases you to lead the way to the Inferno, I shall certainly follow."

"Where are you putting up?" she asked, looking at him tenderly.

"At the Hotel Italy," he replied, kissing her hand. Then he bowed to her sister-in-law, and went off.

The sky was gray when he stepped into the streets, and the air was close and sultry. The

flower-sellers pressed their wares on him on every side; big baskets they had, full of irises, roses and white lilies.

Oh, strange world! so sad, so seductive, so lovely!

Florence was not the unloveliest thing in that world, but it had suddenly lost all its charm for him. The very ground seemed to burn under his feet. The whole city seemed suddenly to be turned, in his eyes, into a sort of orderly disorderly confusion of black and white marble, reminding him of a chess-board; black and white marble, and endless green shutters at the windows.

Returning to his hotel, he found a letter from Else. He opened it hastily. She wrote:

"DEAR WERNER—First, let me give you a big, big kiss for writing me such a nice, full, long letter. There's no one in the world can write prettier letters than you, sweetheart! For my sweetheart you are, just as much as ever; though that's nobody's business but ours. You have such a telling, lively way of describing things, that it makes me feel as if I were looking on them all myself by your side. When you come home, I shall be able to tell you quite as much about your journey as you know yourself.

"There's only one thing that puts me out a little, dear, and that is that your spirits are not as high, you are not as cheerful quite as I could wish. You are not used to being alone, now, you say in your letters, and it makes you feel ill at ease every way. I suppose that is it. Ah, my love! I can't help confessing that I do feel pleased, now and then, to know that you are not

quite the thing away from me. I'm horribly pleased at it sometimes, I fear. Then, in a little while, I'm just as horribly ashamed at my selfishness, and am so sorry, so very sorry for you; and then I break my head in trying to think of some way of mending matters for you. Have you really made up your mind to turn back without going on to Rome? I can't help thinking that would be a pity. Lena is there. I had a long letter from her yesterday full of details. She writes that, after a great deal of irregular going about from one place to another, she is at last landed, or stranded—she doesn't exactly know which—in Rome. But she feels at peace at last, something like the peace of a wrecked ship, or some human creature too tired to stir another step, and who is dispensed, therefore, from forming any resolutions about further progress, as he positively cannot stir from the spot. Rome, she declares, is beyond expression beautiful, fabulously beautiful, and the waves of spring are all streaming together over its old walls, and it looks as if the old ruins would be swamped outright in a sea of flowers.

"Rome, she allows, is certainly more lovely than Berlin, but she will *not* allow that it is more lovely than our Leipzig Place. *That*, she writes, is quite, *quite* the first of all places in the world. That dear, cozy, sweet family life, that sweet, teasing, tender prattle of the children, that hearty affection of their parents, she misses painfully everywhere. Never did she enjoy anything so much in her whole life as that little bit of familiar household life which she had the privilege of enjoying with us.

"I intended to send you the letter, but Dinchen has cut it up into bits to make a paper chain with.

"Lena, I am sure, will do everything in her power to make Rome as pleasant as possible to you. And I'm sure that you, though you pick

all sorts of holes in her, poor soul, will enjoy meeting some one on your travels with whom you can talk freely about us.

"She is living in the Street M—, at the Villa Brancaleone. A garden is called *villa* in Rome, she writes me. Isn't that too funny? (Then came all sorts of household and family details.) A thousand kisses from thine ELSE.

"P. S.—Don't forget to try and make Linden a matter of conscience with Lena. Her last letter, in reply to one of his, was much more like rejection than acceptance. But he does not give up all hope. She really ought to have come to years of discretion by now. She would never repent having him. And if anybody can do anything with her, it's you."

After Werner had read the letter he stood, without moving for several minutes, gazing on the Arno, on which the full force of the sun was falling. His very brain seemed to reel with painful, anxious forebodings. Would it not, after all, be better, far, far better, to take his courage in both hands and return straightway to his home?

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE Villa Brancaleone lay in the direction of the Villa Mattei.

It was one of those vast gardens, with the dimensions almost of a park, which are among the glories of Rome, and of which no other city possesses so great a number.

In the center of the garden was situate the so-

called Casino, a small palace, of which Lena had taken a lease, and where she had now domesticated herself.

It was a very charming dwelling, but much too large for a single person. The rooms seemed as if they were built for the very purpose of making her feel her loneliness to the utmost.

Lena had not yet been there long enough to furnish all the rooms for comfortable use; some of the salons, indeed, were so large that it was almost out of the question to fill them adequately. However, she had selected one special apartment and fitted it up to suit her with great care and taste. And this apartment she now regarded as her headquarters.

This was a large room on the ground floor. The approach to it was, in the first place, three or four marble steps, which led to a loggia that ran along the whole front of the Casino. This loggia was supported by pillars and adorned with statues. And the room specially adopted as her own by Lena opened upon it.

Her piano was there, and her writing-table. All her favorite photographs were there; some in frames on the walls, others thrown about the room in picturesque confusion. And all the curious and interesting things which she had purchased, from time to time, in her wanderings about the city were stored here. There were plenty of picturesque and pretty things, certainly, in that room, but they failed altogether to constitute a harmonious whole, being arranged on no method or principle. The place gave you the

impression that its tenant had no clear idea as to what she wanted to make out of it, and was animated by no governing purpose. The fact was that Lena sometimes gave herself a world of trouble about the location of some quite insignificant object. The next day to this she might, just as probably as not, be utterly insensible, for the time being, to the value of some incomparable work, and fling it aside in some corner or other. And, if anything happened to be in her way, when she was traversing the apartment rapidly, she was very apt to push it aside quite unceremoniously, whatever its value might be. Else's modest boudoir, with all the ugliness of its somewhat vulgar damask furniture, was a better place to live in than all this confused heap of valuable and beautiful things which Lena had collected about her. Even the parlor occupied by Lena at the hotel in Berlin was more like a place fitted for human habitation. The truth is that the disturbed condition of the young woman's mind betwayed itself in much of what she did, and in everything about her.

Lena had settled in Rome simply because she was tired out. She had leased the Casino because it was unoccupied and unfurnished, and sufficiently far from the noise of the great city. Her frame of mind was painfully uncertain. One day she felt the society of her kind quite intolerable, and shut herself up altogether. The next she was ready to plunge herself into any sort of company to be relieved of the burden of herself. Sometimes she would show herself at a couple

of balls and three parties in one evening. At other times she was to be seen nowhere, and was at home to nobody.

This day, when we see her once more, was one of those on which she refused admittance to all the world. She was seated at the piano in this garden parlor, her own special room, and was playing a sweet, soft, sad melody, a Peruvian cradle-song which she had lately heard sung by a young American lady.

The sirocco was gathering up out of doors. Sulzer, her groom of the chambers, who had been in the service of the deceased Count Retz, came in with a card on a silver salver.

She made a pettish movement, and signed to him to stop. "I don't receive anybody to-day," she exclaimed; "I've told you so already!"

"It is Baron Schlitzing, from Berlin," said Sulzer, doubtfully. Baron Schlitzing was a particular favorite of Sulzer, as indeed he was of all his inferiors. "It occurred to me, madame, that as he had come such a long way—"

Lena began to laugh. She did not practice absolute self-restraint before this very old retainer. "Oh! well, as he has come such a very long way, you can bring him in, and bring the tea too, as soon as you possibly can."

One minute later Werner stood before her.

"What a surprise! How are you? Isn't Else with you?" cried Lena, warmly.

"No; unfortunately Else could not get away. It was after I had started that she wrote to me

that you were in Rome, Lena. She has charged me with all sorts of kind messages to you," he said hastily, and in a strangely subdued voice. His words came tumbling over one another, something like the horses of a four-in-hand very badly driven.

"Oh, what a pity that Else isn't here too! Perhaps she may make up her mind to come and join you. And how in the world came you to undertake such a journey, a quiet, stay-at-home creature like you?" cried Lena.

"Well, I had a chill which left me in a wretched state; couldn't get over it," he replied. "My physician insisted on change of air."

"You don't look quite yourself, that's a fact," she said, sympathetically. "Well, we must be careful and spare ourselves, and not take too much out of ourselves in this marvelously beautiful Rome! And now sit down and try to feel a little at home here in my house. Though, I am sorry to say, I can't manage to do so myself. But you bring a little Berlin air with you, so perhaps I shall now get along a little better. Besides, you ought to feel as if you were in your own nook and corner here. It's by no means strange territory! Just look about you." She pointed to her writing-table. "Here's the whole Schlitzing family in a bunch!"

And he did, in fact, see on the young woman's writing-table no fewer than three charming pictures of Else, at different ages, and portraits of all the children.

"The whole family, indeed, with the slight

exception of its head," said he. There was not too much tact in the jest.

"I haven't any portrait of you at all," she replied. "The older portraits are not like you now, and I don't like those that have been taken lately. But here comes the tea!"

She poured him out some in the kindest way, and he noticed that she had not forgotten all his little preferences as to milk, sugar and other such important things.

She was even more gentle and attractive than she had been in Berlin. And about her mouth there was a touch of softness and languor which was new to him, and gave him some uneasiness.

"Is she in love with somebody?" he asked himself. The thought was insupportable to him. He felt that he must try to elicit something from her that would throw light on the matter.

"I have a commission from Else as to something that concerns you," he began.

"Yes?" she answered quickly, looking up from the teacup which she had just raised to her lips.

"She has charged me to speak seriously to you about Linden," he said. "Else entreats you to deal with all that matter like a rational creature. Linden does not seem to be able to take your refusal seriously."

Lena was silent for a moment. Then she shrugged her shoulders and began to speak very sadly, though the sadness had a streak of drollery in it, too. "Linden's persistence is really quite affecting. I rather fancy that that sort of thing goes by the name of 'fidelity' in Germany. As

far as I am concerned, Else can't wish me to behave 'like a rational creature' more than I do myself. Why, there's not a day passes that I don't entreat myself to be sober and rational. But the truth is, that, up to the present moment, I really have come to no conclusion at all. If I were to marry Linden to-day, I should strongly advise him to take a strait-waistcoat with him on the wedding journey. One of the two would certainly go raving mad in a few days. Heavens and earth! There are such lots of girls everywhere. Most of them can get used to any man who does not inspire them with absolute repugnance. The man wants to take care of them and provide for them, and that's enough to start some kindly interest for him in their bosoms. Then, once engaged, and a few duty kisses passing between the parties, and there they are, those girls, over head and ears in love! Happy creatures! I know that if Linden wanted to worry me with any of his kisses, I should just simply throw the plates or the chairs—the first thing that came to hand—at his head! Under those circumstances, do you still advise me to marry him?"

Werner's only answer was a few moments' silence. Then he looked her full in the eyes. "And could you have made up your mind to marry Enzendorff, think you?" he asked.

"Certainly a good deal more easily than Linden!" she replied, quickly.

"Because that alliance would have been more satisfying to your ambition?" replied Werner, dryly.

"Well, what of it? Ambition takes you out of yourself, anyhow! However, I think, to be quite sincere, that the reason why the idea of a marriage with Enzendorff is an easier thing for me than the other is, that there's not the slightest particle of danger of my being forced to make up my mind about *that*."

"Oh, I don't know," replied Werner. "Enzendorff never alludes to you without taking off his hat, so to speak. When a man pardons such a rebuff as you have felt called on to give him, one may conclude all sorts of things from it. He has behaved in a much more dignified, self-respecting way in the matter than I should have expected from him." Werner's sense of justice forced him to say all this; he felt it his duty not to withhold from Lena these facts concerning Enzendorff. But the next moment he was exceedingly vexed with himself for doing it. What was the use of putting that coxcomb in such a favorable light before her? And it did not lessen his vexation when the young woman replied:

"I am very glad to hear that of Enzendorff! He was a man on whom I never could help setting some store."

"You don't class him with those stupid, tasteless bits of ornament which you can buy everywhere for a few francs, then?" asked Werner, who felt a tightening at his chest.

"No, indeed, I do not!" replied Lena. "The man has a great deal in him. He is a character. It is difficult for women to get along well with him, because he has a fixed idea that they are

all more or less good for nothing, and it's not so easy to put up with that. It's a great pity; for there are not many men with whom one can have such good talk as with him. It is true enough that his leading purpose is always personal gratification; but his theories place life on high ground for all that. And I am convinced that when he is absolutely forced to think well of a woman, that is a source of satisfaction to him, after all. Cynic he may be, but he is quite certainly a gentleman."

"In a word, he is a person humiliating as a lover, but with the materials of an excellent husband in his composition," observed Werner impatiently. "I think what you say amounts to something like that, Lena, doesn't it?"

Instead of replying directly to this, she observed, with a little of her former odd *brusquerie*: "If you don't want a fourth cup of tea —you've had three already—you might have a little walk with me through the villa. Come!"

She put on her large straw hat and went out. He followed.

The Casino was on very high ground. The garden was on a slope that led gradually down toward the Campagna.

There was one part of it in which the vegetation had been left to itself. It was a forest of pine-trees, whose gray, nearly black summits were waving gently in the breeze over their copper-colored stems and branches.

And, running through it, was an avenue of evergreen oaks, and another of cypresses; and,

at the feet of the cypresses, were severe-looking busts of Hermes and stone benches. To the right and left in this wood were extensive lawns, of which only one or two were kept smooth after the English fashion, most of them being quite luxuriously overgrown with flowers and spring grass rising as high as a person's knees. And out of the grass rose high, here and there, magnolia shrubs or white azaleas. Creeping rose-trees and glycinas were there in great quantity, twining themselves in wild confusion up to the branches of the severe oaks and pines, or else lying at the feet of the black cypresses, as if tired and borne down by the weight of their masses of flowers.

And so, Lena accompanying him, he wandered through this little earthly paradise. She walked a little in front of him all the time, and he followed her almost mechanically. He could not sufficiently admire the charming outline of her form, and keen was his delight in her pale face when she turned it to him over her shoulder now and again with the exclamation: "How lovely it all is!" He could answer her only with his eyes.

"And now I must show you my favorite spot of all!" she said.

This favorite place was not very far from the Casino, and it was one of the highest points of the garden.

A stone bench, gray-black, damp, eaten into almost by a thick covering of moss, half surrounding a fountain, where wanton naiads and tritons were sending up silvery showers of spray

into the air, which fell back, splashing and rustling, upon them; flowing down then along a few steps into a basin from which the waters overflowed for a further descent, and going it could not be seen whither.

The stone bench was overhung by plane-trees with silvery stems, round which clung, in all their profuse southern growth, a luxurious confusion of Marechal Niel and dark-red jacqueminot roses. The background to it all consisted of a little forest of orange-trees. The orange-trees were not yet in bloom.

The perfume of the roses mingled with the keen odor of the beech-trees, and you detected also that faint, mouldering smell which is peculiar to the gardens of Rome.

"Yes, this *is* my favorite place!" exclaimed Lena, seating herself. "'Know'st thou where I love to tarry when the heat of day is o'er—'"

Again he asked himself whether she could possibly be in love, and how to manage to get light upon the point; then he quoted, almost inaudibly:

> "'Better the heart in thee break,
> Die of the rose's perfume,
> Than never to Passion awake,
> Fade by the loveless doom!'"

She looked up laughingly at him. "Was that an allusion to somebody?" she asked.

"Perhaps," he replied. "I cannot help thinking it a pity that—well, that your life has never yet known that which most beautifies and delights existence. I ask myself frequently whether

the power of loving, in the greatest sense, is not wholly wanting in you?"

She was silent for a brief instant, and then murmured, in low tones: "It is a question that I find it difficult to answer for myself. Sometimes I think that the *naïveté* and simplicity of feeling, necessary to such surrender of myself, are foreign to my being, or have been made impossible by my circumstances. Life has been, with me, a matter of far too multiplied instruction and experience for such things, I fear. My eyes have been forced too wide open for anything which requires a certain glamour of illusion. I—oh, how shall I express it? I am always hearing Mephistopheles laughing on the other side of the hedge when Faust gives Margaret a kiss."

"For shame, Lena! How can you say such a hateful thing as that?" said Werner, angrily.

"Oh! I can very well understand your exasperation," she replied, quietly; "indeed, I almost share it. But what can you expect? It is really as I say. Just think what a life of it I have had, from first to last! That earliest childhood, which I remember perfectly well, though I can never bring myself to speak of it." She stopped short, and covered her eyes with her hand. Then she went on: "And that terrible time afterward, that frightful time between girlhood and womanhood. My grandmother used to lie in wait like a lynx, to pounce upon every movement in me that had any natural tenderness in it, in order to put the most horrible and

degrading construction upon it. That was not a system, certainly, likely to make much impression with me, and she quite failed of her mark. All she effected was to rouse the most violent antagonism in me. In fact, her constant and violent attacks, in one direction, had the effect of rousing impulses and tendencies which perhaps would not have declared themselves till much later. Things that I might have been indifferent to excited my deepest interest. The fire of romantic ideas blazed up all the higher in me because of the tortures to which my youth was constantly subjected, and—well, you know the sequel. My grandmother died. Countess Lenzdorff sent me to Paris, to some friends of hers, to perfect my pianoforte playing. I had scarcely a penny to bless myself with. There was a tiny fraction of my grandmother's property left for me; all the rest she had given away in one charity or other during her lifetime, to the poor, as she used to say. Then I came to know Count Retz. What course was open to me except to comply with the arrangements he so desired to make for my benefit? He took my further education into his own hands, and it is a strange thing, surely, to reflect upon, how utterly opposite were the influences to which I was now subjected. Two beings more diverse than my grandmother and the Cardinal cannot be imagined. She was a creature shut up in the narrowest mental limits; he was full of intellect. She was an ascetic, who knew nothing of life; he was an epicurean, satiated with its enjoy-

ments and experiences. But both of them were exactly of the same mind as to one point, and that is profound contempt for, and disbelief in, the feeling which is generally looked upon as constituting the flowering point of creation. My grandmother's hatred for, anger with, everything like romantic feeling, as I just now confessed to you, roused in me romantic cravings which were partly real, and partly sprang from mere opposition. But the Cardinal's sarcasms at the caprices and absurdities attending passion, which were made up of a strange mixture of tolerance and enjoyment of them, produced a deeper impression on me, and have put my mind into a permanent attitude of antagonism to romance, I fear. And yet—yet, in spite of all that the two old people said, under some circumstances—" She was suddenly silent.

"Well, under some circumstances?" he said, in a low voice.

"I cannot help thinking that it must be only too beautiful and lovely," she stammered, in very low tones; the words seemed to come from the depths of her chest.

"Do you say that?" asked Werner, bending forward a little. "You!"

She looked him full in the face; then, speaking with difficulty, as if just waking from some dream: "Shall I tell you something?" she murmured.

"Yes, Lena."

"Well, then, for one single fortnight of happiness, such happiness as would entirely fill and

satisfy my soul, I would gladly give the rest of existence!"

Her words produced an extraordinary and quite indefinable impression on him. He knew not what reply to make to this utterance of hers. The conversation had been one of the ordinary level kind. And here was a sudden and incongruous outburst of passionate feeling quite altering its complexion.

"Do you really mean it?" he stammered. "I don't think you can be quite aware what you are saying!"

"I know what I'm saying perfectly well," she insisted. "I repeat it. For one fortnight's happiness I'd give all the rest of life! But I mean a happiness that would be altogether satisfying to my heart. I mean a happiness the ingredients whereof would have to be everything that's best and noblest on earth!"

"And for a brief time of such happiness you would willingly lay down your life?" he said, half-jestingly, though his breath came short as he said it.

"My life? Certainly!" she murmured. "But it would need to be absolutely free from the very slightest trace of wrong to any human being. Unless it were, it would be no happiness for me," she finished, abruptly.

"With all possible respect for your conclusions, or wishes, Lena," said Werner, taking off his hat, "I am constrained to think that the end of it all will be that in a year or two you'll marry Linden, or finish up in some such everyday, reg-

ular fashion. I am afraid that the intense and absolute happiness which you have in your head is not exactly compatible with that sort of philanthropic consideration for one's neighbors you insist upon. It's just as impossible to be excessively happy without making somebody or other feel sore, as it is to be excessively wealthy without somebody or other being the poorer for it. The fact is that genuine passion has just as little to do with scrupulosity as genuine genius. Both of them go straight to their mark, and don't care a brass farthing whether they tread upon other people's corns or not. The simple truth is that between passion and you there is an absolute, natural incompatibility of temper."

If Werner said this, not from conviction, but to rouse the spirit of contradiction in her, and, so, elicit from her more avowals of her feeling and thought, he failed in his object. It had not taken Lena long to recover complete mastery of herself.

She shrugged her shoulders. "Let it stand at that," she said. "It was not much more than a careless observation of mine, a slight foray into the unknown. Perhaps the spring season is responsible for it."

The hot wind, the sirocco, had been gathering force. The stroke of six was heard from some distant clock. The vibration seemed to make more palpable the stifling oppressiveness of the atmosphere.

Werner suddenly began visibly to shiver a little.

"For God's sake! Back into the house, and as quickly as possible!" cried Lena, in startled tones. She ran with the speed of a doe to the Casino, and he had to put out all his strength to keep up with her. She did not slacken her pace till they were well within its walls.

Instead of going again into her boudoir, where she had received him, she led the way to a circular room with white marble walls, where several statues were standing among oleander-trees with their white and red flowers. "My pet room," said she, still struggling for breath, "is a doubtful sort of place. As soon as the shadows begin to lengthen it is not exactly wholesome. And, by all account, in the latter part of the year it's a positive pest-hole. And that place with the orange-trees we've just run away from is the most dangerous of all. As for me, all that is a matter of the most supreme indifference. *I* should be glad to be relieved once for all of the bother of coming to some conclusion about Linden," she laughed, with a sort of joyless defiance; "but it's you I am anxious about! What would become of Else if anything happened to you? Did that sharp little run warm you up?"

"Quite," he assured her.

"Well, we'll leave nothing to chance, anyhow," said she. "Wait a moment."

She dashed into the next room, which, as Werner found out later, was the dining-room, and returned with a caraffe of cut-glass, full of some yellow liquor, and two small silver cups.

"Come! you must swallow a few drops of Eucalyptus extract!" she said, imperiously, and filled one of the silver cups for him. "Now, gulp it down, quick. A little more—there!"

"But you're not taking any, Lena; why not?"

"Oh, I? It didn't occur to me! My life doesn't matter much. But if you insist—" She drank a cupful. "And now get home with you, as fast as you can. Where is it? Hotel Europe? All right. Now make them give you something warm directly you get in; and be sure and drink half a litre of good red wine at dinner. But for this little chill I meant to have asked you to stay and dine with me. Oh! don't look so astounded. My arrangements are so perfect that I can ask anybody to stay and dine. I don't care who he might be, if he were an Adonis and a Don Juan rolled in one, let alone a tiresome old German domestic man like you. I have a companion, a duenna, sir, an Englishwoman, who is decorum incorporate. Since that little unpleasantness with Enzendorff I keep an immense supply of decorum on hand, I assure you. You can dine with me perfectly well to-morrow, if it suits you. You must be off directly. Dear me! I was forgetting! I've an engagement to dine to-day at the Russian Embassador's, and really I haven't much more time than I need for dressing. *Àpropos!* do you happen to have brought your riding-suits with you?"

"Yes; Else insisted upon my taking them along," he replied. "Else is one of those old-fashioned souls who think that almost any-

thing may turn up on a journey, you never can tell."

"Else is a treasure! If you think it will do you any good, be here to-morrow morning about eight, before it's hot, and pick me up. We'll have a gallop through the Campagna. I can mount you, but you must hire a horse and bring it along for the groom. Can you find your way out? There is Sulzer, he'll show you the way. To-morrow, at eight o'clock, then!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

WERNER felt for the rest of that day, after leaving Lena, as though he were floating on clouds. And so keen was his expectation of enjoyment for the morning to follow that he was impatient with the hours that still stood between him and his next meeting with Lena. But with her it was quite different. Her interview with Werner had left a disagreeable flavor behind it. She was far from being satisfied with herself.

She was not a little displeased with herself for saying things that it would have been much better never to put into words. Such movements of feeling as she had confessed to never should be brought to the knowledge of any living soul. Besides, there had been so much exaggeration in what she had said! She had not truly represented herself in alleging that wild craving for some unimaginable happiness. Or, if there

was any truth in it, that feeling was so utterly evanescent that it did not, positively did not, stand in any vital relation to her best and permanent self. Her mind was certainly liable to fall, for a few brief instants, into a sort of confused chaos, but how soon it recovered its balance. Yet, *was* this so, after all? Lena could not help asking herself this question not a little sharply. During her stay in Berlin had she been able, with all her best and painful endeavor, to settle, finally, which was the real Lena? The Lena that yearned so terribly for the excitements and enjoyments of exalted feeling, and was ready to lay down her life for ever so short a period of the satisfaction of her heart's ideals? Or the Lena that could see nothing but the ridiculous and the dangerous side of passion? Which of the two was the real Lena? Which of the two would carry away the palm of victory? What would she not give if she could only know?

Next morning it proved that the sober, self-restrained, self-guarded Lena was in the ascendant. And the consequence was that Werner derived far less enjoyment from his ride in the Campagna than he had promised himself.

She did not vouchsafe him a single word that went an inch beyond the coolest feeling. And when he showed a disposition to indulge in some of his enthusiasms, she took the words out of his mouth and reduced him to silence in the most decisive manner. She was like a changed creat-

ure altogether, and expressed her regret that she could not see him at dinner that day, alleging some insignificant pretext or other.

In fact, she intimated to him that for the rest of the day, after their ride, she would be specially occupied. And he spent it in warding off the attacks of persons offering themselves as guides about Rome, and in seeing as much as he could manage to do for himself. He had to content himself with an invitation she gave him for a later day to a polyglot breakfast—a jumble of nationalities—at which she made him sit between a couple of strangers, English women, while she delivered herself over to the enthusiastic attentions of some literary Frenchman, who was just then one of the lions of Rome.

Perhaps because of the nationality of this personage Werner yielded so far to the ill-humor that all this caused him as to take French leave of his hostess. Anyhow, he departed from that breakfast without saying a single farewell word to her.

Then two days elapsed. He expected a note from her to remind him of a plan she had made, for his paying a visit to the Villa Borghese in her company on the following Saturday. The Saturday came, but it brought no sign of Lena's existence. He drove all by himself to the Villa Borghese with a vague hope of meeting her there; he went in and had a look at the Casino there, and those art-treasures so celebrated all over the world. The Dancing Faun stretching out its arms in all the unrestraint of intoxica-

tion. The wonderful expression of severity and fatigue on the famous sleeping figure with the large mass of poppy flowers in its hand! The Daphne, with the laurel branch growing out of her breast, writhing in the convulsions of despair! Then, there was Canova's Pauline Borghese, that most famous example of epicurean elegance and fascination in woman. The work was surrounded, as usual, by a bevy of German governesses enjoying the shock to their modesty embodied in that apotheosis of the style that may not unfairly be called "The Smoking-room Decorative." All these things passed before Werner's eyes. But his mind was elsewhere. Lena was not there. He went out of the Casino, hoping to find her in the grounds.

There, shaded by the laurel trees with their yellow flowers, in the center of a much-trodden lawn in front of the Casino, he discovered—not Lena, but her English companion, Miss Sinclair, seated before an easel and busily painting the only fountain that was in that immediate vicinity, the waters of which shot up and fell in happy indifference to the artist's proceedings.

This conduct of the fountain, the ascent of its waters followed so invariably by their helpless descent again, seemed, to his not well-disciplined fancy at the moment, to bear a certain analogy with the trend of that conversation of his with Lena under the plane trees.

It was with Lena's exalted feelings and utterances as with that unstable water. Shoot as they might, for a moment, up to the very skies,

they were sure to tumble back again in a very little while into the receptacle below, the general receptacle of all the rational conformities of principle and conveniences of every day existence.

She was incapable of passion! Nothing could be more certain than that! She was of a radically cold and guarded nature. Only, she had a large provision of the imaginative faculty, which enabled her feelings to take balloon-like flights into the upper air. But in these flights her head alone was concerned. Her heart had nothing to do with them at all—nothing whatever!

But dissatisfied as he was with her at that moment, he was as far as possible from being able to put her away from his thoughts. He went politely up to Miss Sinclair, examined her water-color with flattering attention, and, in an incidental sort of way, inquired after the countess.

He learned that Lena had been breakfasting with the Marchesa Saldini; "a regular swell breakfast," Miss Sinclair declared it was, given in honor of some princely personage who was traveling incognito. "And she did look so handsome, in her white dress and that hat of hers, ornamented with fresh orchids, fastened with diamond pins. I am dreadfully afraid that hat will get into the newspapers," said Miss Sinclair, with a little sigh.

Werner bit his lips. His ill-humor was far from being diminished by what he heard. He

took his leave of Miss Sinclair immediately, left the Villa Borghese, and directed his driver to take him, by way of the Piazza del Popolo, down the Via Flamminiona to the Ponte Molle. When he had reached the Ponte Molle he made the carriage stop at a small hostelry at the foot of the famous Villa Madama. He went up the ascent to the villa and had a look at the remarkable faded frescoes of the oldest portion of the buildings, deriving much more impression from them than he had from the statues at the Casino of the Villa Borghese. And then he went down to the place where he had left his carriage. And there he found a small group of tourists, belonging to the higher social ranks, with a considerable crowd of the lower strata of the natives about them. These travelers were attentively examining the exterior of the little tavern, and its surroundings, with the praiseworthy purpose of familiarizing themselves a little with the local color. The "local color," in this instance, had its culminating point in a couple of not too well washed Capuchin friars, who were seated at a table and swallowing some red *vin du pays*, in the intervals of their hiccoughs. The effect produced by the friars was enhanced by a songstress with a picturesque veil—so big as to amount almost to a second robe—who was singing some romances of Tosti, accompanied on a pianino by a youth with plaid trousers of a very large pattern, and a head of hair of immoderate growth. The youth looked thriving enough, hair and all; but the unfortunate pianino

looked as if its adventurous and migratory open-air existence did not suit its constitution at all. In fact, judging from its cracked voice, its bronchial tubes had gone to utter wreck and ruin.

The songstress crowed out her "vorrei morir,' and made great eyes at her audience as she did so. She looked as if she might have been a handsome woman somewhat earlier, and, though her voice had long gone, her phrasing and singing were still fairly good.

Her singing, mediocre as it was, really had the power of exciting the nerves of those who heard it, by its very excess of sentimental expression. It seemed to give Werner some sort of pleasure. Or, if it was pain it caused him, the pain was almost agreeable as a counter-irritant to his present humor. He threw her a coin, and then seated himself at one of the stiff-legged rectangular tables and ordered a bottle of Chianti.

He was extremely thirsty, and finished the bottle in less than five minutes. And, whether because of the extremely oppressive state of the atmosphere, or merely because he had drunk very little wine of late, the Chianti went very decidedly to his head.

His depression gave way to an excitement which soon led him to long for some sort of adventure to vary the monotony of things. And the only adventure that immediately occurred to him was to order another bottle of Chianti. At the same time he began to be aware in a careless sort of way that the glances of a very pretty

woman with red hair, who was seated with an older friend at the table between him and the monks, were being expended somewhat lavishly for his benefit. Her demeanor showed plainly enough that he had taken her fancy. He was about to move his chair to her side when a voice that seemed familiar to him uttered the name of the "Countess Retz" in his immediate vicinity.

Werner turned round instantaneously. And he saw the Prince Orbanoff behind him, accompanied by two gentlemen, whom he recognized as members of the German Embassy.

He saluted them, but without moving from his place, and his impulse to gossip or flirt with the handsome Roman ceased immediately. And, as might be expected, he listened with all his ears to the conversation of the three gentlemen at this table behind him, to discover what theme it was they were handling that brought in Lena's name.

One of the German diplomats said: "Interesting, but uncanny."

The second gave his opinion: "She looks uncommonly handsome just now; nobody can deny that; and she is making the most of it. I should like to know what game she is at now. I take it that ambition is the uppermost thing in her. It would not surprise me to read at any moment in the newspapers that she was engaged to some Russian grandduke or other."

"Women like that defy all calculation," said the first speaker. "I should feel just as little

surprise to hear that she had suddenly vanished from the scene of action in the company of some teacher of languages, just as her mother did."

"She'll take devilish good care to do nothing of the sort," struck in Orbanoff; "she's not that sort of woman. You don't marry a wornout old man with half a million of income, as she did, for nothing, let me tell you!"

"If all is true that one hears, the only motive old Retz had for marrying her was that he might provide for her as if they were father and daughter, and her relation to him was filial only," said one of the Germans.

"A likely story that," sneered Orbanoff, "for anybody who knew Retz. Quite too utterly laughable altogether. The next thing you'll want me to believe is that that fellow Enzendorff followed the pretty countess all the way from Paris to Berlin out of pure fraternal regard." He laughed loud, in a coarse way, at his jest.

"Enzendorff? Is there anything on with Enzendorff?" asked one of the gentlemen.

"Oh, that's an old liaison; began in her husband's lifetime," said Orbanoff, in a very positive way. "You'll see he'll turn up here before long."

Werner rose; he went up to the gentlemen and raised his hat. "Excuse me for interrupting you," he began, "but Prince Orbanoff has been speaking rather too loudly, and he has permitted himself to express himself in a way quite

offensive to my ears. I must very decidedly require him to withdraw what he has just said."

"What do you want me to withdraw?" said Orbanoff, in great excitement.

"Those insulting and calumnious observations which you have dared to make about Countess Retz," said Werner, in tones hoarse with suppressed passion. "Will you have the goodness to take back every one of those words on the spot?"

"Not if I know it," roared the prince.

"In that case I have to insist upon your giving me your address," said Werner. "This does not seem to me to be the proper place for the further discussion of such a matter."

The prince handed him his card. It was a matter of "principle" with him never to behave as though he did not care to fight.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Our hero—if he be such—is next to be seen at the Hotel de l'Europe, where he is lying on a couch, in a low-pitched room on the mezzanin floor, which looks out on the Piazza.

The duel, considering all things, had ended tolerably well for Werner Schlitzing; much better than might have been expected of an encounter with such a practiced hand as Orbanoff. Werner had got off with a slight wound in the shoulder, which was very painful but not at all dangerous.

But, when all is said and done, it is not quite the most delightful thing in the world to have to keep your bed in a hotel at a foreign city, with orders to be as quiet and lie as perfectly still as you possibly can, your right arm bandaged tightly to your breast; and all these nice things in a temperature of twenty-four degrees Réaumur, in the shade.

Werner's romance had quite left him for the moment; and he could not help asking himself whether the whole affair was not more trouble than it was worth. Would it not have been better if he had simply gone to work to persuade the prince, in a quiet, gentlemanly way, that he had formed quite a wrong opinion about Lena? And then, what, in Heaven's name, had Lena and her affairs to do with *him*, anyhow?

He did not know how he could possibly bear the time till he should be sufficiently patched up to be able to enter upon his homeward journey. What would he not give to have Else by his side!

During the first forty-eight hours he was nursed by a Sister of Mercy, a gentle, amiable creature, and very short of sight, whose face positively glistened with its plumpness. This worthy creature reduced him almost to despair: first by her hot woolen dress, with its sepulchral odor of phenic acid; and, then, by the rattling of the beads of her rosary, as they fell from her fingers, which was all the time; for she was incessantly at her devotions, except when the duties of the sick-room absolutely required her attention.

This good soul he got rid of just as soon as he could at all do without her. And, when she was gone, he got along as best he could without any particular nursing, by the help of the electric-bell and the chambermaid.

The chambermaid in question had taken him under her special protection. This very day she had, very flatteringly, placed a pitcher with dark-red roses on his night-table.

His physician was a very agreeable person; an Austrian, still quite young. This gentleman had made his visit some time in the forenoon, and stayed for half an hour's conversation, in the course of which, in reply to Werner's entreaties to hasten matters, he had assured his patient that he would be quite fit to travel in three or four days, if he would obey directions and take proper care of himself.

There was an elderly English lady in the hotel who, on hearing of Werner's forlorn state, so far took compassion on him as to send him a whole heap of books, all of them strictly on religious subjects only.

At about one o'clock the monotony of the day is slightly broken by the chambermaid, who brings him a cup of bouillon and a roll. It is quite troublesome to eat with his left hand only, especially as he is obliged to lie absolutely still. So the chambermaid proposes to come to his rescue, and feed him!

In a very little while he was alone again. The sultry heat of the afternoon weighed heavily on all Rome. The roll of the carriages out of doors

sounded much less loudly than usual. The Eternal City was comparatively empty by this time. The pealing of bells was heard rather more frequently than usual; and the footsteps of people, too, marching in close order, as if in some funeral procession. And with that sound there came simultaneously the odor of incense and of wax candles through the open window into his room. Fever was epidemic, in fact, in Rome just then, and that bad form of it known as the perniciosa.

This state of things had been made known to Werner by the young Austrian doctor, who had advised him to do nothing to trifle with his recovery, so that he might get away from the place as soon as possible.

But what did Werner care about the fever? There was only one thing that worried him. "If she does not know"—it was his sincere hope that she did *not* know—"even if she does not know of the particular piece of stupidity which has obliged me to keep my bed, she cannot possibly have remained uninformed of the fact that I am ill"—so he told himself—"and she has never sent to inquire how I am getting on; not once!"

This thought pressed upon him with such force that, weakened as he was, he could hardly keep back the tears. Worn out with the heat and the fatigue of three days' confinement to his bed, he sank into sleep. But he started up in a little while. Surely he had heard the rustle of female garments close to his door? And now a slight knock! He held in his breath; the door was opened.

Before he could recover his self-possession, a veiled female form was standing at his bedside. The veil was thrown back. It was Ilka Orbanoff!

"May I stay? may I stay for just a little while?" she cried.

"I shall be very grateful indeed for a little attention of that sort. I am quite helpless, as you see, and the time hangs very heavy on my hands." Werner spoke in tones with which, one might almost say, disgust mingled, in spite of himself. The disappointment was severe.

"Oh, how hard you are! It's as much as my life is worth to be found out in having made my way to you like this, and you haven't a single kind word for me!" she exclaimed, in tones of reproach.

"Oh, well! if you really have put your life in danger by coming here—" he began, in dry tones.

"Oh! what is *my* life, when yours is in such danger as this?" she groaned.

"I don't believe my life is in any danger at all," he replied, impatiently. "You may set yourself quite at rest on that score."

"But it has been in danger!" she went on, working herself up into excitement. "And to think that the person who has been within an ace of taking it is no other than my husband!"

When she said this, Werner fixed his eyes closely and penetratingly on her face.

"How do you come to be aware of that, I should like to know?" he said, hastily. "Surely, Orbanoff can never—"

"Orbanoff has not uttered a word. The whole

story of your heroism is in the *Italia*, chapter and verse, and here it is!" She unfolded a page from a French paper published in Rome, and he read: "Duel in high life. Yesterday, at a little distance from San Stefano, a duel took place between the Russian Prince O— and a Prussian, Baron von S. The circumstances leading up to the encounter have been alleged to be political; but that is a fiction. The real cause of the differences between the gentlemen was something depreciatory which the Prince O— took it upon himself to say concerning the Countess L—, one of the lionesses of this latter part of the Roman season. Baron S— took the part of the lady in a manner that could lead to but one result. And he is paying for his Quixotism and chivalry by having to repose on his laurels, in confinement to his bed, at the Hotel de l'Europe, with a hole in his shoulder and a smart attack of fever to keep him company."

The paper fell from his hand. "When did that appear?" he asked, in a hoarse voice.

"Two days ago. But how pale you have become, how wretchedly ill you look!" she cried, bending over him. She pulled a smelling-bottle out of her pocket and held it out to him. He put it aside with his left hand. As if smelling-salts and lavender were what the unfortunate needed at that moment!

"Two days ago!" he repeated to himself. "The whole city has been knowing of it for two days? Then she must have known of it for at least as long!"

The Croatian lady went on. "You cannot imagine what suffering it has been causing me all these forty-eight hours! I was beside myself, literally beside myself. I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep, and there wasn't a single moment when I could escape from them all, and rush to you. My husband is an Argus, a veritable Argus! And, just now, he happens to be in one of his worst tempers. Somebody or other—he is convinced it's a secret agent of Count Capriani—has snapped up some rubbishy old prie-Dieu or other from under his very nose for a fabulously large sum. And there's no doing anything with him at all, in consequence. To-day he happens to have gone off to Orvieto. Some valet de place has unearthed a chandelier of Venetian glass; and he has gone after it. He wanted to drag me along with him. But I had an attack of violent sick-headache and went to bed. He went by the two o'clock train. I dashed out of bed. Oh! if any one should discover me here! My life, my position, everything is at stake! Yes, I've risked my all for one kind look from you, and you receive me like that? Oh, Werner! Werner! why are you so cold, why do you repulse me like that? What has changed you so? There is some frightful conspiracy at work against me! You were so different formerly!"

She wrung her hands. She was really very much agitated, in her ignoble way. And that was a little more than Werner could bear up against in his present state. He softened a little. "I will try to behave better, Ilka," he murmured.

"Give me your hand." He kissed her hand, and then said, bitterly: "Let us be good friends. I have often done you injustice in my thoughts, I see that; and it shall not occur again. You have something, at all events, which some women are lacking in, and that is a warm heart. You have some idea of what sacrifice means. Too many only know how to forget."

"Oh, you one man among men! You divine creature! I should like to take my enthusiastic admiration for you in my two hands and scatter it abroad to the four winds of heaven, for all the world to know. I—" All of a sudden the words died on her lips. "Didn't you hear something? Out of doors there! I am lost! I forgot to shut the outer door that leads into your apartment!"

She made as if to dash to the door of the room to turn the key. He stopped her. He too had heard a voice without, a soft, entreating voice, saying to somebody—no doubt one of the waiters: "Take the card in to the sick gentleman, please, at once!"

It was Lena's voice. Werner had got a firm hold of the Croatian lady's wrist with his left hand, and held her back. And a hard, contemptuous look came into his face. "Leave the door alone!" he cried. "And, if you are really in such terror of being surprised with a poor crippled fellow, make your escape through the other door there. It leads to a back stair. Farewell!"

For one moment he was dreadfully alarmed

lest she should do nothing of the kind, but choose to remain. She hesitated a moment; and was gone by the way he had pointed.

As she disappeared the old footman who served his floor came into his room with all the noiseless carefulness that only those servants display who have been trained in the best of houses, and gave him a card.

Lena's card. Her engraved name was crossed out, and underneath hastily written: "Only just heard of your misadventure. May I see you? Lena."

A moment later she stood before him.

She was as pale as death, and her eyes were red with weeping. She had on her well-worn garden hat, in which she made a point of never being seen outside of the limits of her own grounds, and a dress which quite clearly was made for house wear alone, so simple was it, and just as little intended for the street as the hat. She held out both her hands to him, and, as he could only answer with one, she took that one and held it in both of hers. "Werner!" she managed to exclaim. She could not say another word. The tears burst forth, and she sobbed.

He looked up to her, quivering all over, as if beside himself and suddenly transplanted into another world. "Lena, I can hardly trust my eyes! Is this really you?"

Under other circumstances the astonishment in his looks and words would have alarmed her pride and thrown her back into herself. But, for the moment, all thoughts of convention or

propriety were driven from her mind. Every other feeling was swallowed up by anxiety for him, and the thought that he had entered the lists and so chivalrously risked his life for her, and that three days had elapsed without her having even so much as thanked him for it.

"What must you think of me!" she exclaimed; then, pointing to the newspaper, which the princess had left on his bed: "All Rome must have been talking about it for two days! And I knew nothing about it till just now!"

"You must surely know well that I had nothing so much at heart as that you should *never* know anything about it," he cried. "I consider that what I did was quite unpardonable in its precipitation and want of tact. And I think that I have every reason to entreat your forgiveness."

"Precipitation! Want of tact!" she murmured, wiping the tears from her eyes. "Oh, what mere, mere words! It was wonderfully fine of you, though no doubt it was a rash deed and has got me talked about everywhere. Oh, Werner! At first I was simply horrified, just frightened to death, and then—then my whole heart was filled to the brim with joy. I could not restrain my tears for joy. In this sad, sad world, where I am so forlorn and solitary, just like some forgotten sentinel, there *was*, then, one human creature ready to champion me at the hazard of his life! At last I saw, once again, the knightly, chivalrous man who had dashed into the Rhine to rescue the poor, un-

known girl, and whom I had been trying in vain to find and see in you again, in these later days. Now I know that you and he are, and always will be, one and the same person!"

He drew her hand to his lips, once and again, and she was too much affected to make any resistance. Then she seated herself in an easy-chair by his bed, and put some questions to him.

"Now, you must tell me all about yourself. Is there nothing that I can do for you? Are you being well nursed? Would you like to have my man-servant to attend you? Is the food they give you to your liking? Is there anything nice you can think of for me to send you?"

He smiled. "The people here are very kind, indeed. I am under the quite special patronage of the chambermaid. Look there!" He pointed to the roses by his bed. "Besides, I really don't want anything. I can't take anything yet, except a little bouillon. I felt rather solitary and forsaken, that was all."

"You were surprised that you heard nothing of me?" she asked, in low tones.

"Well, yes. Quite apart from this stupid business, which I most sincerely hoped would never come to be publicly known—I only had the newspaper a few moments before you came in—I was surprised, Lena, that, knowing me to be in Rome as you did, you had allowed so much time to elapse without letting me know whether you were alive or dead."

"Well, well, you shouldn't wonder." She wrinkled her forehead a little. "I thought you

were a little encroaching. I was vexed, again, at your running away from my lunch that day without coming to me and saying good-by, only because I couldn't give you, just then, as much attention as you thought you ought to have—oh, well! or wouldn't; have it so, if you please! I don't think it always necessary to make the same fuss with such a good friend, and old friend, as you. The honest truth is, that I was very angry with you indeed; and it happened, just at that moment, too, that I had such a frightful lot of things to attend to that I was obliged to give my mind to them and leave you to yourself a while. Then, to-day, there was I, sitting in the white parlor with the dome—that's the coolest spot in the house—thinking no harm and feeling very angry again with you for your childishness, when lo and behold! in comes Sulzer with the *Italia* in an envelope addressed in a feigned hand. It struck me at once that something disagreeable had occurred. I tore the thing open, and there found—what you know. I went almost beside myself at once. I rang and ordered them to put to, and came to you without a moment's delay, just as I was. There, look! I've got my indoor shoes on." She showed him the tip of a little red slipper, with gold embroidery, peeping out from the edge of her dress. "Well, God be praised for all His mercies! You are getting on much better than I feared. In fact, the porter below told me so before I came up. He said you were getting along famously, and the physician was quite satisfied. I really was half dead with

apprehension. Poor Else! Has any one written to her for you?"

"No. Whom could I have got to write? With the exception of the Sister of Mercy who came to see after me for the first two days, and the physician, I've not seen a soul but the chambermaid and the waiter."

"Well, we must see to that directly," cried Lena, drawing off her long gloves and seating herself at the uncomfortable tiny writing-table, which was all that the room afforded for the purpose. "Will you dictate, or shall I write out of my own head?"

"Oh, write out of your own head, Lena; it's sure to be a good deal better than if I interfere."

"How would it be if I were to tell Else that she must come to Rome and nurse you back to health?" asked Lena, suddenly. "Then both of you could come and stay with me. That would be charming!"

The blood shot into his cheeks. "No, no, Lena!" he cried, quickly; "it would be simply foolish to tell Else to come on here! In three days or so I shall be quite myself again, and then I shall not lose a moment in going home. If we were to summon Else here she'd be half dead with anxiety before she came to the end of her journey."

"There's a good deal in that," said Lena, reflectively. "Taking all things into consideration, we won't say anything to her just now about the way you received your injury. We'll only tell her that you can't move your right arm

—that will do. Poor Else!" And Lena bent over the paper.

She wrote quickly. The roller blinds had been let down; a few spots of light were dancing on the floor; except for these the whole room was wrapped in a gray sort of twilight.

Five minutes, six minutes, eight minutes.

Then she raised her head, dashed the letter energetically on to the blotting-paper, and went with the letter and a lead pencil up to Werner. She put the letter on Werner's traveling portfolio. "There! now you'll have the goodness to use your respected left hand and just put a word or two and your signature where I've left a little space for it." She placed the portfolio before him.

Suddenly she felt some hard object or other under her feet. She stooped. It was a bracelet, a thick gold circle with a large sapphire set with a couple of brilliants. The corners of Lena's mouth went down.

"Somebody has mislaid something here," she observed, dryly. "Who can it be? The waiter, the chambermaid, the physician, or the Sister of Mercy?"

Werner would have been glad if the earth had opened and swallowed him. If he could have done as he liked he would simply have told her the facts. But there are cases when the truth is not "good form," and falsehood, unfortunately, is. "The bracelet must have been dropped by the elderly English lady when she came to provide me with all this enlivening reading matter,"

said he, pointing to the heap of religious publications which was by the side of the roses on his night-table.

"Oh! I never thought of her—"

At the same moment there came a knock at the door.

"Come in," cried Werner.

Lena turned her head in the direction of the door in an unconcerned manner. The waiter it was, with a visiting card. "The gentleman wished to know if he could say a word to the baron?"

"Prince Enzendorff!" Werner read, with astonishment.

"He in Rome? I had not the least idea!" said Lena. All of a sudden she observed that Werner was so confused that he did not know what to say or do. "Let them tell him to come up this moment!" she said to him. She spoke quite roughly, and her eyes darted fire. When the waiter was gone she said, in very dry tones: "Do you know how you happen to look, Werner? Well, you look as if you were afraid that the prince might misinterpret my presence here." Her cheeks were red with anger. "I've never done anything to be ashamed of in all my life; I've never done anything which I would not have been willing to proclaim at the top of my voice in the face of all mankind!"

Hardly had she said the words when the prince came into the room. When he saw her he gave a little start. But when she asked him, a little haughtily and contemptuously, too: "You are

astonished, I suppose, to see me here?" he replied at once, with complete presence of mind, and a low bow: "Only agreeably surprised!" and added: "The only thing that affords matter for surprise is that our visits to our interesting patient should coincide in time, so fortuitously. After that foolish talk in the newspapers, it seems quite a matter of course that you should come in person to inquire and see how it is with so admirable a friend. And I think what he has done entitles him to it."

"Is that really your opinion?" asked Lena, a little shaken.

"Yes, it really is," said the prince, rather strongly, adding in a low tone: "I would have given a good deal to have had the opportunity, instead of him!"

Lena pretended not to hear.

Werner, who meanwhile had held out his left hand to the prince, now asked him: "And what is it that happens to bring you here at this moment, prince? Pure philanthropy? Or, is there some collateral motive?"

"Most certainly there is. I have come to execute a commission for Orbanoff," replied the prince. He glanced at Lena.

"Oh! you can say whatever you like before me," she replied to his glance. "I don't care *that* for what Orbanoff chooses to think of me!" She pointed to the nail of her little finger.

"I am rather sorry for that," replied the prince, "for it happens, just now, that he is

thinking of you as one who deserves the highest admiration!"

"You don't say so! Then you've been doing something, perhaps, to correct his views about me?"

"I have certainly not concealed from the prince the profound veneration and respect I entertain for you myself," replied Enzendorff.

She made no answer to this; but, instead, asked Werner:

"Have you finished putting in what you want to say to your wife? Have you read what I've written? Is it all right, or do you want me to say something more for you? No? Then give it here. We'll see that it's posted directly. Adieu!—Do you wish to do something to oblige me?" This last question to Enzendorff.

"Countess!"

"Well, then, do attend a little to this poor martyr here. It's very tiresome to be lying helpless, away from your friends like that."

"I will do my best, depend upon it, countess. I wish you had laid upon me something more difficult," said the prince; then he added, in tones of entreaty: "And may I be allowed the privilege of bringing to you personally report of your protégé's progress?"

She hesitated a moment, and then said: "Yes. Adieu, Werner!" A little pressure of the hand, a smile of sweet encouragement from those melancholy eyes of hers, which had so haunted him, and she was gone.

"A remarkable woman indeed, that!" ob-

served the prince, looking somewhat fixedly at the door she had passed through. "I don't think I ever knew one who gave me so much material for reflection."

Meanwhile Lena drove home through the subdued, gray light of the late afternoon, which seemed to hover like a soothing caress over Rome.

The Corso was crowded with carriages, and people bowed to her on all sides. She drove through the Forum and then past the Palatine, through the Arch of Constantine and further on, till she had about her the soft rustling of the plane-trees clad newly in their spring foliage.

She ordered the coachman to drive her a little further, on the Via Appia.

A sort of feeling which she had never yet experienced took possession of her. It was something like that pleasant fatigue which comes on after not too severe exertion, and was attended by a gentle, insinuating melancholy.

Werner was, necessarily, in the foreground of her thoughts. Not the Werner, however, whom she had just left helpless. Rather, the young enthusiast who had saved her life at Eltville. Very vividly did she remember how she had then put her hands on his shoulders and kissed his forehead, and how passionately she had longed for his love a little later. And then, with a swift, sudden stroke, the question shot through her whether that which her unhappy heart had so vainly craved for then might not, very probably, now have been brought so close to her, so

close that she had but to put out her hand a very little way to grasp it.

She started, and closed her eyes. "Nonsense! Love! He! *Me!*"

That fateful thought and word crossed her thoughts for a single moment. The very next moment she repudiated the very possibility of such a thing.

"Nay, poor dreamer!"—so ran her thoughts—"I am nothing more than the object of some of that enthusiasm of his, of which he has so much to spare. Heaven forbid it should be more! The bare thought of more feeling for me on his part than that looks as if I were abusing Else's confidence. Even to imagine such a thing possible has a taint of vulgarity in it. Ugh! Horrible! It makes one feel as if some dirt had got upon the very core of one's soul!"

The carriage drove, just then, past a little church, an insignificant little church with a cypress-tree on each side of it. The church door was open. And, at the darkened further end of this little house of God, she saw the candles on the altar burning with their red flame.

Lena ordered the carriage to stop. She went up to the altar, knelt down and prayed.

And she became so absorbed at her prayers, that she was entirely lost to what was happening around her.

Suddenly her ears became sensible of some singing going on in the church. The notes were long-drawn, and the voices were fearfully solemn. She felt as though her whole being were

suddenly enveloped in some vast ice-cold shadow, freezing her to the very marrow.

She lifted her head and looked round her. The little edifice was filled with veiled forms, uniformly dressed, and of formidable aspect. At her very elbow was a bier with its coffined corpse. One of these darkly-robed men, with a cord round his waist—all of them wore the cowl and mask peculiar to this order of servants of the dead—had a small flag in his hand, on which was figured a skeleton.

Torches were carried by some of his companions, and the red light of these, flaring with smoke, seemed to her fancy to be focused on the terrible symbol of that flag. Lena was startled. She was aware that it was only in times when epidemics were especially violent that interments occurred at so late an hour of the day. She made haste to leave the church.

"Whose corpse is that over which the service is being performed?" she asked of an old woman who was sitting in a huddled heap upon the steps of the church.

"Oh, that?" replied the old woman; "that's the corpse of a young girl belonging to the Vigna there." She pointed to a small brown house of hewn stone, laid without mortar, with deeply sunk windows. It was surrounded by an untended garden, a neglected little wilderness of vegetation.

"Do you know what she died of?" asked Lena.

"Oh, the perniciosa!"

That worst form of malarial fever.

Lena recoiled. "The perniciosa?" she exclaimed. "Why, it's not late enough in the year for fever!"

"Oh! the perniciosa is not particular about one season or another," murmured the old woman. "It strikes all of a sudden, without any warning, just like love. And there's only one way of saving yourself when it does strike. Get away from here after the first shivering fit; the third will finish you!"

Lena stood as if rooted to the spot. The sound of that terrible singing became louder and more acute. An oppressive smell of burning wax candles seemed to fill the air, and she was unceremoniously pushed aside. The bier was being carried past. She became icy cold, suddenly, and trembled from head to foot. This close contact with the coffin and the corpse seemed quite to rob her of her self-possession.

She got into her carriage hurriedly and ordered the coachman to drive home. And, as she went along, in the midst of the silence of the Campagna, that awful song of the dead sounded for some time in her ears, as though she had the weird men with the torches close to her elbow still.

The hood of the carriage was thrown open, and she looked round in the direction where the singers were carrying the victim of the perniciosa to her last home.

The funeral procession was following slowly in her wake. As the distance increased between

herself and that melancholy train she began to breathe more freely again.

Presently she saw the dark-brown forms and the torches and the smoke disappear from the Via Appia, into one of the side streets. It was making its way, no doubt, to one of the little churchyards scattered here and there in the Campagna.

Lena began to feel more like her usual self again. The only marked influence about her now, was that of the spring with its living wealth of flowers and blooms among the ruins of the Campagna. And the impression of the flowers and the ruins mingled strangely with the sound of the Angelus bell, which was heard faintly from one quarter or another coming through the soft, sweet, empoisoned atmosphere into which the sun, now below the horizon, sent no ray of light.

But outer influence can very rarely dispel any unusually strong inward movement of the soul. And the echoes of that mystic, penetrating hymn of the dead kept on resounding in Lena's inmost heart.

She could not extinguish those echoes. Nor, do what she would, could she wholly shake off that chill sensation of anguish and alarm which had penetrated her to the very bone in the presence of those ministrants to the dead.

And still the old woman, though out of sight now, kept saying in her ears:

"The perniciosa is not particular about one season or another. It strikes all of a sudden,

without any warning, just like love. And there's only one way of saving yourself when it does strike. Get away from here after the first shivering fit; the third will finish you!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SIROCCO! sirocco still! It seemed as though it would never cease. And the same gray, damp, foggy, strong-smelling, poisonous air enveloping Rome and all its picturesque vicinity!

Lena is seated in the white, circular room with its compartmented cupola, so like a miniature Pantheon in its structure. On her knees is lying a volume of Musset's poems. The heat is too great for any literature taxing the attention more than poetry. Though it would be well, perhaps, if people were more wide-awake over verse than they usually think it necessary to be. In the present instance the heat seemed to be almost too great even for poetry. For the book had been lying open before her for a full quarter of an hour without her turning a leaf. Her brows were contracted, and she had a gloomy expression on her countenance. She sighed, passed her hand over her eyes, sighed yet again, and then became lost in the contemplation of one of the bizarre arabesques of the mosaics of the floor.

It was a singular design. A supple, slender female figure, in a supplicatory attitude, with a broad, shallow cup in her hands which she is

holding out to a Chimœra quenching his thirst therefrom!

The design gave you the impression of being a sort of conventional antique rebus.

What was this thing? Strange! A woman feeding a Chimœra! A woman trying to coax a Chimœra, fierce with hunger pangs, into placidity! Oh, what nonsense! what utter nonsense! The thing was a pretty arabesque, nothing less and nothing more!

Sirocco! still sirocco! heavier, even more sultry. Still, that same smell, ascending from the earth, which seemed to bring with it, all but palpably to the senses, the germs of a fever; a fever aiming, with almost a conscious activity, at the springs of life; a fever selecting its victims from the weakest among the crowds treading the dangerous soil, with a terrible and deadly precision and discrimination.

Some there were, endowed with exceptional nervous strength to balance their imaginative faculty, who took no greater hurt from this poisonous earth-odor than a little heavy dreaminess, stimulating their perceptions of beauty. Many there were, on the other hand, to whom the imbibing of that air was a veritable draught of death.

Werner is now convalescent. He is seated at the Hotel de l'Europe, and is reading a long, sweet, loving letter from Else.

"My Darling—I am delighted to learn that your damaged hand has been put to rights again,

and that you are going on so famously altogether. You seem to have got your head well above water now, so I can't expect that you will have time enough on your hands to write full and long letters to me. I'll let you off that without a murmur; I shall be quite satisfied with knowing that you are well and happy. But it makes me very anxious to be hearing, as I do, so much of the epidemic of fever which is spreading so in Rome. I entreat you, take all possible care of yourself, old man! I have written to Lena—who seems to be most amiably and kindly disposed toward you—to keep an eye on you and to warn you as impressively as she can against silly imprudences which might have serious consequences.

"Little Lizzie is always wanting to know where papa can possibly be. Every night when she says her little prayer with me, she always adds something of her own for your special benefit, and asks God for something particularly nice for her dada. Yesterday the weather was very fine; and so were the tarts. The little thing loves tarts beyond everything. It's a privileged time of life.

"Quite often, when she awakes very early in the morning, she says: 'The angels have told me such a fine story again!' That's the only way she knows of telling you that she has been dreaming. She is a great dreamer, without knowing it! She gets that from her papa.

"The other children are preparing all sorts of surprises for you. They are ransacking their dear little brains for things to please you when you are with them again. Some of their suggestions are extraordinary indeed, dear, enthusiastic little souls! It moves me very deeply to see how they all hang upon your very name. Perhaps that is because you don't, as a rule, take much notice of them. It's for that reason, no

doubt, that they treasure up every caress and every kind word they get from you. But I won't spoil your pleasure by anything that sounds like reproach, dear fellow! I am perfectly aware that the poor little things do make an unwarrantable noise sometimes. And they had no business to come into the world so quickly as that, one on the heels of another, the little tempests! And I am always only too thankful to see that, though you don't notice them much, under ordinary circumstances, if any one of them has so much as a pain in the tip of its little nose, you are much more anxious about it than I am. And, then, how can I be surprised that the small things dote on you so when their mamma sets them such a brilliant example? That sort of thing, of course, descends from parent to child. It's part of Heaven's kindness, surely, that it should.

"Erica Sydow has a little boy, the sweetest little creature you can imagine. She is quite proud at his being such a fine fellow. Your cousin Goswyn is in the seventh heaven, and is just like a second mother to it. He reminds me a good deal of what you were to me when I was so very ill after Rhody's birth. For I must say this for you: nobody in this world has such a tender heart and gentle hand when occasion calls for them. And, therefore"—(here a line or two was a little smudged) "The *stupid* tears! But you know they don't signify much with me. I'm a vessel that quickly fills and runs over. Only—but let us get to something more merry.

"Thilda can think of nothing but painting now. Everything else has its nose out of joint. She is painting something perfectly wonderful just now; an allegory of the most imposing kind, which she entitles 'Modern Art.' There's only one figure, a centaur. He's intended to signify the combination of the beastly and the divine,

which is Thilda's idea of true genius. And his principal business seems to be galloping about in a meadow full of all sorts of staring flowers, and trampling them to death under his hoofs. Ryder-Smythe—the handsome—is sitting to her for the centaur; that is to say, only for the head, of course. The rest of the divine monster she's getting from a plaster cast. Countess Lenzdorff will have it that Ryder-Smythe, who is reported to be embarrassed for money, is making up quite seriously to Thilda. But that must be all nonsense. With all her silliness, Thilda is not quite so silly as to think for a moment of marrying a charlatan like that American.

"Yesterday was Rhody's birthday. He was highly delighted with the letter which you wrote him. I made quite a heap of all the other presents which came for him, and put your letter among them. And you should have seen the little fellow's pride when he came upon it. He has quite made up his mind to write a letter to you himself. I have already ruled the paper for him.

"We drank a demi-bottle of champagne to the health of the little hero of the day, and his papa.

"There's all *our* news. And now, good-by, darling.

"I thought I could finish up without saying a word to you of what an empty thing life seems to me without you, and how anxious I am to have you by my side again; though 'anxious' is a weak word for it. But I find I can't; it will out! I often dream that you *are* here, and that you take hold of my arm and give me that look of yours which comes on your face when you're sorry for me, or I've hurt you, saying: 'What is wrong now, old woman?' God forbid that any words of mine should interfere with your present enjoyment! Indeed, I have no words to say how very, very glad I am that you have at last

some genuine and deep delight to vary the sad monotony of your existence, heart of mine! But the truth is, that since I've been hearing all these dreadful things about the fever at Rome, I am in such constant alarm about you that it's something terrible. And I suppose if I've written to you such a long letter, with such lots of detail, it is because I want to make you pine for home again just a little. We have nothing better to offer you here than what you read of in this letter. But is that really such a little thing, after all?

"I know how wonderfully beautiful Rome is, and how delightful it must be to be in Rome. But the finest things in this world are not always those that agree best with our health. Oh! come back to the children before the poison in the Roman atmosphere has got into your veins! What could I do with the children without you there to help?"

Those were the last words of the letter.

He laid it down with a sigh. "Come home before the poison in the Roman atmosphere has got into your veins!" he murmured to himself.

It was not the air of Rome that had crept like poison into his system. It was something quite other than that air. And his conscience spoke to him with quite startling plainness. It told that, if the least portion of bodily and mental soundness was still left him, he could not too speedily leave Rome and its ruinously seductive beauty behind him.

Yes, he must, he *must* away! He *must* bow his head under the old and too familiar yoke. As the thought took hold of him, he was seized with an access of sudden despair. An impulse to leap out of the window almost came upon him,

just as if he had suddenly seen some monstrous shape at his elbow, and putting out its awful hand to clutch him.

But might he not give himself some few days' grace? Only eight days, eight only days, clamored his thirsting heart! Whereto came answer from his conscience, answer stern, inexorable: "No; not one hour!"

No, indeed! Why, what had he been doing in these last two weeks, since Lena had, on that memorable day, sat by his bed of sickness, her eyes overflowing with compassion for him? What had this fortnight been, except a graceless time of grace, which he had so unwarrantably allowed himself, lengthening it out helplessly as day followed day? Had not this time been spent, really, in trying to persuade himself that the partial and superficial satisfactions, which were all he could allow his dangerous feelings, would so help him to assuage their anguish as to make departure, after a little while, come easier to him? And had he not had enough of this self-deception? Or, was it that all the nerves of sensibility, through which conscience acts, had been so dried up, dulled, blunted, by one overmastering passion, that he had degenerated into a hard, sterile, barren, thoughtless kind of automaton, incapable of any feeling or motion save such as passion dictated?

Nothing he had ever experienced in his life rivaled the dreamy sweetness of the first day or two of his convalescence; and then followed torture, unendurable torture!

The longing for *her* presence, when away from her, became more and more acute. But the satisfaction of merely being in her presence diminished with every occasion of their meeting.

When he saw her again his pulses beat, at first, with feverish rapidity. But in a few minutes a sort of paralysis came over him; he felt as if he were turned into a man of wood. In fact, more than once he actually avoided going near her, simply because he felt himself incapable of saying a single intelligible word to her. And then he cursed himself for his stupidity in letting an opportunity pass of taking his fill of looking into her eyes. She noticed, of course, these changes in his demeanor, but she did not realize their true meaning. She would put questions to him, in her warm, anxious way, about his health, in that kind, motherly tone, which had at first been so soothing to him, but which now reduced him almost to the verge of despair.

And yet he knew well, if he knew anything, that he owed her a deep debt of gratitude for this maternal tone of hers for keeping within some bounds of moderation this passion of his.

"This *passion* of his?" he asked himself, with a sort of recoil. "Was he, indeed, driven to use such a word as that?"

Yes! The facts were too strong for him. With a sort of cold despair he recognized that his feeling was describable only by that terrible word. It was love that had taken violent possession of his soul, passion; love, passion the most fervent,

the most hopeless, that man ever felt for a woman forbidden him by every law, human and divine.

What could it all lead to? He did not venture so much as the faintest wish or hope that it ever could lead to anything, except his misery. The bare thought of any injury coming to Lena's soul through him was something from which he recoiled with positive horror.

Looking, therefore, with such calmness as he could command upon the situation, the best thing he could do was to summon up all his energies and put a summary end to it.

He rang for the waiter and asked him if he would be so good as to pack his things for him. And when did the last train leave for Florence?

The man told him that it was about eleven.

Werner's heart began to beat loudly. It seemed to him something disgraceful to run off in that heedless, headless manner. He felt that he ought to be ashamed of himself.

He asked the man to lay out his evening dress for him. He determined that he would not leave by the night train, but by the first morning train. That evening it would be only right for him to go and see Lena, to pay her a farewell visit. It was the very least he could do, taking all things into consideration.

* * * * * * * *

And that evening, as it happened, was Lena's weekly reception. A few people were assembled in the white hall of the Casino. They had fled there for refuge from the heat which was get-

ting to be insufferable in the other rooms of the palace.

The door leading to the garden was wide open. Werner had stopped his carriage at the foot of the ascent leading to the villa. And he had detected Lena's presence while he was still some way off from where she stood. She seemed enveloped, as by some mystic robe, in the heat-laden mists of that sultry May evening. And he gazed at her as people gaze at things which they want to stamp irrevocably in their memory—things to which they are saying, now and forever, farewell.

She was engaged in animated conversation, and standing with the white blooms of an oleander-tree on one side of her, and, on the other, the statue of a mourning Eros. One of her hands rested on her hip, her other elbow was on the pedestal of the statue, the upper part of her frame was thrown slightly back, and her head inclined to her left shoulder. And grouped about her were a number of those international dandies, who may be said to be known by sight to all the ball-rooms of Europe; conspicuous among them —Enzendorff.

It was he who, for the moment, seemed principally to occupy her attention. Though there were none but men in her immediate vicinity, her demeanor evinced not the slightest consciousness of the fact. Nothing could be more free from the least suspicion of coquetry. It evinced nothing except amiable and kindly acceptance, or recognition, of the homage she was receiving at those gentlemen's hands. Her bearing was

always too decidedly that of command—though gentle and amiable command—to suggest any of the weaknesses of her sex. No one could possibly imagine, for a moment, that any one of those surrounding her exercised the very smallest influence over her, except such as, of full conscious purpose, she chose to permit.

Among the gentlemen with their black evening-dress, and the ladies, who were nearly all in quite light colors, there was one spot of red which scorched Werner's eyes very unpleasantly. Could it be possible? Yes! There, in a fire-red dress, *décolletée* within an inch of her life, her classically beautiful shoulders and arms in full display, between two nearly beardless Belgian youths traveling for the first time in their lives without a bear leader, sat Ilka Orbanoff! Her unrestrained laughter was heard far out in the garden.

Werner stepped out of the shadows of the garden, where he had remained studying the scene a while, and went up to pay his respects to Lena.

She could only just give him her hand to kiss, and then had to turn away to the tea-things, which were just at that moment carried in on a table by a couple of footmen. And she was now obliged to confine herself to her tea-making duties, and to the task of entertaining an exceedingly vivacious old English lady, who seated herself by her hostess. The gentlemen she had just left came thronging round the table, and they were joined by others. She was so sur-

rounded, in fact, that Werner was obliged, for the moment, to give up the idea of getting near her.

As he could not bring himself to enter into anything like a conversation with anybody he saw there, he took a seat as near as he decorously could to some people who were talking volubly together, hoping that their voices would afford a decent cover for his silence.

There was a good deal of talk going on about the room concerning the "perniciosa," and the two victims, members of the foreigners' colony, who had just fallen victims to it. Some expressed great fear; some either shuddered or shook themselves, more or less consciously. Those might be serious symptoms, perhaps! So the two Belgian youths ran up to Lena, and asked her with alarm if she had any Eucalyptus extract. She laughed; and, in a moment, these amiable youngsters were going about the room, one of them with a cut-glass bottle, the other with small glasses on a silver salver, and offering the desired prophylactic to the ladies with all the airs and graces of the most accomplished waiters; of which, they declared, they had become absolute masters, in consequence of their having had the charge of the refreshment sideboard at the last fancy fair in Brussels. When the ladies had taken a sip of this they seemed to have had enough of the perniciosa, and could speak of nothing but the ball which was to take place that week at the Mariani Palace, in honor of the betrothal of the young Princess Mariani. What

an idea! they cried, to give a ball with such an epidemic of fever at its height!

The interest of the talkers was soon attracted by other subjects in different directions.

One of the two young Belgians had gone and seated himself at the piano in the adjacent salon, and now proceeded to give the assembly a specimen of his musical abilities and education, which were certainly not a little remarkable in their way.

This promising youth, as we have just mentioned, had lately been emancipated from the hands of his tutor, an extremely ascetic Jesuit. And perhaps it was owing to the exuberance of his new freedom that he began to favor the company with some songs, the words of which were more fit for the typical *café chantant* of Paris than the select company he was now in. And this he did, accentuating the improprieties with every sort of gesture and contortion he could think of, to show his own delight in them, poor wretch! However severe his training may have been, it had left him, it would seem, insensible to the dividing line between the things that can and that cannot be said and done in society. The people present were taken aback somewhat by his performances.

Nevertheless, they met, it must be confessed, with a certain measure of success. The adjoining room was soon crowded, and the piano surrounded by his little public. There was much amusement, and not a little whispering and laughing. And those who enjoy the spectacle

of their fellow-creatures making themselves ridiculous might have been well satisfied. The only person who did not know what to make of it all was Miss Sinclair, who went about from one person to another with uplifted brows, asking with all her might: "What does it all mean? Oh! *please* do tell me, what *does* it all mean?"

Lena stood somewhat apart from her guests, while this scene was going on, with Enzendorff at her side, and with a frown on her brow. These proceedings were evidently distasteful and annoying beyond measure to her. Enzendorff said to her: "This is really insupportable! Will you empower me to go and order the unhappy young fellow to stop?"

Werner felt a constriction at his throat. Intolerable presumption of Enzendorff to assume the office of censor in Lena's house in that fashion! Ilka Orbanoff saw her opportunity, and came, just at that moment, and seated herself by his side. This was the first time they had met since the day when she had boasted of her readiness to proclaim her enthusiastic admiration for and devotion to him to all the four quarters of the earth, and had, the very next moment, run away and escaped by the back stairs. Werner had always greatly admired her beauty, while despising her character; and the incident referred to had, very naturally, strengthened that contempt.

He could not but apprehend that she would again begin that operation of throwing herself at his head which had so offended his taste, and

he was determined, this time, to use his weapons of defense in a manner she would never forget. But it turned out that there was no need, at this moment, for his buckling on his armor. Ilka was disposed, it seemed, just then, to leave her own interests and inclinations out of account; for the subject she opened her talk about was—Lena.

"This is decidedly one of her beauty days—Countess Lena's, I mean. Don't you think so?" she said.

"You are quite right!" he murmured.

She moved a little nearer.

"In which of the two parties have you enrolled yourself?" she asked.

"In what fight?" he replied.

"Oh! it's the Enzendorff business," Ilka whispered. "Roman society is divided into two camps. One set bets that he marries her, the other bets that he doesn't marry her."

Werner turned rather giddy. "I had not the least idea that anything of the sort was going on," he murmured; then, pulling himself together, though it was difficult, he added: "It would gratify me much to see the countess make such a good match. Enzendorff is a thorough gentleman."

He looked round for the pair as he said the words; but Lena and Enzendorff had left the white salon.

Ilka moved her chair a little nearer still to Werner. "Beaten off the field, poor fellow!"

she whispered. "Well, we must try to comfort you!"

At that moment Lena happened to step to the door which separated the white salon from the hall. The door was decorated with bizarre arabesques in stucco, and Lena stood quite still there for a moment, looking like her own full-length portrait framed in the jambs of the door. She flung a smile to Werner over the shoulder of the red-haired Croatian, invisible to the latter, whose back was turned to her. It was a smile of a kind Werner was not familiar with on Lena's face. The smile that he had known there had always been filled with warm friendliness, dashed with roguish humor; but *this* new smile was rather one of defiance, challenge, mockery. Werner was so struck by it that, without a word of apology for his abruptness, not to say rudeness, he rose, left the princess to her own devices, and went up to Lena.

"You have been so surrounded that I haven't been able to get a word with you," he said.

"Had you anything of special importance to communicate?" she asked him. She was like a quite changed creature; her manner was repellent and defiant.

"Yes."

"Then you might have made some sign to me to that effect, and I would have made an opportunity for you at once. I thought that you were so pleasantly engaged that it would be quite a pity to disturb you."

She threw a glance at the Croatian lady, who

was now absorbed, as it appeared, in examining some of the photographs which were lying about on one table or another.

"Can you guess what the entertaining subject was that the princess and I were discussing?" asked Werner.

"Oh! how should I know? Beauties of that sort have such a very peculiar way of managing their minds that I quite despair of following their working; don't think it worth trying even!"

Werner colored a little. After a short pause he said: "The princess was acquainting me with the fact that society here in Rome is quite busy discussing your approaching engagement to Enzendorff."

"Oh, indeed!" said Lena. "Then society here in Rome knows a great deal more about the matter than I do. Enzendorff is behaving uncommonly well, and doing everything in his power to make amends for his mistake, as indeed he ought; but, as to marriage, he is thinking just as little about any such thing as I am."

"Those are words that I rather fancy I've heard ladies in society say before. And, if I am not mistaken, they were quite speedily followed by the engagement they denied," murmured Werner, looking at the young woman rather uneasily from beneath his contracted brows.

"Oh! people can't always answer for themselves. The most improbable things have a way of happening, sometimes," said Lena; then, contracting her brows too, and turning her eyes

in the direction of the handsome Croatian, she said slowly and in low tones, but sharply accentuating every syllable! "Do just look at that bracelet the princess has on. Don't you think that it has quite a remarkable resemblance to the one lost in your room by that philanthropic old lady from England, who provided you so liberally with religious literature when you were laid up?"

Werner was mortally embarrassed, and could not conceal it.

Lena scrutinized him keenly from head to foot.

Something red, with a pair of dazzling white shoulders rising out of it, rustled by the two, who were so deeply absorbed in each other, in its transit from the salon to the hall. It was Ilka Orbanoff. Lena's gaze followed her.

"I really had not noticed till now how decidedly handsome she is!" murmured Lena. Then, with a very sharp edge on her voice, she added: "There's no denying it; you have uncommonly good taste!"

"Lena!" he said, in a sort of stupefaction, looking her full in the eyes. "Lena!"

"I suppose you'll imagine, next, that I'm jealous!" she exclaimed, hastily. Two bright red spots were burning on her cheeks, and she was unmistakably disturbed and not as much mistress of herself as usual. "It's a matter of the most supreme indifference to me how you amuse yourself, one way or another. It's Else that interests me, and I should be very sorry for her to be hurt; but she needn't know anything

about it, of course. No doubt you'll be able to tell some lie about it to her, just as glibly as you did to me."

"Lena, are those words worthy of you?" he murmured.

"Do you mean to say, seriously, that you did not tell me a lie about it?" she answered, speaking still in the same suppressed voice, very quickly and with the same sharp articulation of every syllable.

"Oh! about the stupid bracelet? Well, yes. And what in Heaven's name was I to do?"

"Oh, certainly!" she looked down with a dark expression. "I forgot. There are some cases in which perjury is a matter of honor."

"I think there's a considerable distance between my innocent little falsehood and perjury. And, in fact, there was no real need even for the falsehood, though I didn't quite see that at the time. I might have spared myself the burden of it. The princess in question had, just the moment before you came in, paid me a visit, as I was lying helpless there. She heard somebody coming, and fled by the back stairs, which was a stupid thing to do, for there was not the slightest reason for her concealing her doings. But some women are made so. They are never happy unless they are striking an attitude, or doing something theatrical. And they think that by playing at hide and seek a little, when they're doing the most innocent things in the world, they put a little halo of romance round their silly heads."

But Lena was not to be pacified. There was no holding her. She seemed to have lost her head altogether.

"You are very clever!" she said in low, mocking tones, "extraordinarily clever! I'd not the least idea you were so clever! However, the affair is no business of mine, not the very least in the world. And my duties as hostess positively forbid my protracting this confidential conversation *ad infinitum*." She made to pass him and go into the salon.

He held her back. "One moment only, Lena! I should like to give you my warm thanks for all the kindness you *have* shown me. I start to-morrow for home at an early hour, and my object in coming here to-night was to let you know, and take leave of you."

"Take leave?" she murmured. "Early to-morrow?" Her voice sounded wooden, as if it had lost all power of expression. Did his eyes deceive him, or was it really the fact that she turned pale? She went on: "I was under the impression that you had made up your mind not to go till after the fête at the Mariani Palace!" She brought out the words impetuously, as though they forced themselves from her; and the angry expression did not leave her face.

"I feel that the air of Rome disagrees with me," he replied, very simply.

She bit her lips. No, he had not mistaken; she had become as pale as death. She had stepped out, by this time, from the framework of that old-fashioned door, and was now stand-

ing where she had stood when Werner came into the hall that evening, between the statue of the weeping Eros and the white flowering oleander-tree. Her hand was supported again on the pedestal of the statue. But her attitude was no longer marked by the negligent grace and charm it had at the earlier moment. She looked now as if her whole frame was clenched, and might be convulsed at any moment.

"Ah! you are afraid of the perniciosa?" she said, in a mocking voice.

"Perhaps," he replied.

"How very fine and noble! A man who, because he's afraid of an epidemic in a town, runs away in cold blood from his friends!" she said, cuttingly.

That speech was so exceedingly foolish that it was not possible for him to feel the least resentment. He smiled almost compassionately, shrugging his shoulders, and said:

"Do you really think I'm afraid of that? Cowardice was never one of my faults. I never was backward in risking my life even when it was still of some account and value in my own eyes!"

"And now, I suppose, it is *not* of any account or value in your eyes?"

"Absolutely none! I see nothing in it to admire, or set any value on at all. It is with me as with Hamlet. 'I do not value my life a pin's fee!' " he replied.

"Indeed!" Her voice became sharper and sharper; such tones he had never yet heard pro-

ceed from those lips. It was something like what might come of the attempt of a person, suffering acute bodily pains, to sing, and bringing out tones which were half screech, half song. "Then, we are taking all this care of ourselves for the sake of our relatives, our family, to whom we are so indispensable!"

He fastened his reproachful eyes upon her face. "Lena, you might have spared those words! No one knows better than I do what a poor, worn, second-hand piece of superfluity I am to my family; a sort of vent for their affectionate feelings; and, beyond that, nothing! Oh, no! I know only too well that, if I were to die to-morrow, a good deal more than green grass would be full-grown on my grave before six months were over; but there'd be plenty of flowers among that grass; aye, and the finest of flowers too! It's not the epidemic which is frightening me away from Rome; by no means the epidemic!"

Her head sank, and she said not a word.

From without, through the wide-open front doors of the hall, came the dew-damp breath of the sirocco, and the gurgle and splash of the fountains!

In the adjoining room the Belgian youth had just begun to favor the company with another song.

The verses turned upon the adventures of a certain bird, whose eccentricities in the matter of nesting have made it the symbol of the worst kind of domestic misfortune. The young gentle-

man sang them with a sort of drastic naïveté, if the two ideas can be thought of as going together. Every stanza was warmly applauded.

Werner felt as if his head were going round. What a strange world it was! This background of culpable levity, and, standing out from it in full relief, Lena, pale, chaste, her fine face and form speaking so eloquently of the heavy-laden life, clad in white; and so enveloped in the bitter, almond-like perfume of the oleander that one might almost fancy it proceeded as much from herself as from the tree.

"And, if it is not the epidemic that drives you from Rome, what is it, then?" she asked, in slow tones.

He gave her an uncertain, scrutinizing sort of glance, and then said, with some decision: "Ask me not! I may not tell you!"

"Oh! pray excuse me," she replied, icily. "I had no desire to pry into your private affairs. You know best what is good for you. I will not detain you unnecessarily any longer. Adieu! Say everything that is kind for me to Else and the children!"

She held out her hand to him as she might have done to any indifferent person, and half turned to the salon.

He held her hand firmly; she could not move.

"Lena!" he murmured. "It was but a few poor minutes that we had for this leave-taking. Why have you poisoned them so? I would have been so thankful for one sweet, last memory to take back with me to my home!"

She shrugged her shoulders, and repeated, "Adieu!"

He went, putting one foot before another in the way we might imagine the possibility of a man doing it after he had had his head removed from his shoulders.

All the arrangements in the Villa Brancaleone, furniture and everything, were turned topsy-turvy by now, owing to the hot weather. In order to reach the place where he had left his overcoat, he was obliged to go through the loggia where the statues were. And he heard, behind him, a low voice that cried: "Werner!"

He thought that he must be dreaming; he heard it a second time: "Werner!" And then he turned.

Among the white statues he saw something that looked paler and more mysterious than they did, and which was standing just as strangely, mysteriously still. He could not understand. He thought it must be a work of his imagination. Then the pale form stretched out both its hands to him, and once again the name sounded through the damp sirocco atmosphere, "Werner!"

He hastened to the form and took its hands in his. They were as cold as ice, cold with an unnatural coldness. Werner was startled as they came into contact with his own.

She lifted her eyes to his; those eyes were lighted up with a strange fire he had never seen in them before. "Werner," she murmured yet again, "it was horrible of me! I am sorry!"

Her voice, too, was different; it seemed to tremble with some new influence. What was it? Was it suppressed defiance or suppressed anguish? And the expression about her mouth, too. All so new to him, all so entirely unfamiliar to her face. He turned quite giddy. What would the next minute bring with it? Would she begin to laugh, or—

Before he could think of what she might do if she did not laugh, she had begun to speak again.

"I should be very, very sorry, too, if these pleasant relations of our friendship and intercourse were to be now suspended for a season in any way that did not harmonize with their former sweetness. You shall not go back to your dear, lovely home without carrying there as good and kind a memory of me as you possibly can. But I can't get my wits or myself into anything like good order among all these strange people. Don't go away till the day after to-morrow, and come as early as you can to-morrow morning, if possible about seven, before the heat begins, and take me for a ride into the Campagna. You shall drink in one last full draught of the beauty of Rome; and then you shall go, and God go with you!"

He kissed her hand. "Good-night!" she murmured, and hastened away.

He followed her retreating form with his eyes. "To-morrow, then!" she cried, just as she disappeared from his view, and before he had time to return her cry, "to-morrow!"

He got into the first cab standing before the villa—cabs were always waiting there for fares on those Wednesday evenings—and drove to "the Europe."

"At what hour does the baron wish to be called in the morning?" asked the porter, who had been expecting him for some time.

"About half-past six," replied Werner, whose mind was elsewhere, and who seemed puzzled why the question should be put to him.

"Very well. What train does the baron go by?"

The question affected Werner unpleasantly. He shrank a little. "I am not going by any train!" he answered curtly, and went to his room.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

It was long before sleep came to him that night; and when it did come it was heavy, leaden sleep. When he awoke, under the compulsion of a loud knocking at his door, it was with difficulty he could force his eyes open and get the full use of his brain again. What in the world were they rousing him at so unconscionably early an hour for? His first glance fell upon his portmanteau, which was packed and only awaited the final touches before departure. Ah, true! He had intended to start that morning. And then it came to him, all of a sudden, that he had made that arrangement with Lena for a ride.

When he now, in the clear light of morning, recalled her singular behavior and demeanor during that strange interview, it seemed to him so very extraordinary that he could not help asking himself whether it was all real, or whether he had not rather been the sport of some impish spirits counterfeiting reality.

The white, pale form came up before his eyes again, standing among the pale, white statues. He saw once more the glitter in her eyes, glittering with tears or fever, or both; he felt again those ice-cold hands, he heard the subdued trembling tones of her voice. And all these things seemed, taken together, to be almost the very realization of all he had ever heard of the manifestations made by creatures not of this world, in the brief moments when they are permitted to visit the earth again. He went on thinking almost mechanically, rubbing his eyes, brooding, doubting, like a man taken in a net. Suppose it was no spirit! Suppose that it was Lena, the veritable Lena, the Lena of flesh and blood, what difference did it make? Spirit or Lena, it was all one, for that matter. It was Lena that was making sport of him for her amusement, instead of some ghostly creature. But that did not help him much if he was predestinate to befoolment! Yet there was no getting over the fact that some creature very like Lena, and very like flesh and blood, had made that arrangement for that morning; had in all seriousness appointed him for seven that morning at the Villa Brancaleone for a ride in the

Campagna. And so, gradually, in spite of the morbid fancy that was forcing him into the region of unrealities, there came back to him every syllable, every glance, exchanged between them the evening before. True, there had been some fairy, some sprite present on the occasion, a mocking sprite, uncanny and unapproachable! But the sprite was a woman, too, with a warm, human heart. And that heart had so spoken that the imp, the fairy, the witch, had vanished at its voice, whose echoes now made his blood course in his veins with a wildness never before experienced.

He told the man to bring him hot water and unpack his riding things, and then dressed himself hurriedly and went out into the Piazza di Spagna.

Everything was quite still; the noises of the day had not yet begun. No sounds were to be heard except the pealing of the many bells and the splashing of the many fountains of Rome. The shops were not yet open, and the jalousies at the windows of all the houses were still not thrown back.

The wheels of his cab as it went along roused ghostly echoes in the great stillness. There was hardly a soul to be seen about; only some pale, tired flower-seller here and there, sitting on the threshold of a house arranging her red and white roses.

On the stairway of the Piazza di Spagna there were the forms of a couple of men from the Campagna. They were pale as corpses, and lying at

full length, almost as still as corpses. He drove to the Villa Condotti, then through the Corso, by the Palazza Venezia, and through the Forum. Everywhere was the same sacred silence, everywhere that melancholy sound of bells with the accompaniment—ironical, fancy might almost deem it—of the plash of fountains.

Presently the cab stopped before the gate of Lena's villa. The scent of the white roses, growing thickly over it, struck his senses keenly in the morning air. The porter opened for him at once.

Werner had not quite shaken off his fear that it might turn out, at the last moment, that Lena had been playing with him. But it was not so.

A man servant was on the steps of the principal entrance, and asked Werner to follow him to her excellency's boudoir. The countess would be there directly.

A few minutes passed before she entered.

His attention was at that moment absorbed by a large photograph which he had noticed lying on the piano; and which, on going up to inspect it, he found to be Botticelli's "Spring."

He was deep in the consideration of the strange symbolism of the picture when a light step struck his ear. Lena it was, clad in her riding-habit; she was in the act of coming down the small winding stairs—cast-iron stairs they were and covered with carpet—which connected the boudoir with her own more private chambers.

"It's good of you to be so punctual," she said,

holding out her hand to him. "By which I mean, if the truth is to be spoken, that you are *not* quite punctual; you're really a quarter of an hour before your time. All the better! It won't be so hot before we get in again." Then her eyes fell on the photograph: "Oh, who has fished out that ugly, hateful thing! Sinclair, no doubt. It's a picture I simply can't endure, though there's no denying its beauty. It was a favorite with the Cardinal, though. He used to say that it had as much meaning in it as Goethe's 'Faust.' I think it just horrible!" As she said the words she took a vase that was filled with red roses and put it right over the figure of the black Demon in the right hand corner of the picture. "Have you had any breakfast?" she asked Werner. She was nearly as pale as on the evening preceding, and her eyes shone with the same extraordinary light.

He had not thought about it, of course, as she had anticipated. She made him take a cup of tea and a biscuit or two, as well as a glass of the Eucalyptus extract.

Her manner suggested a mind torn in different directions, a person in whom the sense of joy was dying out, one from whom the shadows of the night before had not yet passed away; perhaps never would.

The horses were standing ready for them outside. Werner lifted her into the saddle; very awkwardly, too, as is usual with gentlemen who have not made a study how to do it. Though he was a man of such large mold,

and with such a look of strength on his frame, the exertion seemed almost as if it were too much for him. And the groom, who was at his elbow, a little fellow who looked as if he had no muscles at all, indulged himself in a grin of conscious superiority.

They set off, and were in the Campagna in a few moments.

The sky was once more getting its tinge of Italian blue, after being veiled so long; but the atmosphere was still quivering with a treacherous moisture which the sunbeams were weaving into veils of gold. And mists and sunbeams together hung like a halo about the ruins and the olive groves, and all over the great plain. Both of them had looked forward to this ride as a last pleasure; but, now that they were taking it, there was very little in the demeanor of either that suggested any sort of satisfaction. There were so many things that each of them had wanted to say to each other. Yet, now that they were pacing side by side in that wilderness, neither of them seemed able to utter a single word.

A dreadful sense of fatigue, fatigue of body and soul, was on them both. Better might it have been, perhaps, to turn the heads of their horses homeward without riding far. But they rode on and on through the golden mist, past ruins after ruins and olive groves after olive groves; over the green carpet of that strange soil which the summer had not yet come to scorch and the spring had clothed in all its wonderful vesture

of flowers. Neither of the two had the least idea where they were going to. Neither of the two, indeed, wanted to have any such idea. Each of them seemed disposed to wait till the other said, "Enough of it now!" And, as people so often do, who ride without any notion of going to any place in particular, they started their horses from time to time into such a mad gallop, leaping over anything that came in their way, that you might fancy they were trying to escape from some pursuing enemy; or—alas!—trying to come up with some Delight, mounted on faster-footed steed than carried them, and whom they were fated never to reach in that wild race of theirs.

Lena's horse sped madly along as though it had no rider at all. Werner knew what an admirable horsewoman she was, and left her to her own devices accordingly. She was surely safe enough without any special care or protection from him.

They had come nearly up to the tomb of Cecilia Metella when Lena, who was a little in advance, turned to him saying: "Look about you, do look about you! Is it not all astonishingly beautiful at this early morning time?"

"Yes, beautiful, indeed," he said. "I don't think Rome ever looked so absolutely beautiful to me before."

"I told you that I would show you how lovely Rome can be when it tries."

"Yes, how lovely Rome can be!" he murmured, in low tones, and giving her a side

glance. "And how beautiful life, too, might be if *it* might try!"

She made no answer, except by a slight but marked convulsive movement of her hand. Her horse, which had already been excited—in that strange sympathy which a fine creature of that kind has with the mood of its rider—by Lena's excitement and agitation, made at that moment a violent spring forward. Instead of doing something to quiet the animal, Lena gave him a sharp cut with the whip; and the next moment his forefeet were pawing the air.

Werner made as if he would come to her assistance. But she signed to him to do nothing of the sort; he saw at once that it was not absolutely necessary, and indeed, might, perhaps, only lead to further harm. She kept her seat admirably, and gave the animal his head; and next instant the creature was off at racing pace.

Werner did his best to follow her; but his own horse, an excitable, restive creature at best, now began to kick and rear, too. He tried hard to bring it to submission and get up with Lena. But before he could succeed in reaching her the unhappy lady's horse shied violently at the sight of a man who was lying in the grass. It reared then again almost straight upright; and the next thing was that Lena was flung to the ground, and her horse dashed madly away.

Werner flung his reins to the man who had involuntarily done the mischief, and sprang from the saddle. He knelt down by Lena's side. She lay motionless; there was not a

particle of color in her cheeks, her eyes were shut, her lips parted. Werner was horror-struck. It looked much more like death than life.

She was lying in the full, hard, pitiless sunshine. He lifted her in his arms and carried her into the broad, deep shadow cast by the tomb of Metella upon the sward.

Then he looked round for help. The groom had gone off at break-neck speed; his only idea was to catch the runaway horse, in which he took a much greater interest than in the fate of its luckless rider, it would seem.

There was nobody visible but the peasant with whom the mischief had originated; but no great way beyond Werner saw smoke ascending over a vineyard, and some human beings, doubtless, had their abode there. Making the best use he could of the little Italian he was master of, Werner ordered the peasant to tie the horse to an olive tree and fetch a pitcher of water as well as some wine. The man went, and Werner bent over Lena again. There was no change. It was still the same motionless, huddled heap upon the dark green grass, and all about the poor form those peculiar white flowers which Werner had observed growing in that vast ruinous waste of the Campagna, with small, red flower-torches, glowing as if with fire, as they rose out of the large white petals; to his fancy they seemed like the dreadful grave lights of legend. And, indeed, what was that whole desolate region but one vast graveyard?

He covered the hands of the unconscious woman with his kisses. Not the slightest motion in her frame! Then it occurred to him that her dress ought to be loosened a little that she might get air. He shivered at the thought as though it were profanation. Then he reproached himself for his folly. He took the pin from her collar, and, with its help, undid the hooks and buttons of the upper part of her dress.

Her hat had fallen from her head, and her hair fell half disheveled upon her neck. He leaned her head, with its pale, death-like face, against his shoulder. He felt as though his senses would leave him, as though he were being overpowered altogether by the sense of mingled horror and compassion; he sobbed, and pressed a kiss upon her temples, almost involuntarily, unconsciously, as though it were some other person doing it, not himself.

And as he did it he gave a start.

Ha! What was that? Was she really making some movement at last while he had her thus in his arms? He bent over her more closely; yes, some faint trace of color had certainly come into her cheeks. Had she really awoke to consciousness again? Had his kiss done it? he asked himself.

But no, surely that was not possible! If she had realized how he had thus abused her state of unconsciousness she would have started back to full life at once and imperiously bade him to leave her presence in all the wrath and severity of deeply offended maidenhood. But there was

no movement in her at all. And yet, now that he looked again, was there not some change on the face? Had not that dull, expressionless surface taken on a faint, scarcely perceptible expression which it was difficult to interpret? it might be that of happiness, or of a dull despair or resignation.

Suddenly there came over him some mystical sort of sense of the world being filled with things too great for speech, and which would make all speech thereafter impossible. He bent over the prostrate woman again and put a little aside the heavy mass of her hair from the cheek on which it had fallen. Did he dream? Or did that cheek nestle, with a small, slight, barely perceptible movement, against his hand?

The man of the Campagna came back at that moment with a pitcher of water, a flask of red wine, and a very thick, greenish glass.

"Here, signor!" he cried, in his high-pitched, somewhat nasal voice.

Lena's eyes opened at last. The moment she saw her unfastened dress she turned scarlet and turned herself away, trying with great difficulty to button it up again. She managed to do it at last, and then felt at her neck for something; it was evidently the pin that she wanted. Werner handed it to her, and then touched her sleeve quite shyly.

"Lena, please don't be angry with your old friend! He was in such alarm, didn't know whether you were dead or alive, and hardly knew what he was doing."

Instead of answering, she blushed and averted her face. She tried to do up her hair, but she was so overcome by giddiness that she clutched at the grass with both hands, as though to prevent herself from falling, though she had not yet been able to rise from it. Her eyes were opened wide, and she stared at the distance like one distraught.

Forgetting everything in his anxiety and terror, Werner stretched out his arm to support her. She pushed it away with all the little strength she had.

"How do you feel, Lena? oh, how do you feel?"

"Wretchedly, indeed!" said she, with a short groan.

He carefully rinsed out the green glass that the Campagnard had brought, and then poured some of the dry red wine into it and held it to Lena's lips. "Pray, pray be good, Lena! Do try to get a few drops down," he entreated.

She exerted herself to drink a little, and then leaned back again, stretched her full length on the grass, covered her eyes with her hands, and lay motionless for a considerable time.

The groom came up at a trot with the runaway horse. He had had to go a long way. The slender, delicately-formed creature was covered all over with foam; the whites of its eyes were displayed, and they were gleaming with strange fire. And it was trembling all over, as though it were heartily ashamed of itself and expected punishment. Lena took her hands from her eyes,

and looked up with a blank expression, as though the whole scene had nothing to do with her.

"Lena, do you think you could manage to sit the horse and ride quite slowly to the nearest village, where we can get a carriage for you?" Werner asked.

"I can perfectly well ride home, without more ado," she replied, as though speaking to some one standing at some distance behind him, and with the same terrible stare into distance and vacancy.

But when he tried to lift her onto the horse, she motioned him aside. "Green will put me up," she said.

The feeling that he was enveloped in some strange, weird happiness, for which there was neither measure nor word—that feeling which had come over him when he felt Lena's cheek give that slight movement in his hand—was still strong upon him. It seemed, for the moment, to exclude every other sentiment.

Partly at a walk, and now and then cantering gently, with Werner quite close to her on one side, and the groom on the other, they managed to get over the ground between them and the villa.

When they stopped at the marble steps at the front door, Werner went up to her with a swift movement before the groom was ready, and, taking Lena by the waist, as though she were a little child, lifted her down from the saddle.

"Is it better with you now, Lena?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Better?" She gave a quick, impatient movement with her shoulders. "Better with *me?* Why, what thing can be even so much as *good* to me, except death? I wish I was dead!"

He took her hand in his. "Oh, don't think of anything so horrible as death!" he said, in very low tones. "Don't think of anything except how glorious life may be yet, nay, how glorious it must be made yet!"

She made him no answer, but hurried past him with tottering footsteps into the house.

Some hours had passed since their return from the Campagna. The morning had not kept its promise to the day, but had degenerated into a dull, sultry, desolating afternoon.

The golden hues in the air had left it altogether, and it was now one uniform, gray mass of cloud. It was more like a thick, heavy wall than air, barring out all sight of the upper sky. The day advanced toward its close; and, as the minutes went on, Werner became more and more anxious and uneasy.

If he could only make out what had been and what was going on in that strange soul of hers. Had she been merely passive, helpless, when he gave her that caress? Had she merely endured it by reason of the weakness which made any demonstration either of acceptance or resistance impossible? But there was that expression of deep, sad, despairing happiness which had come over the sweet face. About that there could be no manner of doubt. That had been there;

and what was its meaning? Had he been in a dream altogether? And, when he knocked next at her door, would she send out a message bidding him begone? Or—

This uncertainty was more than he could endure. Come what might, he must go to the villa to inquire about her. So much as that was, at least, his duty.

He hastened down from his room, got into the first cab he could find, and told the man to drive him to the Villa Brancaleone.

A carriage was there before him, standing at the circular porch. Werner recognized the overcoat that was lying in it as Enzendorff's.

He frowned angrily. Not, indeed, that Enzendorff's presence there gave him any special anxiety. The gossip about Lena and the prince, which he had heard forty-eight hours earlier at Lena's reception, had already passed wholly away from his mind. It was vexatious to him that any person whatever should be with Lena just at that moment, as he felt so pressing a desire to see her, if only for a few moments, alone.

"Have the goodness to announce me to the countess," he cried to the man-servant who was standing on the steps of the front door.

The man disappeared. In a very short time he returned with the answer: "Her excellency does not feel quite well; her excellency cannot receive to-day."

He felt as if he had been struck by a thunderbolt.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ALL sorts of things had been happening at Berlin in these last weeks. Linden had been slouching around, here and there—if such a word can be used of so good a soldier—as though he were moonstruck. He had turned up at Else's three or four times a week at least, to get a little consolation and some news of Lena, if possible, and relieve himself a little from his cares in a chat with his old friend. But he came away without much consolation, poor fellow; and, as for news of Lena, he drew a blank altogether.

For some time, in fact, very little information of her doings had come to them at Berlin, either directly or indirectly. She wrote very little herself; and Werner's letters, which grew gradually briefer and briefer, referred to her only in an incidental and rather irritating way. "Fed at Lena's; large dinner-party." Or, "Yesterday an excursion to Tivoli; quite a nice little party of so and so." He would give all the names of those who had been present on the occasion, Lena's included; but he never entered into any details about her.

He frequently mentioned Enzendorff's name. Linden was a good deal disturbed at this, Else not. Quite a different sort of anxiety had begun to gnaw at that innocent young heart. She had trouble of her own, and could not find time to worry over Linden's woes. Her cheeks had

paled and sunken quite notably since that April evening, when she gave Werner that fond kiss and slap and pushed him out on to the stairs, and out into the world—big, heartless place!—to dash about a little hither and thither, and then return to her with renewed spirits and tone, a happier and more cheerful being than when he left her.

She had for some time begun to entertain sad and serious doubts about the success of the experiment. All the letters he had written her since his departure were in one drawer of her writing-table reserved for them. There were not so many of them but that she could easily read them through every day, beginning with that first long, rambling, affectionate letter from Munich, with its many carelessly happy repetitions of the same thing, and its longings for home and wife and children; and ending with that last postcard from Rome, with its laconic sentences, cut off sharp as with a knife's edge.

There was no getting over the truth. The longer he was away from her, the shorter his letters became. The more experiences he had to write about the less he did write.

Four days had now passed since she had had a word from him. She would have been in dreadful anxiety about him if she had not known that Lena was in Rome. But she reasoned thus: "If anything had happened to him, if he had fallen ill, Lena would have been sure to write to me. Why, Lena did write to me at once when he sprained his hand. No; the reason why he does

not write is that he does not care to!" This was the melancholy decision at which she arrived, while she was listening with all her ears for the postman's knock; it was about time for the delivery.

The postman was there. But no letter from Werner again. Perhaps in the afternoon. She wiped the tears from her eyes; she took the whole batch of Werner's Italian letters from the repository in which she treasured them, read them all through, from the first line to the last, and put them back again.

The windows of her room were wide open; the bright May sun came in all its force through them from over the tops of the big chestnut-trees, now in the fullness of their red and white flowers. The view from the room was into the garden, where the children were playing. Their little voices were plainly heard in the room where their mother was sitting.

All of a sudden Else burst into a fit of convulsive sobbing.

Her thoughts took in a long range of times and things, and dwelt upon that first period of their wedded life, those first six months in Berlin. It was one long honeymoon to her; each seemed equally in love with the other all the time; but she could not forget how insupportable the big, strange city had been to her, even with all her married happiness. But, in spite of her vivid recollection of that weariness with the city, her thoughts now recurred with insupportable anguish and longing to those earliest

months. What would she not give if she could but make a fresh start once more in that pretty, modest dwelling of theirs in Dorothea Street.

She had thought him just a trifle reserved and moody then; but now, when she looked back! He was quite a different man then from what he had now become; what a different man! His noble, chivalric views of life, his idealism in the moral and intellectual regions of action and speculations; his enthusiastic and constant interest in everything that was beautiful and noble; the childlike seriousness with which he took everything; his affecting purity and tenderness —all these things came back into her memory so clearly and sadly now. She saw his face distinctly again, and the strange expression it wore when he was sitting by her, at that concert where they heard Schumann's "Faust." She remembered only too well how irritated she had been with him for his high-flown enthusiasm, which took him up into regions where she could not follow him. She remembered what an angry feeling it had caused her to witness that sort of superior craze, as she called it to herself; and how she had offered him that chocolate to sober him a little, and bring him back to the solid earth again. That was the beginning of it. And she had done that sort of thing systematically from that moment. Every day she had pulled him down a little lower and lower to the ground, and weaned him more and more from what did not suit her own tastes and disposition. And the more he became a steady, jog-trot,

everyday sort of person, the more he played with her as if they were a couple of children together, the better she was pleased. And so—and so—!

What would she not give now if she could remake him to be what he once was: that ardent, unreasoning creature, irrational creature, if you will, but one who recoiled with a sort of rage from everything that could stain, from everything that was not absolutely true and straightforward.

"Oh! may God pardon me for the wrong I've done him, for the harm I've done him!" she exclaimed; and then she added: "But why did he give me up in such a hurry? Why didn't he stick to what he began? I am sure that I would have tried to learn everything if I had felt that he wanted me quite seriously to do so; perhaps I might even have become enthusiastic over the second part of 'Faust'!" She laughed a little through her tears. "But, as far as I could see, he did not seem to care much about the matter, one way or another. In fact, he didn't seem to care much about anything. I can't make it out, I can't make it out at all! I'm often tempted almost to fancy that he never really cared for me; but that's a hateful and ugly thought, too hateful for anything. Why in the world should he have taken me at all? For my money?"

Her brows contracted, and she burst again into angry tears. She took up a photograph which was on her writing-table, a photograph of Werner as lieutenant, in his uniform; a sitting figure, with his saber between his knees, tall,

lean, with deep, serious eyes and a playful expression about the mouth.

No, no! *That* Werner had no more idea of what money and personal advantage meant than a child! She kissed the little picture passionately, again and again. She remembered the awkward way in which he used to try to adapt himself to the unfamiliar conveniences and comforts which a wealthy marriage brought with it; how difficult it had been for his Spartan temperament to conform itself to even those elementary luxuries which everybody in their position regarded as necessaries; how he used to suggest all sorts of uncomfortable things to her which were easily to be obviated by the expenditure of a few pence; how utterly a matter of indifference to him it was whether he had five flights of stairs to mount to his dwelling, or one; or whether it was truffles or potatoes that were put on his plate!

It was altogether her doing, if he had learned to lose his temper a little when dinner was five minutes behind time, or if a badly cooked fish was brought to table. It was she had taught him that, little by little, with those small arts of hers.

Was there ever a creature so unpretending, so easily satisfied? And she had done her best to turn him into a discontented sybarite.

Her tears came faster and faster. Light came into her soul, inexorable light, searching out places in which, before, there had been no illumination at all.

Easily satisfied then! Scarcely to be satisfied with anything now! Alas, was she forced to take that view? It was sadly certain that, in regard to all the deepest and most serious interests of life, his attitude was now that of the rich man's acquiescence rather than the aspiring man's discontent. As to his material welfare, in his earlier phase, to that he had been heartily indifferent; but he had been very exacting in his demands upon God to do much for His creatures, and upon His creatures to do much for God. In regard to all work of that higher kind, his aims were high, and his appetite insatiable, even as the thirst for holiness in the saints can never, and never ought to be, quenched.

And now, was there anything left that he really did reverence? was there anything in which he could be really said to believe?

Ah, yes! She saw him before her quite clearly; saw him as he once had been, and now was; and the sight sent a shudder through her. There had been nobody like him *then; now* he was scarcely distinguishable from anybody else. Perhaps he was a little handsomer, a little more distinguished, a little more amiable; but, as to all the rest of it, only like everybody else! The poor girl felt for a moment, now and then, while these bitter thoughts were going through her, as though she would like to destroy him altogether, in sheer despair at having made him what he was now. Only—and the thought was comfort in the midst of her desolation—she felt in her heart of hearts that the Werner of the early

years was, radically, the same Werner still; the same Werner whom she had so passionately loved, still did so passionately love, and who, after all was said, deserved her love just as much as ever.

Oh, if he would but return to her! She would try and begin life with him over again, honestly try she knew, successfully try she believed. Alas, alas! If he only would come back to his home, his children, and to her!

She put Werner's photograph back into its place, dried her eyes, and made up her mind to go out for a walk, and a few calls, to relieve her mind a little. She rang for her maid, put on her hat, drew on her gloves, and went down into the garden to say good-by to the children. She never, by any chance, left the house without doing that.

The garden was filled with bright sunshine and black shadows. The magnolias on the lawns were in full flower; Miss Miller was seated on a green bench under a chestnut-tree knitting something in stout, red wool; Rodi and Dinchen were playing at a sandy spot, making a sand heap, which was to represent a garden, and sticking flowers all over it. Little Lizzie was standing near them, with her little legs wide apart and her tiny hands on her hips, inspecting the progress of the work. Something in the way the little thing carried her head, something in her dark eyes, reminded Else of the child's father, "as he *had* been." Else lifted the little girl in her arms and kissed her. And then the other children ran

from their play and came up to hang on the little mother, that was always so delightful to them, and Else had enough to do to find kisses and caresses for them all. And she had at last, in the midst of her laughter, almost to tear herself away by force from the dear little wretches.

"I see that *everybody* hasn't lost the knack of being fond of me!" she thought, in a sort of naïf desperation, as she passed through her house and got out into the Leipzig Place. "Why is it so difficult for him? Why? Oh, what nonsense it all is! Sheer hypochondriac nonsense! It's the city air. I never can stand it in summer—and then—there's no getting over the fact—I want him badly—I don't know what to do with myself, I want him so badly!"

She turned into Bellevue Street.

From the direction of the Column of Victory there came flowing down the street a sort of rivulet of fine dust, shimmering red. The golden light made the reddish-white flower masses of the horse-chestnuts shine out like torches from the rich confusion of the green leaves in which they were set.

Every garden about was full abloom with flowers. She rang at the door of the house where the Sydows now lived, with old Countess Lenzdorff, and went up to their apartments, on the second floor, and asked the man-servant who opened the door for her if Mme. von Sydow was receiving visitors that day.

The man-servant—it was Goswyn's orderly

who opened the door; he usually came to help when the regular servant was away—scratched himself behind his thick red ear with his thick red hand, and answered: "Well, she's not receiving everybody who comes along."

In her everyday frame of mind, Else would have only laughed heartily at this remarkable answer; but she was very sensitive to everything just now, and the rough speech vexed her. So she merely handed the awkward fellow her visiting card, bent double, and went her way. She had hardly reached the first landing when she heard male footsteps and rattling spurs hurrying after her. It was Goswyn Sydow, who had run down to "cut her off," as he expressed it.

He held out his arm for her with a laugh, and led her in to Erica, who had left her bedroom by this time, but had not yet gone out of doors. She was lying on a sofa in her boudoir, which was furnished with an agreeable light cretonne; she had on a white morning-dress, and she looked, as most very young mothers do after their first, as if she had not yet quite grown up to the stature of wifehood and womanhood. Her pale, tender face had that innocent, virginal expression, suggestive of things above humanity, which is seen on the faces of the finest Madonnas of art.

The Erica of earlier days was quite gone; gone altogether that queer, naïf, old-fashioned, primitive and premature maturity of looking and talking about things which had had such a flavor of irreverence. Life was all sacredness and mir-

acle to her now; and she was only a shy and simple worshiper at its shrine.

If Goswyn had not interposed very decidedly and energetically she would have jumped up and rushed at Else. As it was, she had to content herself with sitting up and holding out her arms to her cousin.

"How sweet of you to come! But what an idea to put me off with a card!"

"Oh, well! I asked that big fat fellow who opened the door whether you were receiving; and he answered me, with an eloquent scowl, 'Not everybody who comes along,' and I felt hurt and ran off," said Else.

"Why, Else! Now just listen to what I say; you must have been in a horrid humor to take amiss a little thing like that!" cried Erica. "It's enough to make one die with laughing—'Not every one who comes along!' What do you say to that, Goswyn? The blundering booby! You must pull Stulpe's ears nearly out of their roots for him! I can't, for the life of me, understand how it is you haven't licked him a little more into human shape. He really must be taught how to behave himself a little better, as he has to take Muller's place here, now and then."

"I'll not lose another moment before beginning his education quite seriously," said Goswyn. "Other matters have so occupied me that I haven't been able to do it, so far."

"Well, we'll hold you excused, if that's so," said Erica. "But please, Goswyn, do let the blind down a little lower, the sun is shining

right in my eyes. A little more. No, that's too much. Now it's right. And bring Else the gold cup which grandmamma has sent baby for a christening present. Charming! isn't it, Else? Now, put it back, Goswyn, and then ring and tell them to bring us up something to drink. We're all dying of thirst!"

"What shall it be, my angel? Tea?"

"What would you like, Else? Tea, or something nice and cold?"

"I'd rather have something cold," replied Else, who, in truth, did not care a jot what it was. She sat there, quite pale, and without moving or saying a word, by the side of Erica, at the head of the sofa.

And her heart grew heavier and heavier with every minute that passed.

"Order some orangeade, Goswyn, and let them run down and speak to the man-cook about it, he makes it so nice," Erica begged him.

Goswyn ordered the orangeade, and then walked up to his young wife with very long, solemn and slow steps, and asked with a smile: "Any more orders to give, madame?"

"No, not just this moment," she replied, and looked up at his face, through her half-closed eyes, with an expression of happy love; then she held out both hands to him. "Now, you must be as nice as you possibly can, and come and sit down by me; but give me a kiss first, old man, if you're not ashamed before Else."

"Oh! Else will overlook the offense, taking all the circumstances of the case into consider-

ation, I'm sure," he said, good-humoredly, lifting his young wife up a little from her pillows, and giving her a hearty kiss. Then he sat down by her side at the sofa. Erica took hold of one of his hands and stroked it gently.

"Oh! you dear, good, patient love!" she murmured, and—turning to Else: "You have no idea of what he puts up with from me—just now, I mean. Before then he held the reins rather tight, I can't deny it. He was always kind and indulgent. But never before, since we've been man and wife, has he so lapped me in tenderness of every kind as lately; I've never experienced anything like it before myself, and I don't believe anybody else ever can have. I suppose that tight hand was good for me, perhaps it was even necessary. Poor, dear Goswyn! Now, there's nothing he wouldn't do for me or put up with in me. And, look here, Else, it's fun to me sometimes to let him feel my little bit of power and send him trotting about for one thing after another for me; and then—when he takes it like a lamb and so magnanimously overlooks my little naughty ways, why—" Her eyes suddenly filled with tears, she brought his hand to her lips and kissed it with an air of humility.

"Oh, you silly little lady!" Goswyn cried, trying to prevent her. "I see that I shall have to begin my education over again, just where I left off! You're still a little too highly wrought and intense. I was in hopes that what you've gone through lately had quieted you down a bit!"

Then they both laughed; but Else did not laugh, she was much nearer crying. She bent over a big wreath of white lilies that was in a tall crystal vase, in order to hide her troubled little face.

She was ashamed of her own poverty in the regions of affection and love, in the presence of these two, so rich in them. Her thoughts went back to review the past, to seek the sweetness which the present was so cruelly denying her. In vain! Look where she would in the history of her marriage, even when it was at its best and tenderest, there had been some feeling of a something wanting. She could not blind herself to the fact, not now when all scales were beginning to fall from her eyes.

"The lilies are lovely, are they not? It was Goswyn gave them me," Erica went on. "Say, did your husband spoil you, at these times, as my old man does me?"

Else drew herself together with a little shiver; and Goswyn, who had more sensitive perception of what was going on in other people's minds than his wife—as is not infrequent with married couples—cried hastily: "Why, Erica, dear, there can be no need of such a question as that; it can have but one answer. Of course he did!"

Else, however, felt it to be her duty to make some reply to the question, as it had been put.

"When Rodi came into the world," she declared, "I came as near dying as a woman well can; and, on that occasion, he nursed me so

tenderly that it was quite affecting; but in the case of the others, why they came so quickly, one after another, that the matter didn't make any particular impression on him; probably it seemed so frightfully commonplace. Besides, he is one of those who find it very difficult to show what they feel. You've got to find out for yourself what's going on in him. But, although he does not say much about it, I know him well, chapter and verse; and I know how anxious he is when anything is the matter with any one of us. There's nobody living who has a warmer heart than my husband. Indeed, I don't believe there's anybody like him, for that matter. If he ever does happen to hurt anybody's feelings, or thinks he has, he's like a crazy creature!"

"That's really so," said Goswyn, in positive tones; "that's Werner all over; and surely I ought to know, for we've been chums, more or less, ever since we were little toddlers together; and that's a good deal longer than either of you ladies have known him. And I can tell you that he is a person of wonderfully rich endowments and gifts for everything except the things of practical life."

Else's eyes hung on his face as he said this, and they burned with feverish light. Those eyes hurt Goswyn a little; their expression was so strange, as they seemed actually to drink in the praises he lavished on her husband.

"Officers who have served with him," said Erica, "declare that he was always regarded as one of the most capable among them. What a

pity it is that he doesn't follow any profession, and hasn't anything to occupy him!"

Else turned scarlet, and Goswyn struck in: "That's not the sort of thing which can be pronounced upon in such a summary manner, my dear child. There are some natures that positively cannot swim in stagnant water. There must be movement, excitement to bring them out. He'll be elected to Parliament, sooner or later, I'm quite sure; and then you'll see how he'll develop!"

Again he met that look of Else's, that sad, craving look, so moving in its gratitude.

"That's what I hope myself," she sighed. "Unfortunately, we shall have to wait some years before that is likely to happen."

Else was just thinking, at that moment, of saying good-by to Erica, when in marched old Countess Lenzdorff, as straight as a fir-tree, positively handsome in spite of her seventy-five years; and as fresh as ever in spite of her gray hairs; a woman of women, who now enjoyed life, in old age, as much as she had done in youth; and had always been, in youth and age, as ready to face death as if life had never been of any value to her at all.

"How are my spoiled children getting on?" she cried, as she stood for a moment on the threshold. She seemed to launch her fine spirits and humor into the room before she came in herself. "And how's all the family? It is a family, now, reckoning the small new arrival. Oh, what a charming little visitor we've got! But

haven't we been exciting ourselves a little too much?"

"No, no; we've been as good as gold!" Goswyn assured her, with a laugh. "Besides, the police has been very much on the alert, and the police will stand no joking, and that always helps when there's any tendency to break out."

"Is that so? Well, then, I'm satisfied," the old countess declared.—"And how are things going with you?" She turned to Else.

"Oh, splendidly!" the latter replied.

"Good news of your husband?"

"Oh, yes; very good. He seems to be amusing himself famously in Rome," said Else, as decidedly as she could.

"Is that so? Hasn't he got away from Rome yet? They say it's appallingly hot there," the old lady replied, rather dryly, "and, as I hear, the fever's raging too."

"Oh, I say, grandmamma, don't you make Else anxious about nothing!" struck in Goswyn, whose mission it seemed just then to parry the chance hits of his rather inconsiderate womankind. "All these epidemics are always very much worse on paper than in reality—I mean when one's in the place itself. And Werner's not the man to be upset by the dying of a few people, more or less, unless they happen to be people he's fond of. If the house were burning down over his head, and he was busied with something mental, the fire would escape his notice altogether—unless, indeed, somebody in the flames were to cry out for assistance. And then

he'd have all his presence of mind with a vengeance!"

"Well, if you'll be advised by me, Else, you'll cry out for assistance, just as soon as you possibly can," observed Countess Lenzdorff. "I'm afraid the house *is* on fire!"

"Your anxieties are quite superfluous," replied Else, a little offended, as she always was when anybody ventured to say anything that sounded at all depreciatory of her husband. "Werner will be here now in a very few days; he's only waiting for a fête that's to be given by Prince Mariani. He's in excellent spirits, and in the greatest enthusiasm about all the beautiful things; and I'm sure I don't want to do anything to cut his stay short that isn't quite necessary. I am only too delighted at his having his fill of enjoyment. There isn't so much to amuse him here, I'm sure. If there were anything particularly to be feared for anybody staying in Rome, just now, I'm perfectly certain Lena would have written to me about it."

"Is Lena in Rome?" asked Countess Lenzdorff. "I didn't know that at all. Now I understand what brings Enzendorff there."

"Enzendorff?" repeated Erica.

And Goswyn said, with an air of reflection: "Perhaps she'll get up with the stakes from that game yet! I should have to take off my hat and bow very low to the Princess Enzendorff in that case."

"Why, Rome seems to have become quite a branch establishment of Berlin business!" ex-

claimed Erica. "The Orbanoffs are there, too; I heard that from your cousin Thilda, Goswyn; she corresponds with the princess. Aren't you a little jealous of the lovely Ilka, Else?"

"No, indeed; why should I?" flamed up Else.

"Why should she, indeed?" cried Goswyn, who didn't at all like the turn the conversation had taken. "Werner never did more than just amuse himself a little with that Croatian woman, not a particle more. He didn't take the thing seriously."

"But the 'Croatian woman' did," murmured Countess Lenzdorff, "very seriously."

A deep furrow showed itself between Else's eyebrows; she rose: "I really can't stay longer with you, Erica," she observed. "But there is one thing we really mustn't overlook. Mayn't I have just one glance at baby before I go?"

"Baby's asleep," Erica explained. "Why, I should have had him brought to you at once, darling, if he hadn't been asleep. But if you're bent on seeing him, Goswyn will take you to the nursery. The little fellow is pounds and pounds heavier since you were here last, and so sweet that one wants to eat him. And he has a regular grown-up smile. I can't for the life of me understand why people *will* keep saying that little things of that age are not pretty. My boy is quite charming, I know," said Erica, with conviction.

Goswyn led Else through the dressing-room

which adjoined Erica's boudoir, and then through the bedroom which opened on to the nursery.

She stepped up very quietly to the cradle, with its covering of green silk and its veil of lace over the child. She lifted a corner of the lace very gently and had a good look at the rosy something which was lying on the richly embroidered pillow. Erica was perfectly right. The little fellow was "too sweet for anything," and as pretty as a baby four weeks old has it in him to be.

He was fast asleep, snuggling on one of his little fists. The little breast was rising and falling with a regular movement, and the little countenance wore a deeply serious and earnest expression.

"To think that a bit of a thing like that grows up to be a man!" said Goswyn, who, like so many young fathers, did his best to cover up his emotion by joking about it. "And what serious faces he makes, asleep and awake, the little morsel of a scamp! The whole affair isn't bigger than my hand!"

"I'm pretty sure that he'll take after his father very strongly," said Else. "And I can wish nothing better for him in this world!" Then she bent over the cradle, touched one of the little red fists lightly with her lips, drew the veil carefully again over the little wight's face, said a few words to the nurse, who was standing there, huge satisfaction depicted upon her big, flat, smiling face—most nurses have faces of

that sort—about her little charge; and then she went away, Goswyn accompanying her.

The bedroom which she had to go through to get back to the boudoir was a rather long room and its carpet was very thick and soft. The door of the boudoir was wide open; and old Countess Lenzdorff's voice was, at this stage of her career, very often raised to a quite unnecessarily high pitch. Else's ears could not avoid being aware at once that Erica and her grandmother were engaged in pretty lively debate about something or other; and these words of the old woman came to her in all their pitiless force.

"Of course, he might have made a great deal more out of her!" the old lady was exclaiming. "But he never had the key to her character in his hands at all, never for one moment! And what can you expect? The long and the short of it is that he never really cared for her at all, not a bit!"

Else recoiled with an involuntary shudder. Of whom could they possibly be speaking?

"Grandmother is going on again, in her wild way, about the misfortunes of Lena Edelfeldt," said Goswyn, with astonishing presence of mind. "She has scarcely been able to think or talk about anything else these last fourteen days."

Else looked up at him with the grateful look he had had more than once that day from her anxious eyes, and the look had an even added intensity now.

"Poor Lena Edelfeldt!" she murmured.

"Horrible! To be married to a man who never really cared for you! Horrible! The bare thought of it is enough to kill a woman! Horrible, Goswyn! Pray, pray show me out by some other way, where I needn't pass Countess Lenzdorff again. I'd rather not go through the process of saying good-by over again. It does make such a fuss!"

"Else, I'm afraid you're not quite well," said Goswyn, taking the young woman out by a side door from the bedroom, as she wished. "Shall I get you a glass of water?"

"No, no!" Else replied, hurriedly. "I must make haste home. The children will think I'm lost altogether; they'll be expecting me back to tea."

"Well, then, pray allow me to go with you, Else. Just let me have half a minute to put on my sword. I can't bear the idea of your going alone in this dreadful heat, with that pale face of yours. If your mistress asks for me, Stulpe, tell her that I shall return directly, that I've gone to see Madame von Schlitzing home." This to the servant, in the antechamber.

Then he hastened downstairs with Else to the Bellevue Street.

The good fellow was quite overcome with compassion for his little friend; so much so that he could not speak a word. The two went along in complete silence, and Goswyn gave Else a side-glance with some alarm in it, now and then.

He accompanied her as far as the entrance of the garden, where the children were still at their

play. The little voices were audible to them amid the rustling of the trees, at the entrance, and he stopped there. He knew she was safe now. "Adieu, Else!" said he, taking her little hand in his big one.

"Adieu!" she murmured, almost inaudibly. "I thank you very much, Goswyn!"

"I should very much like to know what for?" he asked, stopping suddenly. He had half turned to go.

"Because—because—well, because you're the only one of all of them who didn't say or do something to hurt me, to-day!"

He kissed her hand again, and left her. "The Lord defend us from those too clever women, especially when they're old and deaf," he murmured, letting his saber rattle along the ground as he went; he was much too angry to take notice of it. "It's the biggest mistake, *I* think, to let a creature of that sex come into the world with more than a moderate share of intelligence; they never can make a safe and reasonable use of it. You might just as well give a child dynamite to play with!"

Goswyn had never forgiven grandmamma, never would forgive her quite, for having, with that brilliant intelligence of hers, driven Erica to the very verge of the abyss.

CHAPTER XL.

ELSE did not go forward to the children, but remained sitting on a bench close to the entrance of the garden.

"He really doesn't care for her!" she kept murmuring to herself; "he really doesn't care for her at all!"

She knew only too well what wife it was they were really discussing, although she had pretended to believe Goswyn's well-meant falsehood; or, rather, his bold attempt to interpret the words as applying to another. She was filled with grief and anger; but not a particle of the latter feeling was directed against Werner.

All women who love intensely rather than passionately, at the center rather than the periphery of their being—and that is the same thing as loving unselfishly—are always prone to attribute any failure in their married relations to themselves rather than the man. Else was preeminently a woman of that type, and it was herself only for whom she had any reproach now. She could not see that she had anything to accuse Werner of. He had never shown her anything but kindness, gentleness, tenderness. And if he had never really loved her; if his feeling for her had never really been what they call love, whatever that *was* in a man, it must be because of some deficiency in herself, she told herself sadly. And then her thoughts went on: "Perhaps that feeling is not absolutely necessary

to wedded happiness. Lena has so often said, 'Love is the supreme luxury of life! It's not everybody who has a right to lay any claim to such a thing. One must learn to do without it!' Ah, Lena! Lena! if only I had you here with me now! When you were with me, often enough did you make me impatient with you. And now I long for you more than words can say. You understood us both, and were fond of us. Perhaps you could teach me to bring to him what he has so far missed in me!"

The leaves rustled, now loudly, now faintly; a few bees were humming about a jasmine-tree close by, bees with golden bodies and transparent wings flashing with all the colors of the rainbow.

"Ah! yes, yes, yes! I fear the house *is* on fire!" she went on, murmuring to herself. "It seemed almost as though Countess Lenzdorff wanted to hint that it was for me she was afraid, afraid that Werner's protracted absence had to do with something quite serious for me. There can't be any doubt that what she meant was that Werner may have got himself entangled with Ilka Orbanoff. God help me! How can I manage to get up anything like a serious feeling of jealousy of such a woman as that? It's simply out of the question! If he remains away so long, there can't be any reason for it except that he's thoroughly enjoying himself there, and can't make up his mind to come back to his old, flat, monotonous tenor of life. Or—"

Suddenly, with the swiftness of a stroke of

lightning, a quite new and terrible thought flashed across her innocent soul. And this thought operated like a sudden illumination, revealing a whole unsuspected world to eyes hitherto wrapped in absolute darkness, when looking in that direction. And the thought was one that seemed almost to cut into the very nerves of life. Else uttered a short, sharp cry, and closed both eyes, as though to shut out some sight too horrible for endurance.

Just then she heard footsteps not far from her and the rattling of crockery and knives and forks. She looked up. It was the servant bringing the tea-things.

"No letters, Braun?" she asked.

"Madame, there is a letter for you; here it is."

Else seized it. Another disappointment! It was a Berlin letter only, and from nobody more important than Thilda. Else considered it awhile, without opening it, with a sort of contemptuous curiosity. The outside of a letter from her sister-in-law, for whom she had as little sympathy as might be expected, considering the natures of the two, was likely to be more acceptable than the inside.

"I wonder what Thilda has got to write to me about now?" she asked herself. "I daresay it's to ask whether I'll make one of some party or other to go to the theater." She tore open the envelope.

She read, and could hardly trust her eyes; she read it over again. And, depressed as she was, she was almost inclined to burst into laughter.

She asked herself whether it was she who was crazy, or Thilda? There *must* be some mistake! She read a third time:

"DEAR ELSE—You will have to forgive me for informing you, by letter only, of what is far the most important event of my life. My agitation is so great that I can't calm down enough to come and tell you of it myself. Indeed, you might increase it, perhaps; for it is quite probable you may underrate the importance of what has happened, and is to happen. And there's nothing that I can stand so little as not being sympathized with, especially now. Yesterday I affianced myself to Oscar Ryder-Smythe. He has managed, at last, to stammer out his confession of his love for me. Oh, Else! It is happiness beyond compare to love and to have your love returned, warmly, enthusiastically, wildly returned! How sorry I am for anybody who has to go through life without that happiness! In rapture, THY MATHILDA.

"P. S.—It is far from being a *mésalliance;* although Oscar is an American, he has six kings of Scotland among his ancestors."

The paper fell from Else's hands, and she stared almost helplessly, as though something utterly grotesque was visibly before her. "The thing can't be possible; it *can't* be possible! She must be mad, quite, quite mad! Why, he's twenty years younger than she, if he's a day. It's nothing short of scandalous!"

Scandalous or not, there was one good thing about it, that it had the effect of rousing Else, for a little while, entirely out of all the rest of her misery.

She remembered, now, with what dissatisfaction Werner had observed the great intimacy between this Smythe and Thilda, and what a rage he went into when the report that Thilda had paid the young American's debts came to his ears. And now! "The affair now has gone much further than a joke!" she said to herself. "Something has to be done, without losing a moment's time, to get the woman's head twisted back into its right place again. The best thing would be for me to go to her at once; perhaps I may be able to bring her to her senses. If my preaching turns out of no use, I shall write at once to my mother-in-law."

She determined not to lose an instant, and put her hat on again; it was on the bench by her side; and she made for Potsdam Street, where Thilda lived.

Thilda's dwelling was a pleasant enough place, certainly. It consisted of a pavilion, with a studio at the back. This studio was in the middle of a garden, and it was well protected, therefore, from the street noises. It was quite an idyllic habitation. A sculptor had built it expressly for his own use some time before, a gentleman who wanted to enjoy the illusion, at all events, of solitude, if he could not the reality, in the midst of the big city. And it was now, under the ironical dispensation of things, in Thilda's incongruous hands.

The garden was surrounded by an iron fence with a wicket at one point. Else rang the bell, and the wicket was opened to admit her imme-

diately. She went forward with rather hesitating steps—not relishing at all the scene which she foresaw—up to the little house. It was quite low-pitched, a very old-fashioned looking affair, with small-paned windows. The maid-servant, who came at once to see who it was that had rung at the garden-gate, informed her that mademoiselle was in the studio. Perhaps madame would be so good as to go on there instead of having her mistress come to her.

Else assented. The girl hurried before her, to open the outer door of the studio for her. Else went in.

Thilda was standing before her easel; she had a sort of emancipated red felt hat upon her touzled head, and a blue wrapper round her lean form; her attention was wholly absorbed in her work.

"Oh, Else!" At first it seemed as though she would go up to the young woman and embrace her, but she thought better of that immediately. This was no moment for ordinary doings! She struck a solemn attitude in the middle of the studio, and stood there, without moving a muscle, leaning on her mahlstick. And then she asked, in veiled, tragic tones: "Do you come as a friend, or as an enemy?"

Else hardly knew which way to turn; but she went forward to the crack-pated thing, and said, quite gently: "I am here because I am your true and sincere friend, who wishes you well, God knows! if anybody does, and has no thought except for your welfare."

Thilda, it was quite plain, was quite dissatisfied with this answer. Not departing in the least from her solemn attitude, she blinked mistrustfully at Else. "Are you making fun of me?" she asked, roughly.

A slight rustling in the room drew Else's attention away from Thilda. She observed something moving itself on a sofa in a corner of the studio. This was no less a person than Ryder-Smythe, uncoiling himself rather quickly from a rug under which he appeared to have been devoting himself to a refreshing afternoon nap.

Engaged persons of his sex, who happen to be twenty years younger than their beloved, are surely entitled to their little privileges.

"Beg your pardon!" he cried, seeing that it was Else; and he wore a face of great perplexity. "I'm sure you ladies have some confidences to interchange, and I would not intrude upon you for worlds." And, so saying, he got himself out of the room somehow or other.

Thilda flung her mahlstick with magnificent energy against the wall, folded her arms upon her breast, and cried, with a voice of challenge: "Now!"

Else had managed to preserve her countenance, more or less, so far. But she felt now that it was quite going; and she could not venture to utter a word.

"Now, then!" repeated Thilda, tapping the floor in an impatient and imperious manner with the tip of her long foot. "What—have—you—

to—say—to—me?" she asked, accentuating each syllable in a manner little short of awful.

"That the news of your engagement has quite astonished me!" Else declared.

"Indeed! I suppose that's not all, by any means?" said Thilda, loftily. "Astonishing, indeed, that a girl of good family should boldly overstep the lines drawn by the petty and prejudiced fraction of society, and marry a young artist, a musician of genius, and who can prove by documentary evidence his descent from Robert Bruce in the bargain! Very astonishing that, isn't it? Yes, about as astonishing as everything in this abominable world that is at all out of the way, or at all noble, or at all beautiful!"

There was something in the tones of the grotesque, lean lady so hard, so self-willed, so immeasurably irritating, that it seemed to both provoke and justify measures as strong as could possibly be taken for forcing her ridiculous conceit back within decent limits. If ever there was an indulgent, gentle creature in this world, it was Else. And this was more than even she could stand.

"You must excuse me, Thilda, for what I say; but the truth is, that I can't allow any veils over the truth, as I've got to speak it to you now; positively I cannot!" she cried. "I've never made the slightest allusion to it, because I knew it couldn't be pleasant to you. But I'm perfectly well aware of the fact that you are quite ten

years older than Werner; and that makes you forty-five."

Thilda became as pale as a corpse. "Else!" she almost shouted. And then, for once, at all events, in her life, her habitual fluency failed her altogether; she was dumb.

Else seized the opportunity, and went on; but she was, of course, distressed by Thilda's painful agitation, and did everything in her power to soften the blows she had to inflict upon the unfortunate woman.

"I don't mean, in the least, that that's too old to marry, dear Thilda," she said, coaxingly; "but it is too old to marry a very young man."

"You think so?" said Thilda, defiantly.

"It is my deep conviction," said Else, in her clear, sincere tones. "If you feel any inclination to marry you'll be able to find plenty of chances in your own circles"—Else was not exactly convinced of this, but she bound herself to appear so—"plenty of opportunity, only you ought really to give the preference to a man of ripe years."

"*Oh*, indeed!" hissed Thilda, before Else could get further. "Some elderly privy councilor, or high official or other. No doubt I could." Thilda was herself quite free from any doubt in the matter, if Else was not. It was Thilda's conviction that she had but to make up her mind to marry anybody in society, and the victim would be at her feet directly. "Oh! yes, indeed! If all I wanted was to be married, without more, I might easily enough decide

upon the course you so kindly suggest. But that's not what I'm after at all. What I want is to love and be loved; to be happy!"

And, as Else had no reply immediately ready, the other went on, with no little spite in her voice: "I'm not one of those women who could bring herself to live, years in and years out, by a man's side, thrusting upon him endearments for which he doesn't care a pin!"

All the light left Else's eyes. But, in her extremity, she betrayed no agitation in that studio. "To whom are you referring, in particular?" she asked, very quietly.

Thilda closed her mouth firmly, like an obstinate, ill-conditioned child, and shrugged her shoulders. Then, after a short pause, she said, sharply: "Oh, I don't want to be so unkind to other people as they are to me!"

"Don't take the trouble of beating about the bush. You meant me!"

Thilda did not say a word.

"That's your view, is it? That Werner, when he married me, didn't care for me at all, to speak of?" Else now said, going straight to the mark. "And, if he didn't care for me, there must have been some reason why he took me, and didn't leave me. What was it? For my few wretched pence? You'd better think before you reply, Thilda!"

"Money never was any consideration with us Schlitzings!" said Thilda, grandly.

"Very well! Then what *was* it?" Else asked again. She looked like a changed creature; she

looked as if inches had been suddenly added to her stature. She was as pale as a corpse, but perfectly composed; and there was not a trace of tears in her eyes, or a quiver about her mouth as she stood, dignified, grave, self-possessed, confronting her sister-in-law.

Thilda shrugged her shoulders. "Hm! There are men capable of marrying a girl out of compassion, because they see that she's dying for love of them," she said.

"Oh, it is that!" exclaimed Else. "And I was the dying girl, and he the magnanimous man! Will you allow me to ask whether all this is pure conjecture on your part, or whether he has ever said anything in your presence to authorize these suppositions?"

"Not in *my* presence," said Thilda, taking care to lay the proper accent of spite upon the important word in that sentence.

"Oh! not in *your* presence? And are you aware of his ever even having expressed himself in that sense in any other person's presence?"

"Well, if you've made up your mind to know; yes, yes, yes, yes!" Thilda hurled the words as if they were missiles right in her sister-in-law's face.

"When and where?"

"It was at Schlangenbad, on the evening following our excursion to Rauenthal; you've not forgotten that excursion, I'm quite sure. Werner informed us all rather abruptly, on that occasion, that he had made up his mind to leave for

Italy. And you lost your self-command so that you upset a small pot of cream."

Else's head sank. Thilda was not the woman to spare when she had the chance, and she went on, pitilessly:

"That evening, a good deal later, Werner came up to my stepmother's apartments. I was sitting writing in the next room. I didn't listen, but I couldn't help hearing what passed. It was no fault of mine if what they had to say to each other came to my ears. My stepmother reproached him for thinking of going off like that, in such a hurry; and he confessed to her that he was going away purely on your account, and that she had herself opened his eyes to the fact, which he would never have detected for himself, that you were in love with him. His mother appeared to be doing everything in her power to induce him to seek your hand. Money was always an immense object with her. And he did his best to make her understand that he could not bring himself to marry you; because, though you pleased him much—I really don't want to distort his words, or hurt you more than I can help—and though he was fully sensible of your good qualities, he did not feel so drawn to you as he ought to be to the woman he married; so drawn that the feeling would render him quite safe from all other attractions and influences, if he did marry you. Those were his own words, as nearly as possible!"

A pause followed; a period brief, but that terrible stillness which precedes the storm. Else

stood there, quite still, quite motionless, deathly pale, still self-possessed and dignified. But she felt that her strength would not enable her to hold out like that much longer. Black clouds began to gather before her eyes; the outlines of the furniture in the room began to waver, every object seemed to be dissolving into parti-colored mists. "Have you done, or have you anything more to add?" she asked, all but inaudibly.

"My stepmother asked him if his fancy had gone in any other direction."

"Well?"

"He answered her evasively. He said that he really did not quite know, there had been a chance meeting with somebody; it was not a thing that he could put into any words that he knew of. Later I discovered who that other was. It was my friend Ilka."

Leaden silence followed for a short while; then Else exclaimed: "Ilka Orbanoff! Impossible! That woman never, for a single instant, touched the outermost rim of his heart!"

"That's your conviction, is it? Your vanity and conceit have always kept you far above any temptation to jealousy, I suppose!" exclaimed Thilda. "But I happen to know that those two formed acquaintance before your marriage!"

"Oh, yes! they met once at Aunt Malve's; I remember perfectly how slightingly he spoke of her," said Else.

"Indeed! and you fancy, do you, that there was nothing in it but a casual meeting at Schlangenbad, on a balcony at Aunt Malve's, do

you?" cried Thilda. "You've always been able to persuade yourself of anything you wanted to, like all self-satisfied women. But I can tell you that much bigger stakes were played for in that affair than you've any notion of. They've loved each other passionately, for years. I had plenty of opportunity of observing them, here in my studio, when they were hours together."

"Indeed! And it was the knowledge of that which induced you to press Werner so to meet the princess at your place, I suppose?"

"It seemed to me the most innocent way of affording two burdened hearts some little opportunity of relief," answered Thilda. "Besides, I felt I could rely absolutely on my brother's sense of honor. Indeed, it's only too great! According to what I've heard lately—"

"And what have you heard, pray?"

"Well, I've heard, from a source which I can positively rely on, that Werner has written to Counselor—Counselor—oh! I don't remember the name, but it's an early playmate of Werner's, and he lives in Lutzow Street—to ask what are the proper steps to be taken to procure a divorce. He didn't ask for himself, he said, but for a friend; but, of course, he would say that. I don't think anybody can mistake the meaning of *that!*" And, so, Thilda ended.

Else had never taken her eyes from her sister-in-law's face, and they were there still; and very serious and severe those eyes were.

"Your hateful words shook me a little, at first, I must confess, Thilda!" she now quietly

said; "but your last piece of information has quite robbed all you had before said of all its weight. I quite know that women like your friend, Princess Orbanoff, have the power to make men, even some of the best of men, lose their heads for a while. But to divorce their wives for a person of that kind—oh, no! That's quite out of the question! What motive could they possibly have? What would they gain? There is some great misunderstanding somewhere. I am convinced that you do Werner great injustice." Then she gave her sister-in-law an almost mechanical nod, and turned to go. She tottered a little before she reached the door, but pulled herself together instantly.

When she reached the street, she became as erect as a candle on an altar; she held herself, indeed, much more upright than usual. It took her a good deal longer than usual, too, before she got up the flights of stairs that separated her from her home. At last she reached her door. She went past the servant, who opened it, straight to her bedroom, locked herself in, flung herself on the bed, and buried her face in the pillows. Anguish such as she had never imagined possible had taken full possession of her being, anguish more like madness than anything else; and all her powers of resistance were for the moment paralyzed. A certain suspicion had suddenly come upon her, and went circulating through her veins like a swift, subtle poison. She felt as if she was on fire, and the whole fabric of her inner life had fallen into sudden ruin. No! It was

not Ilka! A man does not seek divorce for the sake of *that* sort of woman! No, it was some other woman! And who could it be, except one —one only—one utterly different from all the rest of her sex—

She searched her memory for confirmation of the terrible idea, as unhappy creatures in her plight do; and things which had long since passed away from it came up again with their "confirmation strong." Werner's agitation, his decided opposition, when the question was discussed whether Lena should be invited to his wedding. His unmistakable embarrassment when he and Lena came together unexpectedly, the winter before, at Countess Warsberg's. Lena's evasive answer when she, Else, asked her where and how it was that she and Werner had already met and become acquainted?

"If it is as I fear—if it is as I fear; if it be she, she, she! Oh! Almighty God!"

There was a knock at the door.

"What is it?" cried Else.

"A telegram," answered the maid. Else sprang up in wild agitation, and opened the paper.

"Have just engaged myself to Enzendorff.
"LENA."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE fête at the Palazzo Mariani was at its height, and the quick measures of the music

were heard along the Corso, with the accompaniment—for those nearest on the street—of dancing feet and rustling silks. The famous thoroughfare was lit up for some distance by the illumination of the façade of the palace. Beyond the reach of that mass of light the street was all gray twilight, relieved at long intervals by the faint yellow shimmer of some gas-lamp. Above, the sky was of a deep black; the moon had set; heavy storm-clouds had shut away all the planets and all the stars.

The music was merry enough, if the night was sad. At several of the salons of the great suite the blinds were down, at a good many others, not. At some of these windows the dancing couples could be seen flitting past, but only as doubtful gray shadows. At others they were fully revealed in all the sobriety of the men's costume and the splendor of the women's. These Roman ladies furnished plenty of examples of the opposite styles. Brunettes there were with their rather dark skins, their large beaming eyes, and their perhaps too ample lips; blondes, with reddish hair, and complexion pale and transparent even to unearthliness. England was represented by a few of its beauties—tall, with a tallness that suggested that their growth was not yet completed, with toilets a trifle too dressy, and of a demeanor too proud to conform to the standards of compliant feminine grace. Among these people were figures describable by the one word "oddities" only. And the whole was a confusion of splendors and colors, a flash-

ing here and there of precious stones; among which the dark silhouettes of the men mingled, producing, in combination with the others, a total effect singular indeed.

And how interesting it was in all ways to the people who stood gaping at it in the street below! There they stood, commenting in their characteristic way on the whole business; little, sturdy Italians—mostly of the lower middle class—to whom some of the aristocrats, turning and twisting above the level of these observers, were quite well known, having been served by these inferiors of theirs in shops, or something of the kind. One of them would nudge another and say, "Hallo! There's Princess Romanelli;" and the man nudged would cry to him, "And there's the Marchesa Grandioni, I declare." "E carina la Romanella, molto graziosa" ("A dear little thing is the Romanelli Princess, and as graceful as you please)." And then the shoemaker or glover in question would kiss the tips of his fingers, and, with admirable sang-froid, throw a kiss up to the defenseless princess in question.

There they stood, those inferiors in the human fight, stretching out their necks to see, staring with all their eyes, till those useful organs were sore, only to catch glimpses of those brilliant superiors, whose measures they had, perhaps, taken for boots and shoes; and eking out that pleasure by humming the dance tunes the musicians were playing in the ball-rooms above. All of a sudden all the heads in

the street were turned in a different direction from those superior regions, and the people crushed up right and left against the wall. Right through the middle of them stalked a procession of gloomy, mysterious, masked forms; a few torches glimmered among them; and two coffins followed, one immediately after the other.

The music seemed to sound sharper than ever in the street below at that moment, and somebody closed one of the open windows with a sudden, quick movement.

"The perniciosa — oh, good Lord, the perniciosa!" the cry went through the crowd. And then there were jokes in plenty, and some pantomime, signifying defiance of that demon, and an invitation to it to do its worst! While, at the same time, more than one of these heroes rubbed his back uneasily, as though they all at once felt some enemy striking them in the rear. And, in a very few minutes, the procession below proved itself more powerful to repel than the ball-room above had been to attract—and the Corso was empty!

But that dancing went on, above the street.

The fête, it will be remembered, was given in honor of the betrothal of a daughter of the house, a charming young creature. She was, of course, the heroine of the occasion. But the next most interesting person to everybody there was the Countess Retz. Her loveliness that night seemed raised to a point it had never before reached. Never had there been seen such brilliancy in her eyes, never so deep a tinge of red on her lips.

Never had she seemed in such brilliant spirits. Or, rather, as the more acute observer would have put it, never had she been more ready and more lavish with her laughter.

She had on a white dress; she was rarely seen on such festal occasions in any other color than white. So that was nothing unusual. But now she was loaded with a wealth of jewelry such as had never been seen on her before. These articles were all presents from Enzendorff, who seemed to be about as enamored as a man well could be. He never took his eyes from her, and never left her side unless absolutely obliged.

Their engagement had not yet been officially announced, but the prince had already taken so many good friends of both sexes into his confidence that all the people there knew pretty well all about it. And one or other of the more elderly ladies, in the exuberance of her good nature, kept rustling and bustling up to Lena all the time, and whispering, "I congratulate you with all my heart, really, all my heart; I've seen it coming for some time!" And Lena was always ready with her words and smiles of thanks.

As we enter the rooms we may find her, if we look, seated in a small apartment, situate a little aside from the principal ball-room. She was between two great ladies. One, the embassadress of one of the great powers, an elderly lady with arms too fat and voice too deep; drawbacks compensated by the remains of what

had once been remarkable beauty. The other of the two *grandes dames* was an Englishwoman, old Lady Banbury, a person famous everywhere for her kindness and her wit.

"I really am quite delighted, dear child, really," said Lady Banbury. "Of course it's the prince who's most to be congratulated, but some of that falls to your share too. He's not only highly intellectual, a chivalrous and superbly handsome creature, but he'll make a famous husband, if only"—here the old lady's eyes twinkled humorously—"if only because of his past. Now you mustn't be angry with me, dear child. I know it sounds like an old and a bad joke; but I mean that quite seriously, I do, indeed, quite truly and seriously!"

"I am quite of your opinion," said the embassadress, very positively. "It's those wicked fellows that always make the best husbands. Best thanks, prince!" This last to Enzendorff, who had come up to them at the very moment. The lady in diplomacy had begged him to get her something to drink, and he had brought her a glass of champagne.

"Don't these other ladies want something?" he asked, looking from one to the other.

"No, I think not," laughed old Lady Banbury; "though, stay! I think there is something we do want, in which you, with your enormous experience, may be able to set us poor ignorant women right, perhaps. It's about some views we've just been advancing; but what are our

views worth until they have been submitted to you superior creatures?"

Enzendorff made a deprecatory movement with his hand, saying: "If I am to be of any service, you ladies must graciously intimate to me of what kind these views I am to pronounce on are. And, perhaps, meantime, you'll allow me the privilege of sitting down comfortably with you for the discussion."

As he said this, his glance went courteously from one of the older ladies to the other, and then rested with a tender, interrogating expression upon Lena.

She smiled assentingly, and, at the same time, stretched out her arm amiably to push nearer to them a small chair that was a little way off. Enzendorff, at the same moment, stooped to bring it quite close to the group, and, as he did so, impressed an almost imperceptible kiss on Lena's hand. Then he stole a glance at the older ladies, though he was not apprehensive that they would view the little transaction otherwise than indulgently. Sixty years is rather apt to enjoy that sort of thing. It was Lena that contracted her brows a little.

This gentleman had been so long a spoiled darling of society that his original sensitiveness had been a good deal blunted. Lena's little prudery —it was as such that he classified her annoyance —amused rather than disturbed him. He pressed her hand slightly before allowing it to glide from his—that was the man's instinct of self-assertion —and then, turning to the elder ladies, said:

"Now, I am ready to undertake my function of arbitrator."

"Oh, you'll only laugh at us! We two elder ladies were maintaining that the less ballast there was in the doings of a bachelor, the more likely he was to prove a good husband."

"Hm!" said the prince, twisting his mustache. "If I am to decide that question by bringing myself in, I am convinced that the future will prove the absolute correctness of your views. And that"—with a slight inclination in Lena's direction—"will be a very small merit in me, indeed. But if I am to pronounce upon a wider view of mankind, I should be sorry to be regarded as pledging myself to the truth of the proposition. But if I am not without my doubt whether the worst bachelors make the best husbands, I have no doubt whatever, not the least, of the truth of the converse. I am quite certain that the best bachelors make the worst husbands."

"Oh!" cried Lena. She was conscious of being displeased; but why she was displeased she was not at all conscious.

"You don't agree?" said the prince, smiling. "Yet, plenty of instances strongly confirmatory of my doctrine have come in your way, first and last. Take, for instance, our friend Schlitzing!"

"Schlitzing!" exclaimed the embassadress, in astonishment. "Why, I've always taken him for one of the best of husbands! I've known him since he was quite a little fellow. Such a promising youth as he was! It's a constant surprise to me that he hasn't done more. And

the most sympathetic of creatures, too! At least his nature and mine are in strong sympathy, I know!"

"I don't at all mean to say that my nature is out of sympathy with his," laughed the prince. "But that's quite another matter. And I don't say that he's a husband who affords much visible handle for complaint to his wife; or that he's bad at all to live with. Besides, some women are endowed with a wonderful talent for keeping their eyes shut. But there's no denying this: Baroness Else might see a good deal, if it suited her to open hers!"

"You think so?" murmured Lena. Her throat had become suddenly dry.

"Well, I say nothing of his adventures at Wiesbaden and Frankfurt; but now this history with Princess Orbanoff! That's not in taste at all! And when one thinks what a charming wife he has, what a perfect little jewel of a wife!"

"Surely you don't attribute any importance to a mere flirtation like that!" said Lena, impetuously.

"No importance?" The prince gave a peculiar laugh. "Well, judging from all appearances, I can hardly avoid thinking that this excursion to Italy was a matter of mutual arrangement between Schlitzing and the Orbanoff, before either of them left Berlin. The husband's notorious and vigilant jealousy was a good deal of a hinderance to them at first. But all this last week he has been in Sicily, routing out antiquities.

He left the lovely Ilka under the surveillance, or guardianship, of a sister of his, a perfect Cerberus, in whom he has absolute confidence. But the sister is altogether taken up with a monsignore who's trying to convert her to Catholicism. And the young couple are finding their account amply in that lady's diverted attention. Why, you meet them everywhere together, the lovely Ilka and the languishing Werner! The Croatian puts on quite a bold front on the matter, but the gentleman has not such command over his demeanor. In such cases it is the ladies always who have to teach the gentlemen the requisite *aplomb*. Though, fortunately, all ladies are not so endowed as to make it possible for them to do it. Between women and women there are differences that are simply immeasurable!"

"I never should have believed it of Werner," said the embassadress.

"Nor I, either," Lena forced herself to say. "And yet I've seen more of him than of most men, being, as he is, the husband of my most intimate friend."

"Men are always what women choose to make them," said the embassadress; to which Lena, who preserved her self-possession only with difficulty, replied: "Not quite always. I'm sure I should have chosen that Schlitzing should be something quite different from that for my friend Else's sake." She laughed. And she had even force of self-control enough to put a note of cheerfulness in her laughter, and enough even to excite the laughter of the others.

The music in the ball-room came to them in the next brief interval of their silence, with all its seductive invitation to motion.

"You have scarcely danced at all to-night, Lena, have you?" asked the embassadress.

"A few turns," answered the young woman. I have asked the prince to allow me to dispense with the cotilion. My engagement is neither officially announced nor kept secret; so I would rather not be placed on view conspicuously, in that way."

The other ladies quite sympathized with her.

The embassadress discovered now that her thirst had recurred, and announced the fact to them; but this time Prince Enzendorff turned a deaf ear. In this pass, another knight came forward in the nick of time, offered his arm to the lady, and led her away to the buffet.

A little while after this, Lady Banbury withdrew also, declaring that she had had enough of it.

The engaged couple were now left by themselves. Enzendorff edged his chair a little nearer to Lena. "How lovely you look to-night, Lena!" he whispered. "Aye, and it is the loveliness of the heart, the disposition, the soul, in which you so surpass all others. It is that loveliness which has made me irrevocably yours. Though, Heaven knows, you are just as much beyond your sisters in the beauty that feasts the merely material vision. I despair of giving you any idea of my sense of the high prize I have drawn!"

"You should be on your guard against spoil-

ing me too much, prince!" she said, deprecatingly.

He looked in her eyes a little reproachfully. "Don't you think you could get yourself used to calling me Ernest when we are quite alone, as now?"

"Ernest!" she murmured, as though the syllables would not come. "Pardon me, prince—that is, Ernest—but I do not yet quite know myself, in these new circumstances."

"You are absolutely charming!" said the prince, ardently. Such an attitude of woman toward him was a new and peculiar sensation to the experienced man, with his record of easy conquests. But whether this shyness of his affianced irritated or pleased was not perfectly clear to himself. He took out his watch. "I think it is time for me to go, Lena."

"Are you still determined to leave so early as six?"

"Unfortunately, I don't see how I can avoid it," the prince replied. "I attach great importance to the point of informing my eldest sister of my engagement with the least possible delay. And, as she may be leaving Florence from one day to another, I really ought to hurry thither. My sister will be with me, heart and soul, in the matter, I am sure. And she will take on herself, quite readily, the duty of informing all my other near connections of the happiness that has befallen me, as I shall earnestly entreat her to do."

"The 'near connections' will not be particu-

larly edified by the communication, I apprehend," said Lena, dryly.

"That is their affair," the prince replied, shrugging his shoulders. "It is a matter of the most supreme indifference to me!"

"It is impossible for me, however, to take that very impartial attitude in the matter," replied Lena, with some edge on her voice.

"Lena!"—the prince took her hand in his—"whatever attitude of opposition to our engagement my relatives may be pleased to take, there is one thing of which you may rest perfectly satisfied, that, as my wife, you will occupy the position that you ought—and that position cannot be higher than the one which you have all along occupied by force of your own personal merits. And now I really must go. Are you going to remain any longer?"

"Yes, a little while," replied Lena.

"Well, well! God protect you, my proud, noble one! angel that has come to rescue me from what I was! Mind and wrap up well when you leave; these nights are very treacherous. Indeed, I shall not be entirely at ease till you have left this city of the plague. There must be no change in our plans. In a couple of days you start for Venice. My Aunt Braccioli knows all about it from me; and whether the others are troublesome or not, Aunt Fifie will be sure to erect arches of triumph for my queen to go through on our way to the altar!"

He rose, and she rose too, somewhat mechanically, and they went together to the door. He

kissed her hand once again, touched her forehead very lightly with his lips, and disappeared.

Then the self-possession which she had so strongly exerted herself to maintain, feeling it due to him, broke down. She pressed her handkerchief to her mouth with both hands, to stifle the loud cry which seemed as though it must burst forth in her own despite.

"Is it all real?" she asked herself. "Is it not all some horrible mistake? Is it not all some mere stupid rumor which can be at once contradicted and got rid of?"

And yet, and yet! Her thoughts swept back over a long range of the past. The very first time that her eyes had fallen on him again, after that long interval between her early maidenhood and the riper time, he was by the side of Ilka Orbanoff. And then, later, how often, how often! And, then, there was that history of the bracelet which she found in his room at the "Europe"! Then, that confidential, even familiar bearing of the Orbanoff woman toward him, at the last reception of her series at the Villa Brancaleone; his visible disturbance and embarrassment; his sudden resolve to leave Rome. What could be his real reason, if it were not that which he had carefully concealed from her, the unhappy Lena, his wretched fear lest he might succumb altogether to the depraving and depraved charm of this woman, which had been so long held over him with its dangerous power?

All the facts of the case seemed to her, the more she dwelt on them, to fall into a heap

of confusion, defying interpretation or arrangement, do what she would.

It had all seemed so clear to her, only a little while earlier, so unmistakably clear, if so replete with anguish.

She had believed, more or less, for some time previous, that his interest in her was stronger than friendship; but after that ride in the Campagna there was no possible room for doubt. At first the conviction of this had merely startled and alarmed her. But that terrified feeling soon gave way to a perfect intoxication of the wildest joy, which, in its turn, inspired so deadly a terror that she had clutched at the first man's hand held out to her.

She had done so for the purpose of enlisting a strong ally in the warfare with herself which she plainly foresaw. And so it came about that she affianced herself to Prince Enzendorff, to build a wall between herself and temptation.

Yes, it had gone so far as that with her! No self-deception would avail here; between her and—temptation!

She rose from the corner of the sofa in which she had been cowering, and almost staggered as she came to her feet. A sudden vague desire to look among the dancers in the ball-room came upon her. She had caught only one single glimpse of Werner that night; and that was at a moment when she was so surrounded that it was quite impossible for him—though, as she detected, he intended it—to get near enough to her to kiss her hand.

She could not resist trying to find out whether he was still there, and whether he was dancing. She went slowly along the exterior vaulted passage which extended along the four sides of the court, with its many statues, and upon which all the doors of the ball-room gave. These doors were all wide open, to let in some air. Lena looked in as she passed. The cotilion was just reaching its climax, and just at that moment nobody was dancing. All necks were being stretched forward to see as much as they could of an incident, in the course of the cotilion, which seemed to be an extraordinary success. Some toy or other, with a clock movement, had been wound up and was rolling along the floor on the gray linen cloth, the usual covering of the floor of ball-rooms in Rome. The gentleman in front of whom the automaton came to a stop was to have the privilege of taking out the young heroine of the fête to the dance. There was much laughter, much exclamation of excited voices, and a good deal of betting, as though the gentlemen and ladies were at a horse-race.

But there was one couple that seemed to be quite indifferent to, and indeed quite outside of, all this child's play—Werner and Ilka Orbanoff.

They were seated close to one another in a corner of the ball-room. His arm was resting on the back of her chair, and she was talking at a great rate in a low voice to him, while he was bending forward toward her to listen. He seemed to leave nearly all the talk to her, and confining his share in the conversation to nods

and shakes of the head, steady twisting of his mustache, and an occasional low laugh.

It was difficult to detect in the unhappy young man, at that moment, the idealist, the dreamer, the enthusiast that he really was. That creature seemed entirely extinguished, and, substituted for it, was another of whom you might almost imagine that it lived only to satisfy the senses, and to discard the soul. Every fiber of his frame was relaxed; the soldier's bearing was forgotten, the man's bearing barely remembered. And all his energies seemed to have undergone a complete momentary suspense, the consequence of some debauch by which they had been overstrained, or from which they had vainly sought extrication.

Suddenly, Lena's eyes and his met in full collision.

At the first moment it seemed as though he was somewhat thrown off his balance; but that feeling gave way at once to another, which made him contract his brows and give a stare that might almost be termed one of defiance. She recoiled slightly, as though the look were a blow, and went back out of sight among the statues of the quiet, vaulted passage; and then she looked down into the court. The glow of a few tiny colored lamps was visible among the rosebushes surrounding the fountains in the court. The low musical splashing of the waters was distinctly audible to her. The hot, sultry, steaming breath of the sirocco ascended to her as she stood. And it seemed to her less the breath-

ing of a material wind, than the pressure of some evil, ghostly influence; the same influence that presses most inexorably our material part to earth when the spiritual soars in greatest rapture to heaven.

The fiddles within began to scrape a mad galop, and all the couples began to career wildly over the floor again. The cut-glass pendants of the lusters in the room rattled and rattled, as though they were shaking with contemptuous amusement.

"Is this all that I have done, with all my sacrifices to duty, to friendship, to God?" she murmured in a heavy, dull, despairing voice. "Have I only made him drag his domestic life through the dirt before the sight of men? Dishonor himself and Else both before all eyes? I cannot allow it; I cannot, and will not allow it to go on!"

Her moral exasperation was sincere, if ever there was sincerity and truth in the soul of woman. But what woman, in her miserable plight, could avoid some tincture of jealousy mingling with the higher and nobler motive? It was there, doing its work, though her spirit was too exalted to detect it; it was there, doing its dangerous work in drawing her nearer and nearer to the abyss. Alas, poor woman! Alas, poor Lena!

The fiddles ceased their scraping. And the people came strolling out into the gallery, in couples or one by one. And, among the others, Werner; he seemed to be looking about for somebody or something. An impulse came over

Lena which was too sudden and strong for reflection or resistance. She went straight up to him, and laid her hand on his arm, saying gently: "Werner!"

He almost staggered. And when he spoke his voice was as the voice of a man hoarse and speaking from the far distance. "Lena! What is it you want? What can you possibly want with me?"

"I wish to have one more full, long and serious conversation with you!" she murmured.

"It is not for me to refuse you," he said, in that terrible dry voice. "But I cannot help one question, for myself, perhaps, rather than you: Of what possible use can such conversation be? It can come to nothing!"

"Werner, if you only knew what a stab every one of your words gives me, you would spare me!" she replied. "I have not deserved that you should take this tone with me!"

He was silent, with the silence of hauteur, defiance and distress.

"Werner!" she stammered, in imploring tones.

"I am awaiting any communication you may be pleased to make," he replied, in a hard voice.

She clutched her forehead wildly with her hand. Misery, such misery as swiftly seals up the springs of life itself, seized and shook her. Another moment, and she feared her feet might no longer be able to support her. "I cannot say what I have to say here," she murmured. "Somebody would come up and interrupt every

moment. Come to me to-morrow afternoon, come for one last time; do it for your old friend —do it, I beg and beseech you!"

He reflected for an instant, and then said, in cutting tones: "Am I to have the pleasure of sharing the interview with your very distinguished fiancé?"

"No, no!" she answered, hurriedly. "My fiancé starts early to-morrow, for Florence. What I have to say is matter sacred and only for ourselves, Werner!"

"Schlitzing, have you routed out my wrap?" cried a deep female voice. It was Ilka Orbanoff, appearing at one of the doors of the salons opening on to the gallery.

"Immediately, princess!" replied Werner.

"You will come? To-morrow! In the afternoon?" whispered Lena, taking hold of his wrist with an almost involuntary movement.

He merely bowed, turned upon his heel, and went to the Croatian lady.

Lena left the gallery with staggering footsteps, and was quite passive as the servant, who was there waiting for her, put her cloak round her. Then she got into her carriage, and was driven to the Villa Brancaleone, through the gray morning twilight, whose veil was dissolving rapidly into the dawn.

Her whole being, body, soul, spirit, seemed as though it would exhale in one long cry of anguish and despair.

But she made no sound. To all the lifelong stock and store of grief that had led up to this

climax of her misery, there was now added one bitter ingredient of humiliation hitherto absent from her experiences. She had humiliated herself before Werner! She had been spurned by Werner! She, who had always placed herself upon a pedestal so high above him! She whose slightest favor had been always taken by him as though it were the extreme of condescension, she had had that day to entreat for words with him as though she were some beggar seeking alms.

There was but one thought to comfort her where everything else was gloom. "It was not for my sake, it was not for my sake! It was for Else's dear sake! Oh, God! If he will only come! But will he come, will he?"

CHAPTER XLII.

THE forenoon was over, at last. The second breakfast was finished. At which she had sat, pale, with fever in her veins, without being able to swallow a morsel; a dumb, helpless figure—with Miss Sinclair confronting her.

And that lady's appetite, which no circumstances ever disturbed, amazed Lena more than ever; the appetite and the inexhaustible phlegm.

Miss Sinclair had now withdrawn. She had gone, to proceed with the execution of the undertaking she was at present busy with,

and which absorbed all her energies. And there she now sat, stiff, upright, at her desk, with her elbows stuck to her sides—the regulation attitude of the industrious writer—laboriously adding page to page to her masterpiece, a work upon Rome. It was to be a work not simply topographical or historical, but also of imagination and ideas; something occupying a kind of intermediate ground between Murray's Handbook and Mme. de Stael's "Corinne." Page after page left her hand, written with desperate precision, without a moment's hesitation, without a particle of obscurity, and without a blot. The sirocco raging without had no more power to disturb Miss Sinclair than if she had been a wooden image. The evil breeze would not have helped to quicken her pulses, even had she been engaged in trying to do that impossible, incredible, incompatible thing—write a love-story.

Lena went and sat by herself in her favorite apartment, the corner room with an entrance into the garden. She was deadly tired, but so restless withal that it was as much as she could do to be quiet for a moment. She took a book in her hand, but could not fix her attention. Her eyes saw the letters, but the letters formed no words.

She looked at the clock. Three! Did he mean to come? She turned her head. Hark! Was not that somebody's step? She rushed to the door. Only one of the under-gardeners passing by.

She remained standing at the door gazing out. The thick gray clouds out of which the sirocco proceeded were hanging deeper and deeper, nearer than ever to the ground. And it was strange. There was moisture in the air; of that there could be no doubt. The system felt it, depressing and relaxing. But, for all that, the soil seemed dried up, and was cloven into many chasms. Leaves and flowers were fast withering up. The earth, wherever you looked, seemed perishing with thirst. There was a sensation in the air that made you feel as if some monstrous thing was approaching nearer and nearer, seeking for victims to devour.

Through these sirocco-mists came the sound of a little Neapolitan song, sung in a voice that seemed to have something of the dull, dreaming languor of love in it. Then there was some laughter, and the song was taken up in two parts, a male voice and female.

The cloying sweetness of the oleander flowers came to her from the same direction as the song.

Lena listened for a moment or two, then turned back into the room like an automaton. It was the gardener's daughter, of course, gathering orange flowers with a young Neapolitan lad, one of the under-gardeners. The two were always together in one place or another. And the thing was a thorn in Lena's eye. "Let them make a match of it, for all I care, but *this* sort of thing!"

No, she could not possibly put up with it any longer, this frivolous flirting and coquetry! It was a horror!

She went back into the room further and further; then she walked up and down like a caged thing; then stood still and listened with all her ears.

No sound! Not a sound! He did not intend to come, then! Ilka Orbanoff had prevented him somehow! Amazing, monstrous, the power of females of that sort!—"females" was the word her thought employed, not "women." What was the secret of that strange, terrible force? Did it operate as a portion of those blind, irresistible nature-powers which maintain the whole created world of things? How much did all that virtue, which civilization had invented to protect itself, weigh in the balance, after all, when set against a primary force such as that?

Again there came upon her almost a blast of that repulsively cloying perfume of orange-blossoms. A shudder ran through her. Then, suddenly, there arose in her memory a legendary explanation and commentary—the extempore invention of the Cardinal—of Botticelli's "Spring." She remembered the moment, as she did everything, perfectly. She had just turned away with a shudder from that strange combination of depravity and symbolism. And she remembered the Cardinal's demeanor, too, the amusement in his face, the twinkling in his good-humored, too wide-awake old eyes.

Here was the legend, and the commentary. "The last great revolutionary conspiracy in the heavens above had been put down. And the all-powerful Creator of all things had got His vic-

torious foot upon the Devil's neck at last. The Devil was down; not a doubt of it! But the Devil was not quite dead; very far from it. He had strength enough left to look up, with a good deal of scorn in his look too, and say: 'All right! Annihilate me! Make an end of me! Kill me! But please not to forget that if you do you'll annihilate, kill, make an end of all creation too, to keep me company. I am the Principle whereby all living things continue themselves. I am he whereby they bear fruit before they die! Life is in the hollow of my hand; and, if you destroy me, all the work of *your* hand will grow cold in death!' The All-powerful saw the force of that, and could not bring Himself to let all His glorious world dry up and cease to bring forth fruit forever. So He struck a truce with the Devil, determining that He would think the matter well over, and see how He could wrest this power, that had been going on through the ages, out of the Devil's hand. And that truce has gone on up to the present moment; has gone on and will, as long as life's fever pulses through creation's veins.''

Lena could not help recalling this improvisation of her paternal friend; and her glance rested on the photograph of him which was placed on the piano.

That love-song was audible again; and, now, so near that she caught the words. The blood shot into her cheeks. This was really more than any one could be expected to put up with! She went hastily to the bell; she would send a ser-

vant out to the people. But she stopped short suddenly, turned her head and listened. How well the male and female voices harmonized and balanced each other! And why, oh! why, was the melody of that song so sweet, and the words so ugly, so hateful? And lo! in the very next stanza after those allusions, so seductive in intention, so repulsive in reality, which had so angered her, came another stanza—as is so often the case with the songs of the people—which was full of a gentle resignation and melancholy, one almost of warning against the dangers of the verses which had preceded it. Lena bent her head forward to hear better. And, how strange a thing is this nature of ours! When the song ceased, much as it had annoyed her, she would fain almost have had it begin again.

She waited an instant or two. No! Song and singers were alike gone. But the perfume of the orange flowers remained; and that seemed, every moment, to grow stronger and stronger.

Then, suddenly, came the hoarse sound of distant thunder. Darkness began to gather. Heavy rain-drops began to fall.

The restlessness under which Lena had been laboring the whole livelong day seemed to increase tenfold. Her limbs grew heavier and heavier. It seemed as though her very breathing must shortly cease.

It is settled. No Werner is to come that day!

At that moment the door opened. Sulzer appeared, announcing: "Baron von Schlitzing."

"Ask him to come in."

Wonderful is the self-possession of women! As he crossed the threshold, she seated herself in her favorite place in an easy-chair, in bearing and attitude much the same as at any other time. Or, if not quite the same, it would have taken keener eyes than Werner's to detect the difference.

"I did not hear any carriage as you came up!" she said, after holding out her hand to him and making him seat himself at her side.

"I walked here," he replied.

"Walked! All the way from 'The Europe' here?" she asked.

"No; only from the Palatine."

"Ah! you've just come from the Palatine?" she asked, and her voice was a little forced.

"Yes."

She could say nothing for a moment; then, giving him an angry look, she asked: "With whom?"

"With whom? With a couple of cousins from East Prussia, from whom I received a letter at the hotel yesterday, a letter as full as it could hold of blood-relationship. And they asked me to help them in their wanderings about a little here, which I could scarcely refuse. I have been taking them to see the Ara Cœli, the Forum and the Palatine. I've told them very plainly that they positively must leave Rome without a moment's delay, as the fever is increasing so rapidly. I was very nearly overtaken by the storm before I got here, Lena."

"Hm!" Lena had crossed her arms on her

breast while listening to him. "Do you expect me to believe in this story of yours, and these cousins from East Prussia?" she asked, sharply.

"I never was a good hand at telling lies, Lena, and I've given up practicing altogether, lately!"

"Oh! we all know that there are some cases in which a gentleman who respects himself is obliged to lie!" she replied.

He looked very straight in her face. "May I be permitted to ask what you mean by 'some cases,' and what those cases have to do with me?"

She looked away from him. "All Rome is talking about you!" she said, with some violence.

"Indeed! I *am* surprised. Has all Rome nothing better to do than concern itself about so insignificant a person as I am? There are matters so much more interesting for it to talk over; your engagement, for instance!"

She uttered a little cry of angry dissatisfaction. "Oh, indeed! I should like to know what my engagement matters to you?"

"Well, at least as much as it matters to you whether I've been to see the Palatine with cousins from East Prussia, or in company with any other person!"

She bit her lips. How was it that he ventured to say such things to her? What change was this that had taken place in him? Had she lost all power over him? Under these circumstances, how could she possibly fulfill the serious task she had undertaken?

"I wonder you came here at all, if you mean to behave like this! Every word you utter gives me pain!" she said, in great irritation.

"I came because you expressly requested me so to do," he answered, uncompromisingly. "And I now beg to ask what purpose you had in so doing?"

A long pause followed. The rain fell heavier and heavier; the atmosphere in the room they were seated in changed gradually to a gloomy bluish tinge; now and then a flash of lightning tore into the darkness; and then followed a loud thunderclap that seemed to shake the very earth. The man and the woman both were quite insensible to this raging of the elements. At last she raised her melancholy eyes to him, and began:

"You ought to be perfectly well aware that I should not have dreamed of asking you to come here unless I had important reasons for doing so!" she murmured.

"Very possibly! But I find it quite impossible to imagine what those reasons can be."

She drew a deep breath, and then went on in very low, intense tones, which seemed to give especial force to that soft, vibrating voice of hers; a voice which, to a keen ear, told the story of her mental and bodily exhaustion:

"Werner, you know how warm the ties of friendship have been between Else and myself, ever since our early girlhood. Else was the one only creature in this world, at one time, upon whom I was permitted to lavish any affection. And God knows what treasures of affection I

was conscious of carrying in my heart, and with what bitterness I yearned for somebody to spend them on! This last winter, Else and I, after long years in which we had seen nothing of each other, came together again. And then I saw you again, too. I had, during those years, carried about with me a picture of your character which was altogether the creation of my imagination, and which might very probably have been the merest distortion of your real self. But, in renewing my intercourse with Else, I came to know you better, and to prize your character at its real worth. Both of you gave me the privilege of sitting down to warm my chilled life at the fires of your domestic hearth, of sharing your family life; and how sweet and tender that life was! I was grateful to you both for that privilege. Ah, God! *how* grateful words cannot tell! I learned to love all of you, all of you alike, you, Else, the children. Every breath I drew seemed to have you all in it. Every beat of my heart seemed a prayer for one and all of you. And now when I see all that love, which was such a delight to me, standing in mortal peril; when I see you bent upon bringing all that sweet, dear, lovely domestic happiness of yours to rack and ruin; when I see you going straight to degradation, my heart is cut to pieces. And I cannot help longing to do everything in my power to stop you in your course. It is for that purpose I asked you to come here. I did it in order to have one last opportunity of speaking to your conscience,

of saying to you: Think, think! for God's sake, think what it is you are going the road to destroy, and shake from your soul a feeling which can have no better result than to drag you down into the mire!" She clasped her hands, and looked up at him, her face full of imploration and entreaty.

But *his* face had no such answer in it as she looked for. An angry frown gathered on his forehead. "It is too late, Lena!" he replied. "A few days ago, all that you say would have touched my senses to the quick. I could have seen nothing but beauty and duty in it. But it is too late! *Then*, you could have led me whithersoever you would; one glance of yours would have sufficed, a glance or a casual smile. But all that is past and gone now; past and gone!"

A hoarse groan escaped her. She clasped her forehead with both hands, and drew back her hair from her temples. "Can this woman's power be so utterly irresistible?" she asked, in tones of despair.

"Woman's power! What woman? What power? What do you mean?" he asked, angrily.

"Well, this—this"—she kept her face averted —"this Princess Orbanoff!"

"Power! Princess Orbanoff!" There was boundless contempt in his voice. "If you could only realize how utterly indifferent the woman always has been to me—has been, and is! Orbanoff indeed! She has never been to me more than a glass of champagne, which a man clutches

at to help him to get over a miserable hour or two. If you know so little of the human heart as all that, if you have so very little insight into character, whatever you may have to say can weigh very little with me!"

The thoughts that shot into Lena's heart, as he spoke, had terror in them. But the terror was mingled with a subdued rapture. She knew well that it was her duty to prevent him saying another word. And she felt also, alas! that she was no longer strong enough to do this. She knew it only too well now. If ever she was to know a moment's peace again, it could not be, now, until after those words had been fully spoken which she ought not to allow to come to utterance at all. Oh, paradox of the self-deceiving soul! Then, perhaps—nay, then, certainly, by the mercy of the All-merciful, this frightful restlessness of her spirit might gather the flowers of resignation. She could renounce a love that she had come certainly to know as being her own. But not even renunciation was possible if her despair was always to go hand in hand, thenceforward, with doubt.

"I never pretended to have much knowledge of character, or the human heart," she murmured. "But this change in you, this utter change—you are not the same creature!"

"You are quite right in that. I am not the same man at all. I am at the edge of an abyss; and it is very probable that I shall not be able to avoid falling into it, or plunging into it. But it's not to be laid to the

account of the poor princess, not the least in the world!"

Lena hesitated before she said the words; her heart beat as though she would choke; the pulsations shook her throat. "Whose, then?" she murmured.

"Do you really wish me to tell you?" he asked, sharply. Her head sank. "Well, then, listen. She who is accountable for it is a woman whom I venerated with all the moral force my nature had left in it, little or great—a woman in whom I believed I saw incorporated all that was most beautiful, noble, tender and loving that God had ever gathered together to make the one perfect, unique creature among His daughters; a woman under whose influence the ideals of my youth, trodden into the dust by circumstances, sprang up again into renewed life and bloom; a woman whom I was content to worship in sad, silent, austere devotion for the very reason that she wore a countenance that seemed, in the height of her moral grandeur, sternly to forbid that worship. Yes, a woman whom I worshiped, worshiped then, and now despise, despise from the very bottom of my heart; because I have come to see that it was a mere vision, that former reading of her; and that she really is nothing but an average creature, with whom the satisfaction of vanity and ambition outweighs every consideration on earth; a creature who sold herself once, and now purposes to do it again. And now, Lena, a question to you, in my turn. Name the woman of whom I speak!"

Lena had sprung from her chair, as he spoke, as though shot through the heart. She rushed past him to the door giving on to the garden, tore it open, and flung out her arm with a gesture full of tragic intensity. He rose, bowed, and went out; went, without an instant's hesitation, and without turning for one farewell look. The rain fell upon him in positive masses of water; big hailstones mingled with the rain and pelted him. He had gone but a few steps when the clouds were cloven asunder with so blinding a flash that the whole sky seemed to be sending fire upon his head. The bolt struck an ivy-tree close to him. It seemed to totter to the very roots; it cracked and fell. Then—what was this? Suddenly he felt himself seized by two hands, cold as ice, which clung to him and prevented his going further.

"For God Almighty's sake, Lena!"

Yes, it was Lena, who had rushed to him through all that horror of hail, thunder and lightning! Lena, who now gazed up at him with death in her eyes—Lena, who cried, in a voice of anguish: "Come back, I implore you! Come back till the storm passes!"

He stood there an instant, unable to move a limb, unable to utter a word. Again the clouds were torn by the lightning; again a wreath, or ball, of fire struck the earth quite near to them. Then Lena threw both her arms round him, as if to shield him from the fury of the elements. "For God's sake! for God't sake, come back!" She clung to him passionately, desperately.

From the higher ground in the garden, where the orange grove was, there had come down quite a small river of rain-water, as much mud as water, and it was rushing rapidly to lower ground, with many ruined white flowers on its surface, close by the two unhappy creatures. And it was between them and the house.

Before Lena knew what he was doing, he had lifted her from the ground and carried her back through that muddy stream into the garden-room they had just left. There he put her on her feet; stooped, took the hem of her sodden garment, pressed it to his lips, and hurried away.

Self-sacrifice? Magnanimity? Yes, if you will. There are moments when man—and woman—are capable of such acts. Those moments are, of all, the most critical in the history and development of passion. They are moments when it has reached its climax of sacredness and beauty. They are moments when, from that climax there comes the descent, slow, gradual, inexorable, to the lower ground. The Angel of Love, in those moments of solemnity and terror, has soared for the last time into the regions of the empyrean. But he is incapable of further upward flight. His foot touches the earth soon after again; and that contact sends a shudder through him. Fain would he rise, once more, to those upper heights; and he spreads his wings for the effort. But their office is done; and, so far from raising him they drop from him, leaving him to such fate as he may find upon the common soil.

And the skies went on sending forth fire and

ice. Earth quivered under the thunderclaps. Mangled flowers and dead birds fell from the trees. Earth seemed one vast Desolation, filled with a hissing and a howling, as of the angry Demon, cheated of some expected prey on which he had surely reckoned.

CHAPTER XLIII.

WERNER returned to his hotel, crazed rather than intoxicated with delight. And, hardly had he changed his clothes, when he sat down at his table to write to Lena. Before he saw Lena again he felt it indispensable to make her see as he did in regard to this conflict of affections and interests in the lives of both, which had now come to a point where, in his view, it admitted of but one solution. This was absolutely clear to him; he must now make it equally clear to her.

Lena loved him. Lena's life and his must be made one.

All his capacity for thinking and feeling gathered together in the focus of this one overmastering, exclusive sentiment.

For the moment it was impossible for him to take into serious account the many creatures, the many hearts, he would have to tread under his foot. All that was nothing to the purpose:

he was deaf and dumb and blind to it, unhappy man!

The Devil had gone to work very cunningly with him. One by one, little by little, all the lights had been put out in his soul except those that threw their evil rays in one direction. His passion had now reached that height where the very principle of love for his kind—even those once nearest and dearest—seemed paralyzed in him, where the sentiment of Duty, in its highest and deepest signification, seemed withered at the very root.

He had simply lost, for the moment, the power of forming in his mind's eye any adequate image whatever of the miseries inseparable from his purpose. Indeed, he may be said, just then, to have all but lost the power of thinking altogether. And in the places of his soul where will and thought had reigned, but knew them now no longer, there raged and reigned little more than a wild desire.

What little power of reflection was left to him enabled him to perceive that — in the case of such a woman as Lena—the thousand and one perplexities and humiliations inseparably bound up with secret and unhallowed relations were absolutely out of the question. Impossible to drag her down to that level. Everything must be done to spare Lena's dignity and self-respect. Lena was and must be his first consideration, whatever befell. There was simply but one thing to be done. He must divorce himself from Else; he must be free, and marry Lena.

No other plan was possible. He settled in his own mind that it must and should be so. Only so would he be able to induce Lena to sanction this project of divorce, and give him her hand when the tie now binding him was sundered. There was nothing else that constituted an insuperable barrier in his present frame of mind. Certainly, there was Else—and the children.

Well; he was very sorry for Else; very, if you came to that. What a pity that the thing could not be carried through without hurting her. It was really quite hard and cruel of fate that there was no help for that. He was sorry for Else. Poor Else!

The children! Well, when he thought of the children he *was* touched with something like a feeling of melancholy and regret. Well, yes, he would certainly have to do without them; and that idea was not exactly pleasant. But, still, it could be arranged that they would spend some weeks, perhaps months, every year with him; and, then, Lena was so full of resources, so sweet to them, so devoted to his children!

He had never felt so inclined to fall down and worship her as when she had one of his little ones on her lap. She would know how to get over any little difficulties there might be in their arrangements. "Getting over little difficulties" was a very innocent phrase; but what it meant was neither more nor less than making the children strangers to their mother, sooner or later. A very ugly, hateful idea, indeed, as Werner would have been ready to see, if he had not lost

possession of himself and his brain for the time being. And the only excuse that can be made for him is that this really was as nearly as possible the case.

As we have said, his thinking power, his perceptions of cause and effect, were, in that crisis, all but extinguished. And, as is the case with men of his stamp, this suspense of the rational part in him was accompanied by a wild debauch of his fancy and imagination. Freed from the fettering perception of realities, that imagination of his performed miracles in the way of beautifying the life he was proposing to get at by forcing his way through all these obstacles of duty and right. And wonderful were the webs of deceitful charm which his fancy wove to hide from the inexorable eye of day the abysses in which he proposed to plunge every soul connected with the matter—Else, children, Lena, and himself.

And all this, although the man was radically a fine, noble creature, in whose nature the principle of dignity was stronger by far than in most, in whose heart lay the strongest power of affection, whose tenderness and sensitiveness for others was something rare, indeed. What can be said, except that he was an irresponsible being just then; delirious with the fever in his veins; neither more nor less than a sick man?

Many were the influences and circumstances that had contributed to bring about in him this sickness of the soul.

There is but one positive, tangible, inexpug-

nable ground upon which moral principles can be based. And that is the ground of religion. On this ground his feet had long ceased to stand. But there is another ground upon which men of experience are fain or content to erect the edifice of morality. It is a ground not so much of objective principle as of subjective resignation. And it consists in this: That the desires of the individual must be renounced if they can only be satisfied by the overturn of rules recognized as radically necessary, if the principle of a community, of a society, is to have any effective place in life at all. Werner was in a stage of thought in which the religious principle had ceased to operate, and the other—the stoical principle—had not begun to act.

We have seen how, at an earlier date, he had become familiar, in his social intercourse with certain ladies, whose principles had broken down under the stress of anarchic speculations, of the arguments that dissolve the social bond in the interest of the individual feeling. He had not yielded to those arguments then, but they had never passed away from his mind. They had exercised there a latent force. And that force came to the surface now to help him to specious excuses for the steps he meditated.

According to these doctrines there was but one motive which could invest intimate relations between two beings not of the same sex with any semblance of right; love, mutual attraction of the soul. Where that had not begun, or where that ceased to operate, those

relations could lay no claim to being moral at all. The principle was plain; the deduction was inexorable. Any further continuance of his marriage relations with Else was immorality, nothing but immorality.

This was as clear as daylight to him; we have said so. But there was Lena! Would she so readily fall in with those views? He could not wholly disguise from himself that, to say the least, there would have to be a great struggle with her before she did.

One thing was clear. He must do his part to bring about in her as clear, as logical, as courageous a comprehension of the situation they were in as he had in himself.

Moved by these considerations he wrote at once the following letter to Lena, and sent it on to her the same evening:

"LENA, DEAR, WORSHIPED, BELOVED LENA!

"It needed the lightning flashes of those incomparable moments to enable me to read all that was, that is, in your soul. Only when Heaven had sent the electric illumination of those messengers of the sky could I, at last, at last, see into the very depths of your being, so fraught with mystery, with moral grandeur, with passion! And so it is, then, that I have come to see what it never entered into my wildest moments to hope even, far less to believe—that you love me. Can you—you!—take it ill of me if I am overwhelmed with happiness, nearly crazed with happiness, now that I know

this so certainly and so well? Lena, Lena, what happiness, what a rapture of happiness the future has in store for us!

"You cannot for a moment fail to apprehend my meaning. You being what you are, how could I ever dare to offer you any fragment of myself, anything less than my whole life? Your engagement with Enzendorff, what is it but a mere barrier you have tried to erect between yourself and me? And my marriage with Else, what has that been but one long blunder and mistake of many years' standing? You must annul your engagement on your part, I my marriage on mine, that we may be free, that I may be free to offer you what alone I ought—my hand.

"And, as far as I am concerned, believe me, that to part from my wife is the one conclusion imposed by reason and morality alike, in view of all that has led up to the present situation.

"There is no aspect of this question which I have not fully and maturely considered. To prove to you that this is so, I will venture upon the information—do not shrink, we are discussing practical things—that my position, materially, is one now of complete independence, thanks to the succession to considerable property which occurred in my favor only two years ago. Our future, therefore, will be amply provided for.

"The only thing now to be done is to consider well, thoroughly, carefully, the best course

to take to lead up to the divorce I ought to bring about.

"Your reputation must be the first, the foremost, the most sacred consideration, dear Lena! Whatever is to be the result of these painful complications, that, at all events, must emerge from them flawless, unassailable. Indeed, it was not necessary to put that in words. But it had to be said. Because, for that reason, it is my purpose to do myself the violence of denying myself the unspeakable delight of seeing you for a season; and what a sacrifice that will be you will surely know! But, first of all, I have to entreat you to appoint me an hour for a meeting, to discuss more particularly and fully the matter of this letter. With love and reverence, boundless and unspeakable—

"WERNER."

CHAPTER XLIV.

IT was late at night before Lena received this letter.

She read it twice, thrice. And her feeling was one almost of exasperation, first with Werner, next with herself. She seated herself at her writing-table to answer it at once. But she found it impossible to do so.

Fever raged in her veins, in her heart, in her head. She held out her arms to empty space, poor soul! It was all she dared open her arms

to. "Oh, for happiness!" she murmured; "for one poor hour of true, real happiness!" Then she clenched her teeth, and the frown gathered on her pure forehead, and she thrust Werner's letter out of sight, into a drawer of the writing-table, and turned the key on it.

For some nights previous she can scarcely be said to have slept. She had felt herself overcome by a deadly fatigue, and she went early to her couch. But, in spite, or because, of this excess of her fatigue she tossed about for a long time before sleep consented to come. Nay, it did not consent. It sent a Dream instead to plague her even then withal.

It seemed to her that she was made to stand in a meadow luxurious with grass and flowers, and in the center of this meadow was a statue, very tall, and with its face covered with a thick veil. Female votaries of Bacchus—his women they were curtly called in the old mythology—were circling round this silent, mysterious figure, with movements signifying the unrestraint of passion; pale, beautiful, voluptuously formed girls, whose clothing was for beauty only, not for covering, with tiger skins on their shoulders and vine leaves in their hair. On their wrists and ankles bangles of gold glittered in the sunlight. The air was heavy with the perfume of orange flowers, and in the distance two voices were singing a love song, one male the other female. The dance of the women of Bacchus became more impassioned, more unrestrained every moment. Wonderful was the seduction,

the invitation, the charm that spoke in every movement of the limbs, in every lineament of the faces, of those pale creatures. Yet there was that in them, too, which made Lena shudder and recoil.

And those eyes! They were the eyes, the well known, terrible eyes, of the women of Bacchus, narrow, nearer far to the brows and temples than the eyes of humankind; eyes that looked ever upon the ground, as do the eyes of beasts, and never to the skies.

And they thronged round her, and whispered in those rich, dangerous, seductive voices, peculiar to the women of Bacchus and to Sirens, and said to her:

"Remain with us! Be of us! Offer sacrifice to the goddess round whose veiled figure we dance, dance, dance for ever, and all shalt thou have and more that thy heart desireth, ONLY—"

"Well?"

The women of Bacchus made no answer. But, in their stead, a Voice from above cried in awful tones:

"ONLY: Thereafter never shalt thou be suffered to look BEHIND thee, and never to look ABOVE thee."

Then, in this Vision of her Trial, the faithful soul looked upward to the source from which that Voice had spoken. And all that array of Voluptuousness and Temptation vanished; she was left alone, and her strength failed, and she fell to the ground. But she recovered at once, and crawled painfully, slowly, as though with

the last of her strength, till she reached the mountain from whose summit the Voice of Warning had come. She toiled painfully up that ascent. But the mountain became more and more precipitous, the air became colder and colder, and but very, very little of her strength was left. She tried to prevent herself from falling down the steep by seizing a bush that grew out of the rock. But lo! It was full of thorns and the thorns pierced her hands. She defied the pain and seized the thorns, the leaves, the branches, to steady and save herself. The bush felt as if it were giving way altogether; a giddiness seized her; she looked below to see the place from which she had escaped.

A thick gray mist now overhung and shut from view the meadow and the flowers. But the veiled statue stood high above the mist. Then all the folds of the veil fell from it, and a black Demon emerged from the unveiled figure, winging his way above the plain. It was the Demon of the Spring, from whose mouth there comes Creation and the Principle that makes it bear fruit. He spread out his wings to their utmost breadth and shot upward with a violent movement—

And Lena awoke with a violent scream.

Before noon next day Werner received the following answer to his letter. There was no superscription:

"I should fail altogether if I were to attempt to describe the pain your letter has given me.

Do not attempt to see me! There is nothing to advise about concerning your future and mine. Everything in your life must remain exactly where it is. Nobler far and more magnanimous would it have been in you if you had never made even a single further allusion to that which mere accident, robbing me for a moment of my self-possession, has betrayed to you. But this suggestion of yours, which you seem to make as though it were a mere matter of course, that I should, in cold blood, thrust Else aside and rob her of her happiness, I think simply monstrous, frightful, horrible!

"I am almost beside myself when I think of the misfortune and misery which I have occasioned; I, of all women in the world, I—I . . .

"Your idea of a divorce is so wicked, so hateful, so unworthy of you, that it can only be explained at all by the state of agitation you are in; a state which, for the moment, deprives you, no doubt, of all responsibility for your words and deeds.

"But this is *only* for the moment. It will pass away; and then you will be deeply grateful to me that I never for one moment mistook it for being more than it really is.

"For that moment of your recovery of yourself I shall patiently wait, and am meanwhile yours in unalterably loyal kindness.

"LENA RETZ."

When Werner read this letter, he foamed with rage. Everything in it was offense to him. Its

purport was trial enough; but that was aggravated by the precision with which every letter in it was formed, and every sentence punctuated. And the surname in the signature was a perfect climax of injury. A wretched, factitious thing, he declared to himself, that letter was; cold, a piece of patchwork trying to have a character of its own, and failing miserably. Absolutely clear that it did not represent the writer's full mind, and the conflict which had certainly gone on there! No, all that had been cunningly omitted. And the document was, on the whole, a wretched jumble of sincerity and insincerity.

Well, well! A woman who could make no better reply than *that* to the glowing words she had received from him was simply not the woman he had taken her for. She was a woman incapable of love, radically incapable! What she was capable of was just this, and only this: Jealousy and the electric state of the atmosphere might, for a moment, cause her to lose her head. But when the air had cooled down a little, she could cool down too, and go back to those cold regions of rationality where she lived and moved and had her proper being. That had been his idea of her all along, in reality; he had always felt that she was not capable of any such passion or enthusiasm as would take her off her feet, and keep her there; that she was a mere creature of prudences and scruples, bound up with the pedantical, the conventional and the traditional. Else, and Else over and over again! Heavens

and earth! As though it had not been a hard thing to him, too, that Else would have to be hurt in all this. Of course it was a hard thing! But *he* had not hesitated for a single moment! What was the hurting of any woman, nay, what was any crime—what men call crime—when weighed in the balance with the sacred rights of Passion? While she— But what did *she* know of Passion? She had not the faintest idea of the meaning of that word, not the faintest!

Then he read the letter again; and his displeasure with it even increased. Labored style! far-fetched ideas! A sort of school-girl's prize composition! A disgusting document, from beginning to end, with its pitiful, small sentiments of decorum calling themselves morality; its pitiless sense of self-satisfaction, showing broad upon every syllable of every line; its insolent, Philistine assumption of superiority and of the right to warn and rebuke!

And, then, one particularly ugly and hateful thought occurred to him, as a climax to all this raving: Else—Else indeed! Else was nothing but a pretext. The real reason why she thrusts me away like this is that she has no mind to break with Enzendorff! The explanation of that engagement I gave myself was perfectly ridiculous. She is incapable of any such exalted ideas, quite incapable!

The unhappy man spent many hours, partly in wild ravings of this kind, and partly in the attempt to determine upon some line of action. After forming and discarding all sorts of con-

tradictory resolutions, he suddenly made up his mind, or, rather, the sudden impulse came on him, to drive to the Villa Brancaleone. He would see Lena, and hurl all his immense and overwhelming contempt in her face, beg her forgiveness for the enormous error he had fallen into in his overestimate of her character, and take his formal and respectful leave of her forever! This impulse was too strong for his present powers of resistance, and he actually gave way to it. But he was afraid that Lena might deny herself to him if he went to work in the ordinary way. So he stopped his carriage before he arrived at the villa, and sent it away. Then he walked up the terraces of the garden, and made straight for the house.

In spite of the storm of the day before, the sultriness and heaviness of the air had not at all diminished, indeed it was even more oppressive and exhausting than it had been. And there was something in the thick, cloggy vapor that rose from the ground that seemed almost to stun like a blow.

Werner went up the steps leading into the garden-room. The door was wide open. And there he saw Lena. She was seated at her writing-table, and the pallor of death was on her face. She had a pen in her hand, and she was moving it in an uncertain manner over the paper, apparently without being able to form a single letter. She could not find the words she wanted; that was clear. To whom could she be writing? Werner began to boil over with jeal-

ousy. He stepped in, and placed himself abruptly in front of her. She started, and fell back in her chair. Then, for some seconds, the two looked in each other's eyes without uttering a single word.

"To whom are you writing?" he managed at last to stammer out.

"To Enzendorff," she murmured, in low, dull tones; her voice was as the voice of a woman quite spent.

"Indeed! To Enzendorff? Of course, to Enzendorff!" he said, with suppressed passion. "It is as I supposed! Everything has to go on in the old rut. *That* too!"

"Werner!" she said—and what reproach was in her voice!—"have you come here only for the purpose of insulting me?"

"I have come to offer you my congratulations on the fine feelings and virtuous sentiments with which your remarkable letter is replete, and, for the rest, to request your forgiveness for the exceedingly foolish and hasty letter of mine which occasioned that reply!"

"You are perfectly right in thinking that your letter to me is something for which you require and ought to ask forgiveness. There is no doubt of that!"

"Yes; it was indeed folly, the worst of folly to write to you like that!" he said, in bitter tones. "I really don't know which of the two I ought to laugh at more bitterly for their share in the transaction, myself or you! Here am I,

flinging my heart at your feet, ready, nay eager, to tear down everything that stands between me and you, however loved, however dear heretofore! And what do you do with it? Simply make a pedestal of it all, for yourself to stand on in pharisaic superiority! And you send me an answer which would have done honor to a well-trained little boarding-school girl!"

She still maintained rigid silence.

His jealous wrath increased with every word he uttered. "All that is very fine, very noble, very honorable, no doubt!" he hissed. "But it would, perhaps, be still finer, still more honorable, if it were not, at the same time, so tremendously prudent, rational, worldly-wise!"

And still she said no word.

"Is the letter you are sending to your fiancé of the same color and tone as the one I have been honored with?" he asked, as cuttingly as he could.

For a moment she hesitated. Then, with a sudden movement, she held out to him the letter she had been engaged in writing when he came in.

"DEAR PRINCE—It is hard, very hard for me to say what I find needs must be said. But as I find I have to dissipate an illusion, and occasion you a disappointment, it is better the thing should be done with the least possible delay.

"You have made it the one indispensable condition of a union with yourself, that I should

become a member of the Catholic Church. And I find it impossible—"

"Lena!" cried Werner. He fell at her feet, and covered her hands with kisses. And when she withdrew her hands, he carried the hem of her dress to his lips and kissed that.

"Leave me!" she cried, thrusting him violently away from her, and rising from her chair. "For God's sake, leave me! You have not the faintest idea what pain and grief you cause me! Yesterday, when I suddenly lost my senses and my self-control, in my anxiety for you, and you carried me back to the house in your arms, and went away at once, without a word, I respected, I reverenced, I worshiped you almost, as a being more divine than human. And I should have been grateful, thankful—oh, how grateful and thankful!—if I could have died that moment with the memory of that thought and that moment in my heart, with nothing, nothing to come between that and my last breath! And now you have spoiled it all! Is it possible, can it be possible, that you do not see what unspeakable grief you cause me with every look you give me, with every movement you make, with every word you say to me, with every word you have written me!"

"Oh! put it all in one word—with my love!" he murmured, standing up and raising himself to his full height.

"Well, yes, then, if you will have it! With

your love, yes, with your love!" she groaned. "Are you absolutely incapable of seeing what humiliation the whole affair is, in my eyes?"

"Humiliation?" he repeated, in exasperated tones.

"Yes!" she cried, passionately. "Humiliation! How can I help being humiliated by the turn things have taken? Do you suppose I meant *this?* No, no, no! quite different is that which I did mean, did intend, did hope for, pray for, would have worked for! My purpose was to impart strength for action and nobility in motive to all the fine qualities lying fallow in you so long. And what have I done? Dragged them down to an even lower level, and, perhaps, permanently weakened their fiber. My purpose was to wake into activity the conscience, the moral purpose which I saw enveloped in a darkness that I believed might be dispelled. And what have I done? I have, perhaps, annihilated that conscience, I have paralyzed that moral purpose; so utterly annihilated, so paralyzed it that the conception of duty seems to be torn up in you to the very root. For how, otherwise, can you offer, in cold blood, to do for me what you know well I would never let you do for any other woman, if I could prevent it, to destroy your dear, sweet domestic life, and tread everything that is or should be sacred to you in the dust! Oh! it is horrible, horrible! simply horrible!"

"It is horrible to you, for one very simple reason that you do not love me!" he murmured. "If you loved me, you would find it all simple,

natural, inevitable enough. But you do not love me; not one whit!"

She looked full in his face, and in her eyes there was wrath, exasperation, at the tortures he was inflicting on her. But with these feelings those eyes were not exclusively filled. There was something else in them, too; something which seemed to belong to regions with which words have nothing to do, the same look, springing from the depths of woman's mystic soul, the look of yearning and of grief, which he had seen there for the first time when the lightning-flash, literally, the lightning-flash, came to betray the workings of her soul to him. "Indeed, you think so, do you? I do not love you! Not one whit!" she repeated. "Oh! what I would not give, what would I not give, if I could so lie to myself, lie with such skill, perseverance, strength, as to persuade myself that those words of yours are true! But I have not that strength. I cannot lie, to myself or to you. That strength departed from me at the moment when I came out of the stupor of unconsciousness at the tomb of Metella. Up to that moment, I never realized what was going on within me, I did not or I would not. But since then I have known it only too well. And I am a horror to myself. Why, for what reason did I affiance myself with Enzendorff? To raise an impassable barrier between me and—oh! it was a crime, a crime, a crime, to drag a gentleman, a man of honor, into this miserable vortex in which I am struggling! But I did it in the very wildness of panic terror, clutch-

ing at the first support that came to hand, lost, irresponsible, unaccountable creature that I felt myself to be! And why am I dissolving that engagement now? Dissolving it in this abrupt, unfeminine way? Because I would rather suffer crucifixion than caresses from the unfortunate man; because I couldn't endure the faintest approach to them from him, could not, could not, could not!"

She had risen from her chair before saying this, and, up to that moment, she had remained on her feet. But now she was quite exhausted, and sank back again into her chair. Werner seated himself too, and drawing his chair a little nearer to her, placed his hand on the arm of the one she occupied, and said, almost in a whisper: "This is a serious sacrifice you are making on my account. Surely I shall not be wholly forbidden to do what in me lies to compensate you for it in some small measure!"

"It is no sacrifice at all, and certainly it is not made on your account. It is merely something that I cannot do otherwise than throw overboard, in order that I may feel my misery a little less acutely," she replied, roughly.

"But say what you will, I know what a burden you are taking upon yourself for the future, in breaking off this engagement," he said, still in the same low tones; and now his hand went softly to her shoulder.

"I know it, too," she said, "know it perfectly well. I shall be an impossible creature hereafter, everywhere, and with everybody. The

world will be sure to see some reason discreditable to me in the breach with Enzendorff, and those who have envied, or do envy me, will take their revenge to the full. Do you suppose that I care one straw for that sort of thing? True, no corner will be dark enough, no solitary place solitary enough, for me to creep into for a long time to come. And then—but how can I tell to-day what may come hereafter? The one thing that so bows me down to the very ground is thinking of the ignoble proceeding I have been guilty of with Enzendorff. His conduct has been that of a gentleman. And the best thing that can be said of mine, is that it has been that of a mad woman. And that's a weak word for it. I, who was so proud of the uprightness of my conduct, who deemed myself so trustworthy, so actuated by rational motives only! Where has that all gone to? Werner, Werner! You have made me poor indeed!"

He took one of her hands in his, and stroked it gently. "I hope that it will be my privilege to make you very rich yet, beloved, noble, incomparable woman!"

She withdrew her hand sharply. "Why do you persist in torturing me so?" she groaned. "Surely you must see that I cannot bear any more!"

"Torture you? I—you!" he repeated. "Why, Lena, you cannot possibly imagine that I shall not strain every nerve to bring you to see the position we are in with the clear eyes of reason, as I see it? A feeling such as each of us enter-

tains for the other, it is quite out of the question to submit to, or measure by the standards of conventional duty, quite. It is a feeling that needs must burst through all the opposing barriers of the vulgar world; and it is right, duty, law, of itself and for itself and to itself alone!"

"Right, duty, law! Where do you find any trace of all these in this matter?" asked Lena.

"Such passion as ours has its rights, is a right in itself, and that right consists in the irresistible force by which it is animated, and which lays upon those who entertain it sovereign commands!" he cried. "Duty! Duty in and for itself! That is a dull, flat, stale, cold, unprofitable word. It is no more than a cunning invention of the average man, intended for the use of average men; and it has no higher meaning or purpose than to serve as an outwork protecting the pitiful institutions of average men against the uprising of that which is at once natural and eternal, and therefore Divine! Oh, Lena! my angel, my queen! It is nothing but sheer misapprehension of the sacred, God-like purpose of the upper powers, speaking so loudly in this strong drawing of each of us to the other, that makes you struggle against the measures necessary to unite our lives! All the baffled yearnings of my life have had but one aim in them; I know it now; a latent aim it has been, an aim whereof I was not conscious; but now that aim stands revealed to me unmistakably. And that one aim, of all these weary years, has been—you! I have had to traverse long, painful, de-

vious, circuitous paths to reach both it and you. But I stand before it at last, at last! And would you, can you drive me away from you, drive me back into the desolation, the emptiness of the life I have hitherto been leading? It is sad to have to hurt Else, I know it well. But Else will know how to find consolations for herself, after a season. But for us there never would be, never could be, any sort of consolation whatever! As long as we draw the breath of life, we should waste, waste, waste with longing for each other, though we were to be divided from each other by the widest oceans. My marriage was nothing but an error, a grievous error; I have never been happy; and, though I have done my best, in all honor, and in every way I could think of, to make Else happy, I never have succeeded in doing so. And, now, I put it to you: Is it right that I should go on dragging the chain of that unsatisfying relation about me? Is it not a ten times more worthy course to let in the light of truth upon the whole situation, to dissolve my present relations and begin a new life? You tell me yourself that you would rather die the worst of deaths than endure Enzendorff's caresses; and yet you would have me, whose heart is filled full of you, return to Else! In my eyes, that would be the very height of immorality! Lena, you cannot but see that I am right! Speak, for Heaven's sake! If you do not agree with me, at all events, refute me!"

Again he took her hand and kissed it; and again she withdrew it. But he felt that it was

now done more hesitatingly, and that it was hard, hard to her to have to do it.

"Refute you!" she murmured. "Oh, I cannot refute you! I cannot even argue at all about such sophisms as that. I never could, even when I was fully mistress of such little intelligence as I ever did possess; and now I am not mistress of it. I am so very tired; and it seems to me as if I were beginning to wander a little—here." She put her hand to her forehead. "But there's one thing I do know, and that I never, never will give up. One has no right to destroy another's happiness to win happiness for one's self!"

"Then there is one thing more that I have to say to you, and which I must and will say!" cried Werner. "My union with you would be no deviation from the path of truth; nay, it would be a return to it. I loved you before ever I set eyes on Else. My marriage was neither more nor less than unpardonable unfaithfulness to you, was and always has been!"

A strange alteration took place in Lena when he told her that. Now, for the first time, since he first came into the room that day, she turned her face deliberately and full upon him. Her eyes shone with an almost supernatural light that made the death-like pallor of the rest of the face even more remarkable.

"You loved me as early as that, after our very first meeting?" she asked, and her voice was fuller than it had been.

"Yes, after our very first meeting. From the moment that you pressed your dear lips on my

forehead, my heart has been filled with love for you. My engagement with Else was the result of accident and circumstances to which I had simply to submit, seeing no alternative. But I never loved anybody but you, never did, never shall! The night before my wedding I could do nothing but dream of you. And you, Lena? You?" He stopped short.

"I!" She rose now from her seat, and drew herself to her full height. Never was her beauty so great as at that moment, in spite of her death-like pallor and the traces of the tears upon her face. "I!" Her voice had a strange, veiled, tender tone in it which he had never before heard. She seemed to shiver as though some sensation of delight ran through her, as she went on to say: "If your courage, your spirit had been then on a level with your love; if, then, you had come and unlocked the door of the dark prison-house I was condemned to live in, and called me out into the sunshine, I would have followed you without a word, never caring even to ask whither in the whole wide world you chose to lead me! I would have been content to be a drawer of water, a hewer of wood, to serve you, and held myself, in so doing, richer than any queen! There was no sacrifice that I could have made for you which I should not have thought the rarest of privileges; and I should have held it mere grace and gift of yours that you had given me the privilege of making it! Aye, if you had come *then!* But you did not come; you did not come!"

"Nay, nay, nay! I have but lost some time on the way. I am here; I am come!" he cried.

"It is not the same thing. It is not, and it cannot be! Upon your head be it that there was that delay! Upon your head be it that you have thought, that you still seem to think, one time is as good as another with woman! And now, it is for you to see how you can hereafter settle this great account with yourself! I cannot help you. And, I beseech you, torture me no more in seeking any further assistance from me in doing it, as you have been doing!"

"Lena, Lena! all that is mere madness. I can, I will, make it all good, if you will but grant me the means!"

"I? Grant you the means! How, indeed, now?" Her tones were very bitter.

"I will show you how! Why, that's what I am trying to do, what I want to do! I have been advising about the matter with a person with whom I have been intimate for years. There may, very probably, be a good deal of agitation and excitement, at first, perhaps; but all that will soon pass over. Else will reconcile herself to the position. The world will cease to talk. The grass will grow over the affair; it grows over everything!"

"Yea!" she murmured. "It is even as you say. The grass grows over everything; even such hours as I have had to go through this day!"

She seemed quite broken. She resisted still. The spirit of resolution in her was strong still.

But the fire and passion seemed to have gone out of her resistance. Gentleness was the only weapon left her in that hour of weakness. And her gentleness had always been more effective with him than her fire. She had recourse to that weapon now.

"Yes, that may be true. Else may possibly come to find in misery a second nature, and to go about looking like other women, with the broken heart in her breast. But you, dear Werner, you and I! *We* never could be reconciled to the situation. *We* never could be happy, never! Some portion of our pain we should be free from soon, soon; only too soon would the wild longing for each other be quenched. But our regret, our repentance, our remorse, these would last forever. Therefore I beg you, I beseech you, I implore you, return to Else and take with you all I dare give, my blessing and my truest, warmest sympathy in the struggle that is as much mine as yours! I shall find some way of making my life endurable; and you—you will find a place of peace, though it may take you long, long to do it, in the post of duty which you dare not surrender! That duty will be hard to you, for some time, hard indeed; I see it only too well. But you will surely do it, and you will find a satisfaction in that duty, at last, which nothing else in the world could afford you in such fullness and completion. And the day may come, will come, when we may meet again without the deadly fear of tempting each other to wrong. It is far off, that day, but it will come,

it will come! And then—then—then, perhaps, I may find some little corner in your house, some corner like that I did have for a brief while, and you and Else may receive me and cherish me as the friend who loves you all so well. And perhaps the next time I may prove more deserving of that confidence than I was before. I will look forward to that time during the long years of separation which we must impose upon ourselves for that slow and painful preparation which alone can fit us for meeting once again. And now go, go, go, in God's name! Go, and God be with you! If it is hard for you to leave me, He knows how hard it is for me to send you away!"

"I cannot, Lena! I cannot, I cannot!" he cried. His very brain seemed to reel under the pressure of this gentleness and sweetness. Every nerve in his frame vibrated and quivered with suppressed tenderness. "Every word of dismissal that you utter only binds me to you with tenfold strength; every word shows me what I should lose if I were to give up you. I cannot do it, Lena! Dear, sweet Lena! My angel, my queen!" He wept like a child. Both her hands were in his hands; she could not help it; and he covered them with his kisses. "I beseech you, I implore you, look at things as they are. Your spirit of sacrifice is beautiful, beautiful, exceedingly. But it is exaggeration! It is against nature. God has made us for each other. The barriers between us are frail, rotten things, the miserable, paltry work of man!"

"The barriers between you and me consist in the confidence that Else has placed in me!" she said; "and those barriers neither God nor Devil can tear down!" Then, withdrawing her hands gently, very gently, from his, she folded them with a gesture of unspeakable entreaty, and with an anguish in her eyes that haunted him thenceforth forever, aye even to his deathbed, she said in a very broken, very soft, very gentle voice: "Werner, that day when your divorce from Else is pronounced shall be my last! My own hand shall see to that!" She began to tremble violently, and her voice, as she uttered these last words, sounded as if the death she spoke of were very near. Her senses, in truth, had all but left her! And the little strength and consciousness that was left to her she used for a few final words. "What I owe Else I never can forget," she stammered. "What I owe myself I might possibly forget. But for God's sake spare me! Spare me, for God's sake! It would be no joy to you; and to me it would be ruin, destruction, despair! Therefore I entreat you yet this once! Go, go go!"

He looked up once again into those eyes of hers, with their fixed, glassy stare, eyes filled with more than the terrors of death; and he hesitated for an instant. Then he rose to his feet, knelt at hers for one moment, pressed his lips to her hand, and left her.

CHAPTER XLV.

He left her. And, with the full heat of the day beating down upon his head, he traversed the whole length of the street in the direction of the Arch of Constantine.

A heavy weight seemed to be attached to each of his feet. He stood still, from time to time, as though it were impossible for him to stir a step further. All that had that day happened to him was stupefaction, astonishment, despair; such a descent into the pit of anguish as he had never imagined possible in his moments of wildest imagination of such things.

And over that Villa Brancaleone which he had just left there hovered still the awful Demoniac Influence, Magic, Power—by whatsoever name it was to be called. It was as though some Unnamable, Monstrous Thing, baleful, powerful, irresistible, was there waiting for victims to fill its hungry maw withal.

And alas! If there is one moment when woman is utterly weak, it is that which follows the moment of her apparently most secured triumph.

Lena lay back there in the chair, wherein she had sunk in misery and utter exhaustion.

He was gone; she herself had sent him away. And now she will never see his face again,

never, never! Yes, indeed! She had spoken to him of times, far-off times, when once again their hands and eyes might meet. But she had done it only in her despair, and for his sake; done it that he might have some strength, some comfort, some consolation to support him and to feed on during those long, weary days and years of travel through desolation which were before them both. But, as for herself, such hopes or prospects were but figments of the brain. That distant time, when their souls should be regenerated and their lives once more united, when passion should have burned itself out, and friendship's safer, surer and more lasting warmth alone remain, seemed to her so far off, so unlikely, so incompatible with her sense of the failure of all powers in her being, that they were no more than distant mists on which nothing stronger than a vision could be built. It was no more than if she had told him, as she now told herself, that there could be no meeting for them hereafter at all in this world of bitter trial; none, ever, except as disembodied spirits in Paradise.

Yes, he was gone; and it was she who had sent him away! In those first moments after her eyes held him no more, only for as long as a cry from her lips could have reached and brought him back to her feet, her anguish was merged in pride that she had been heroic enough thus to say farewell forever to earthly bliss. But those first moments of exaltation were passed. Her pride was spent with the immediate and terrible

need for its exercise. And all that was left in her heart was that terrible yearning for the loved one's love which is the last feeling to be expelled from the breast of woman.

Yes, indeed, if she could imagine, could have imagined, that the dangers she had so valiantly fought against were still not far from her, she could have gathered her forces for the battle again, and chained up the dangerous creature pacing up and down in its cage within her bosom. But the danger, she told herself, was near her no longer. It was gone far away, gone never to return. What need, then, to add to all the other multiplied tortures of that dreadful hour the tortures of self-chastisement and self-restraint? These were surely not necessary now. Why had she not even allowed herself—and him—one kiss, one poor solitary kiss, before they took eternal leave of each other? That would have been no robbery of any of those rights of another soul which she had sworn to herself to respect. Oh, merciful Father! merciful God!

The poor creature was like some soldier exhausted in long fight, who lays aside the armor and weapons now too heavy for him to endure. And through the open door there came that frightful blast of the sirocco, and the bitter mockery of that odor of the orange flowers!

She began to sob. The little remnant of will and reasoning power still left in her began to fail altogether; a cloud seemed to come over her material vision, and the firm outlines of purpose and spiritual thought faded away into a sort of

vapor. And then there came, nearer and nearer, the great Darkness wherein the lines dividing right from wrong from each other in the soul tremble, tremble, and tend to disappear.

She pressed her cheek against the back of the chair wherein she sat cowering. Her tired eyes closed in a sort of counterfeit of sleep, and her tired soul began to dream.

She saw herself in Eltville again. She was in the early prime of youth once more. She loves him, she yearns for him. And between them there is no barrier. There is no Else; there are no children. The door opens. He steps up to her. She sees the youth, as she had that first time in her life seen him on the banks of Rhine, with his tall, supple young form, and the large eyes that spoke so eloquently of the Idealist's soul. "I lost my way on the road hither, and that is why I am so late!" he exclaimed. "But, thank God, I am here at last, my angel, my queen!"

Suddenly she started up and tried to shake off her dream. But alas! Her delirium she could not and did not try to shake off. And Werner, the real Werner, stood before her!

She looked up at him with eyes still scarcely awake, still with the dream in them. Consciousness struggled to break out of the twilight in which it was wrapped. But it was too weak to endure the fullness of the light. Twice did her hands move about her with the helpless movement of a creature in desperate illness, or trying in vain to get rid of some invisible and terrible

burden crushing it to earth. And then, almost before he opened his arms to her, she had fallen helplessly on his breast.

* * * * * * * *

It was over. The Lena who was so full of pride in herself, so stern in self-conquest, so triumphant over the dangers of all her unprotected years, has, for the moment, vanished from this earth. The Angel had lost her wings, the scepter had been wrested from the hands of the Queen. Her power was broken. Her crown lay in the dust.

* * * * * * * *

Again did Werner traverse that avenue of plane-trees which ends at the Arch of Constantine.

Such a little time before, such a very little time, and he had come along that road with the sense of defeat on him, but a defeat of which, at the bottom of his heart, he was proud. Now he traversed that road once again with the sense of a triumph, but the triumph had the bitterness of Death in its flavor, and bowed him down to the very earth with shame.

And a terrible, complex shame it was. Shame for the creature that had yielded to him; but shame, terrible, withering shame, for himself, that he had not spared one so weak, so spent, so helpless, as he had only too well seen her to be.

Strange, with what swiftness the heart of man can suffer transformation, precisely in

that one of its impulses, passions, affections, which is, of all, the most powerful.

His feeling for the good and great woman whom he had so deeply injured had been one of almost insane passion; and it would have been marked by all the levity and instability of passion, but for the respect, amounting indeed to veneration, which the grandeur of her character had, all along, inspired him with. But now, the feeling which filled his agonized heart, as he dragged himself back to the center of Rome, was one from which the fires of passion had suddenly departed. That feeling was one compounded of compassion, tenderness, and the painful sense of responsibility of a cruel wrong, which he had now to expiate by remorse, and compensate for by some course of conduct not yet defined to his mind, but which he must certainly adopt.

That feeling of respect and reverence was extinguished, and, alas! could never be revived again. The flood of passion had reached its height, and the inevitable ebb was come. And with the ebbing of that tide came to him, at last, clear revelation and perception of the cruel and widespread ruin wrought by the onslaught of its raging and remorseless waters.

One thing was strange! Whereas his thoughts had, till this present hour of reckoning, been absorbed, with an almost maniacal absorption, by Lena, and Lena alone, now they left her and took a quite different direction. They swept back, by some force he could not measure, to the

place where his wife and children were looking for his return to them. Those long years which he had spent by Else's side, and which made up that life of "dullness and desolation" he had, but a few hours ago, so bitterly denounced to Lena, suddenly re-assumed their former familiar aspect. They re-appeared as something almost impossible to renounce, sweet, dear, indispensable.

Else's figure and character came before him once again in all the force of their simple, unconscious goodness; invested with that halo of pure self-sacrificing love, so free from all tinge of morbid passion, which were so peculiarly her own. Purity, in its most sacred form, seemed to breathe from the image which thus came up to his repentant memory. An immeasurable longing for her presence came upon him, that he might go down on his knees to her and rest his tired head upon her lap.

And in his ears came sounding the little tripping steps of his children. They were coming to the door of his work-room to tell him to come to join the family meal, which was ready and waiting only for him to come. And he heard again the babbling of the little soft voices, all going together, before they reached his room. And wee little Dinchen came toddling up to him, climbed up in his lap, and put her small, warm arm round his neck; and her sweet, fresh, child's breath came upon his cheek as she whispered: "Papa, I've been helping to cook dinner to-day for you!"

Trifling things, these, very trifling indeed! But how important, to that wayward heart of his, he had never yet realized.

Then he remembered one time when little Lizzie had fallen sick, and it was feared that an inflammatory attack of croup was supervening. The physician had strictly enjoined that she was on no account to be allowed to fall asleep, or, at least, she was not to be allowed to go fast asleep. He took his seat by the little one's side—she was propped up as high as they could manage with pillows, embroidered pillows they were, he remembered—and he tried to make her forget everything in play with him. In emergencies of this kind, he was much better able to deal with the children than Else. He heard the little thing's sweet, small, ringing laugh, and then the weak, hoarse cough which so severely tried the little breast. The little eyelids wanted so badly to close over the tired eyes; and she whimpered so pitifully because they would not let her go quite off to sleep, and he kept her as much awake as he could possibly do, with all sorts of fond little jests and jokes. Else was standing at the foot of the bed, pale and exhausted with three sleepless nights! She was rubbing her eyes, and looking at him so tenderly that it was quite affecting. Oh, how it all came back to him now! He did his best to persuade her to go to bed. She gave him a kiss, and whispered some words of love to him, and then did as he wished. But hardly had she fallen asleep when little Lizzie began to cough again. And before he could

look round Else had jumped up and was at Lizzie's bed, in her night-dress and with her hair all about her shoulders. He saw her pretty, bare feet shine white upon the carpet.

Yes, those seven years of life together with Else now seemed to have about them a delicate aroma of tenderness, confidence, and all purest household joy.

He had never realized how tender his affection for her and the children really had been, and was; how thoroughly he delighted in all the little things that gave her simple soul delight; how much he suffered at any suffering of hers; never realized it till now.

And, now, he was going to take a knife and thrust it into Else's breast; now he was to put away the children from him, as though they were not his at all! Now, he was to part with Else altogether, in order that he might be free to marry Lena!

The magic, the charm, which had maintained Lena's ascendency over him was shaken to its base, if not forever gone. It was simply this. He had been so long accustomed to regard her as a creature by whose being he had to regulate his own, and as the inferior does regard the superior. She had stood so long on an eminence above him, up which he had to climb every time to reach her. How, then, could he at once accommodate his thought to a state of things in which he would have to reach down to her, instead of up to her? That sudden, vehement out-flame of passion in the unhappy woman which had caused

all barriers between them to fall, had, at the same time, flung all the harmonious outlines of the pictures of her in his mind, with which he had been so long familiar, into a mass of discord and ruin. And then there came into play in his soul, in all their former force, and for his chastisement, those instincts of reserve, of shyness, of forbearance, of chivalry, of purity, of which the miserable theories of these later days had sapped, perhaps, some part of the foundations, but had left the main fabric and structure quite intact.

A cold sweat gathered on his forehead, and his breath came with difficulty. He saw that he was bound hand and foot. After what had occurred, after all that he had said to Lena, he had no choice whatever. Lena had now a claim on him to divorce Else and marry her which it was simply out of the question to resist. And the thought was madness!

The soul that vacillates, as Werner's always had done, is never a wholly sane soul. And this was a man who, as we have seen too well, had vacillated, always, between absolutely incompatible principles and impulses. If he did not now fall, if he was protected hereafter from falling, into the abyss of declared and utter insanity, he now came perilously near its brink. For he actually clenched his teeth, lest he should yield to the temptation of cursing the woman whom he had destroyed.

CHAPTER XLVI.

In those same dreadful moments Lena was seated in her room—the garden room—where he had left her. And now her perceptions and understanding came back to her in all their fullness and force, so much surpassing as they did the average mental power of man or woman. Every thought that would now be passing through Werner's mind was as clearly revealed to her as though he was there putting them into words. And she was able almost to divine the very words he would have put them into. She dug her nails deep into her forehead and felt as though she must dash herself to pieces on the floor! Then, for minutes together, it was as though every nerve of sensibility had ceased to act, and she was a mere dumb lifeless log. And then came back the anguish of it all once more; that scorching, burning feeling of self-contempt from which she knew there was no refuge for her while life lasted. Then came the wild, convulsed, despairing feeling of a creature caught, as it were, in a net, and tearing at it to see if there was no way of escape; then, the wild thought that it could not be, could not, could not, that such things could not have happened to her, to her, to her! It must all be some bad, wicked, impossible dream. She must

shake herself from the ugly sleep in which such dreams were possible! She must shake herself and wake up!

But for her there was no waking.

It seemed to her as though she were set to stand upon the highest point of some mountain, where there was barely room for her feet, and where steep precipices were on every side of her —abysses the depth of which no human eye could gauge. She could stir neither backward nor forward. The slightest bodily movement turned her giddy at once, and might precipitate her into the gulf below.

The Past? She dared not so much as think of it! Every word that had ever fallen from her lips and had had anything in it claiming kinship for its utterer with high and noble spirits, every aspiration she had ever sent up to higher regions, returned upon her now and scourged her as with whips and scorpions. Every drop of blood in her veins seemed on fire with remorse; every nerve quivered with the extremity of her horror at herself!

Lena! She! A living woman! Absurd: there was no such being! A Lena there had, indeed, once been, but she was dead now. This was not that Lena, this pitiful, helpless, broken being, writhing like a crazed thing in her shame, clutching vainly at some shadow, some straw —of excuse or pretext, or illusion—to cover her up from the sight of herself, lest she break down wholly into delirium and madness.

Excuse. Why, there was none! Nothing

could qualify the hideousness of this moral ruin! If others thought such glozing possible, she could not!

It was, indeed, true that this unhappy woman's strong sense of right and truth had always been one of the most distinguishing features of her fine mind. And that sense was never so inexorable as now, when it operated to destroy her in the intensity of her self-condemnation.

That sense of right, however, might have saved her in this supreme hour from herself. But her pride, a pride unchastened by that which alone chastens pride—religion—came to do its final work of ruin in these terrible moments of moral crisis. Even in the act of repudiating the bare idea that there could be any sort of excuse for herself, the thought crossed her distracted mind that excuses in plenty could be fnrnished in such case for others, perhaps; for the sort of women upon whom she had always looked down. But she did not want excuses. What she wanted was consolation; and consolation she could find nowhere. And what she did not see or detect in herself, was that this strange mixture of pride in herself and of abhorrence for her offense deprived her of all hope of a restoration to any form of life in this world, and drove her on the way to self-destruction.

She tried, indeed, to tear away her thoughts from the irrevocable that had befallen, and to form some idea or plan of what her life must be in the future years. And she failed miserably.

Do what she would to construct or imagine some sphere of existence, some personal or social relations for herself in the future, she could not realize the future woman in any sort of extrication from the toils in which she was now writhing. Among the many thoughts which chased each other through her troubled brain was that of a regular union with Werner. But, then, had she not said to him only a very few hours before: "The day of your divorce with Else will be my last; my hand shall see to that"?

Her bosom was shaken with a laugh that had more than the bitterness of death in it—so bitter that it stuck in her throat and could not emerge from it in the shape of the sane laughter of the happy. Why, it was the old Lena that had said that—the dead, murdered Lena, whom she dared no longer think of, who must be buried out of sight as soon as possible! This other Lena—the new Lena—could not be held responsible for such folly as that. This new Lena had nothing to do with sensitiveness, or justice, or kindness, or scruples of any kind. She must hew her way forward through thick and thin, at all hazards and at any cost of suffering to others.

But there was one difficulty there. She knew as well as if he had re-appeared to put it in actual words to her—we have already said so—that her power over him was broken, that he had now at last begun to reflect seriously upon the moral difficulties of the position.

And what then? There should be no such reflection; she would not permit it! His only

duty now was to her! She had a paramount right to all the rehabilitation he could give! She had her rights to life and in life as well as others, and to hold her head at least as high as other heads, guilty heads that had never quailed or bowed under their guilt.

Then, suddenly, there shot across this tangled web of her emotions a frightful sensation of powerlessness! She saw again the last look Werner had given her before he left her presence. That look came before her eyes with a terrible vividness. It had been a look of compassion, of embarrassment, of confusion, and perplexity.

She threw her hands up to her face and covered her eyes. Impossible, impossible now! Not all the sacraments of all the altars in the world could give her once again the place she had held in the man's feeling. It was over; it was all over! Passion indeed, passion of the lower type, might arise or be roused in him once more, but the noble, beautiful, beautifying, exalted, earlier sentiment—never, never, never!

Better see him never again! Better hide herself away from him, better fly from his face to the very ends of the world.

Fly from him? She knew only too well that that was impossible for her now. That was beyond her strength now; life was insupportable to her without him now; she felt and saw only too well that only with him and from him now could she ever know the bare fragment of a shadow of consolation.

And again she dug her nails into her temples. And again the wild fancy crossed her that all this torture was no more than some evil dream, from which she must shake herself awake. But there was no waking for her!

There came a knock at the door; she started violently.

It was Sulzer, who had a letter for her.

A terrible pang shot through her, such a pang as might be inflicted if a red-hot knife were thrust in an open wound. It was from Else!

Old Sulzer had delivered his letter, but seemed not to be able to get himself out of the room. Lena gave him a questioning glance in which there was some of her old imperiousness and impatience.

The faithful old fellow said in low hesitating tones: "Excellence, there is going to be dreadful trouble. I fear it's all wrong with this place. Marietta, the gardener's daughter, is dying of the perniciosa. She must have got it yesterday when she was picking the orange flowers; and now they don't give her twenty-four more hours to live! The kitchen maid is ill too. There's not one of us who can be sure of his life from one moment to another, my lady! For God's sake! If you only would leave and take us all away before we spend another night in the place!"

"Well, well! I'll leave to-morrow. You can tell Nina to pack up. I shall not dress for dinner to-day."

Sulzer evidently wanted to say something

more, but she motioned him to go so decidedly that he had no alternative.

She was alone. Else's letter seemed to scorch the fingers that held it. But it must be opened and read!

And when it was opened, what she read was this:

"DEAR LENA!—A hearty kiss and my sincere congratulations on your engagement. It is not exactly the future I had imagined for you, as you know, but if you are content I am happy. It does not matter to me how it is as long as you *are* happy; that's all I want.

"I wish I could say that I was so myself just now. But I cannot. The truth is that I am in very great misery. I was going to say that I don't think I could possibly be in greater misery than I am at this moment. But I cannot; for, an hour ago, things were even much worse with me than they are as I now write.

"It is frightful to have it suddenly revealed to one what a wretched poverty-struck creature one is, and humiliating to have to confess it outright. I can do it to you, though; and that shows how near and dear to my heart you really are. There isn't a living soul that I can say a word to about my trouble except yourself; and yet, only an hour ago, when I told myself that I *must* pour it all out to you, I was afraid to do so; yes, afraid even of you, dear! But I have mentally asked your forgiveness for it; asked forgiveness with all my soul, for thinking for a

single instant that *you* would ever do anything to hurt me.

"Do you know what all the people about me seem firmly to believe and Thilda has even gone so far as to hurl in my face? All through my married life, they will have it, I've been living under an illusion: Werner never really cared for me, and only took me out of compassion, because he saw I was so fond of him! They even say that, before his engagement with me, he had an inclination for somebody else, and that he has never been able to shake it off. I try to think what other this could be, and I can't come to any satisfactory conclusion at all. Thilda insists that it is Princess Orbanoff. But I cannot believe that. I can just imagine it possible that her beauty and her advances—they have been too clear to be mistaken—may have turned his head a little and made him forget me and the children for a moment. I can imagine her producing the same effect on a man as a little too much wine might do. But I cannot believe it possible that he would ever think of putting us away from him in cold blood and divorcing himself from me for such an unworthy creature as that. And, according to what I am told, God help me! he is thinking of nothing less than that. I learn from Thilda that he has been consulting some lawyer, an early friend of his, as to the best measures to take for the purpose.

"I cannot tell you what a state of mind I went into when they told me this. I left Thilda

at once and fled home, and then—oh, it's no use, I *must* tell you how frightfully unjust I've been in thoughts to you and Werner both!—then the dreadful thought came into my mind: It's not for that Croatian woman he's going to divorce me; if he's thinking of such a thing at all, it's for Lena!

"Oh, my God, if such a thing were possible! Well, what would be the only thing left for me to do? Only one, and I should have done it at once if I could have thought it possible. I should have gone quietly away somewhere and managed to put an end to myself in some manner that would attract no remark; so that you and he might be free to marry and never have any reason for remorse. What else could I possibly do? I never could think of entering into any struggle, any sort of competition with you! You might very easily break my heart, Lena; but you couldn't make me really angry with you.

"Oh, but there are the children, you may say, and it would be my duty to live on, in any case, for their sake! Indeed not! In all that confusion and complication I should have been of no use whatever in bringing them up; I should simply not have had strength enough for any such thing. And to live, and yet not have them with me, would have been just as great an impossibility! You would have been far better able to take care of them after that. Oh, I had thought it all well over, and quite come to that conclusion, and I was even begin-

ning to consider how to set about carrying out my resolution—when your telegram came. I nearly fell to the ground with the sensation of relief; I shed tears of joy; yes, indeed, in spite of all the misery I was in! And I was *so* ashamed of myself, so dreadfully ashamed! And in order to do all the penance I can for the ugly, hateful notion I had allowed to creep into my mind, I have made this frank and full confession.

"And, as I have now done so, I cannot help entreating you to find out, if you possibly can, what it is that keeps Werner away from us so, with all that frightful fever about; and what is the meaning of this story about a letter that he has sent to his lawyer, if he really has sent any. Perhaps it all rests upon some misunderstanding.

"In spite of my great affliction, I feel that strength and courage are coming back to me, and that I can command myself enough to begin a quite new life with him, if he will only let me. For, during these heavy weeks since we have been separated (they have been heavy, indeed, to me from the very first) I have come to see only too clearly that I have much to make up for as far as he is concerned, and that I have never taken life as seriously as I ought to have done as his wife.

"I shall await your answer in great anxiety and suspense, and remain, warmly pressing you to my heart, and wishing you all happiness, once more, thine old, faithful— ELSE."

She read through the letter twice, thrice, dwelling on every word. And presently the despair which had heated her pulses and coursed so violently through her veins gave way to a cold rigidity that might well be deemed the very precursors of dissolution. The letter operated to drive Werner altogether out of her thoughts, and her passion faded almost out of sight. Else became once again the foremost figure in her considerations. All else was mere valueless background.

She thought she had loved Else before; but that feeling had been a weak one, indeed, compared with the adoration she now felt for the young wife. She felt herself a mere creature of the dust in comparison; and she could have crawled before her in that dust in admiration of the poor young creature's simple greatness of soul.

She longed to be able to take the being, whom she had involuntarily afflicted, in her arms and clasp her to her bosom with the tenderness, more like a mother's than a friend's of equal years, which she had always felt for her. Oh, that she could but whisper to her: "Let your dear heart be at rest, my darling, my darling! Do not fret; it will all come right! No one shall hurt you—not *you*, whoever is to be hurt!"

But hardly had that thought crossed her soul when the agonizing reflection occurred to her that she was now forever unworthy of taking Else in her arms. Almighty God! What was to come of it all?

Then—at the moment when that despairing question came across her mind—something black crossed the windows of the room. It was a priest, carrying the Host. He went in the direction of the little orange grove, and disappeared. She knew what it meant. He had been summoned to administer the last sacraments to the dying girl.

Lena rose from her seat, raised herself to her full height and stood there in inflexible rigidity for a few moments. She took from her writing-table the letter for Enzendorff—of which she had written the few lines we know—and destroyed it. She then went to the threshold of the room, and stood there in hesitation for a few moments, covering her eyes with her hands. And then she said to herself, in a low voice: "*I should have gone quietly away somewhere and managed to put an end to myself in some way that would attract no remark.*"

Her breathing seemed to fail her at this supreme moment. But she recovered herself directly; and she put her foot resolutely over the fatal threshold. And then she went quickly, taking the direction in which the priest had gone.

But as soon as she had passed into the outer air there came over her a strange feeling of horror and alarm, and she shivered from head to foot. But this was by no means the fear of death, though it was enough to make every step further on that dreadful road a difficult thing. Every breath became almost a spasm. The daylight was now far spent, and the twilight deep-

ened rapidly into darkness. And it seemed as if the air was filled not so much with dying light as with a fine gray dust. And night came on with something of the rapidity of far more southerly latitudes than those she was in. It seemed to her as though everything in the whole world had been loosed from its moorings, and that all the visible things about her were suddenly huddling each other away from the field of her vision. The leaves on the trees hung there as if dead with autumn, too dead to fall even to the ground. The sultry air was still with more than the stillness of the grave. Yet, in spite of that stillness, it had power to communicate a very horror of disturbance to the nerves; as though some baleful electricity were being generated in it by the flapping of the wings of birds of ill omen. And the odors of the orange flowers were so intense that the senses seemed to fail and sink under them. From some tavern, not far off on the main road, there came the thin sound of some guitar and zither, playing something modulating abruptly into a melancholy minor, some wretched stuff which was made tragically impressive by an accompaniment of coarse shouting and laughter. There were drunken men there, trying to drown their fear of death in vulgar debauchery! An ugly thing, indeed! But one seen often enough in Cities of the Plague.

Nine o'clock now! The hour at which Lena

had been used, since those dreadful heats set in, to take her evening meal with Miss Sinclair. It had been no more than a sort of high tea for some time past. The burden and heat of the regular dinner had become an intolerable thing to the ladies.

Nine o'clock!

Old Sulzer tried to find his mistress to announce the meal. He went all over the house. She was nowhere to be found.

Where, in Heaven's name, *could* she be?

Miss Sinclair was standing in the White Hall, which led from the drawing-rooms to the dining-room, where they always met before repairing to the latter apartment. But Lena did not appear. Nobody could tell what had become of her. Miss Sinclair sent to the stables to ask whether the countess had driven suddenly, without letting her know, into Rome.

The priest passed by the house again with the Host, on his return from his melancholy errand.

Some of the servants crowded about him. They were pale, and their teeth chattered with fear, as they asked:

"How is Maruccia getting on?"

"Maruccia is no more," said the priest. "She was in her last agony by the time I reached her."

The people broke out in cries of grief and despair. The poor things were full of fear for their own lives, and their cry was full of that fear. The priest sighed deeply. "You had

better look to it lest a much more terrible misfortune befall you all!" he said. "Your mistress was with Maruccia when I left the poor thing's corpse. I tried to prevent it, and to get her to come away with me. But I could not induce her. She had helped me, too, in consoling and strengthening the girl in her dying moments, and she looked so wretchedly ill herself that I was quite frightened. She would not listen to my entreaties to leave the place. The poor, sick creature had seized her hands in her death struggle — she was afraid to die, poor soul!—and the countess *would* not withdraw them."

The servants, male and female, looked at one another in speechless horror!

Old Sulzer went, as fast as his poor old legs would carry him, round the orange grove to the gardener's little cottage, to take his mistress away.

They told him that she had left the place. He came back to the house as quickly as he possibly could; but she was not there. He waited for another quarter of an hour in mortal anxiety. Then he said to himself that his unhappy mistress must have been struck by the fever and become delirious and lost herself somewhere. Could she possibly have gone through the orange grove? Almighty God! Why, she might be there still!

A shudder ran through his poor old body from head to foot. But his own danger was no more to him than it would have been to a faith-

ful dog in that crisis. And he went off to try and find and save her from what he knew well were the very shades of death.

It was getting quite late. The moon had succeeded in struggling into view out of the gray clouds filled with the sirocco; the flowers on the orange tree glimmered white; a quivering mist rose from and almost hid the soil. And there, with her feet enveloped in that mist, and all the lower part of her frame indistinct with it, Sulzer saw coming toward him, as if she were being carried on by the clouds, a woman robed in white.

Her arms hung straight at her side. Her head was slightly thrown back. Her eyelids were all but closed, her lips and mouth half open.

She went along very slowly, and, as she went, drew in, with deep, slow, regular draughts, that sweet and terrible Atmosphere and Odor of Death.

That noise, so pitiful, so repulsive, from the tavern in the road, came sounding, sounding into the thick of that fatal grove. And, over and above those foul noises of earth, there hovered the clang of the Bell for the Dead, which they were ringing in some chapel in the Campagna for the dead girl.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE following morning Werner came down rather early to the breakfast-room of the hotel. His mind had not yet recovered from the confusion and perplexities in which it had been thrown by the events of the previous day. And he had been vainly endeavoring, throughout a sleepless night, to form some plans for the immediate future. When he got into that apartment, the only person he found there was that young man from Belgium, who had enlivened Lena's last reception with his questionable musical performances.

"Well, this is a pretty reign of terror here in Rome, just now, I must say!" the young Belgian exclaimed. His face wore the smile which seemed always to inhabit it; a beardless face it was, and smooth as an egg with the shell stripped off. "Have you heard the last nice piece of news? My servant has only just this moment told me all about it. He had been to the druggist to get me some eau de Cologne. Countess Retz is down with the perniciosa, and they say there's no hope for her!"

"Countess Retz! The perniciosa!" The words seemed to freeze on Werner's lips. "It can't be possible!"

"Oh! there's not a doubt of it. And, you know, the perniciosa strikes like a flash of lightning. That Brancaleone Villa has a very bad name; and the countess, they say, has just gone the way to make sure of having it, with her frightful imprudence! The gardener's daughter was ill with it, and nothing would do but the countess must attend to the girl herself; and, besides that, she needs must go and patter about in that orange-grove there, which has got the nickname of the Wood of Death; and after sunset, too! Why, it was that very wood which was the death of the girl. If one didn't know that the countess had the best of reasons for wishing to live—such fine prospects, you know—one would be almost inclined to fancy that she had thrown her life away willfully. Oh! poor, dear countess! Three shivering fits, you know, and it's all up with you!" As he uttered these last words, the young Belgian applied himself to the breakfast which the waiter had set before him, and broke the shell of an egg with a spoon. "Ugh! Rome is getting to be more than I can stand!" he cried. "I shall be off this evening!"

Werner did not hear him out, but sprang to his feet. His face was more like that of a dead than a living man, as he dashed out of the hotel into the Piazza di Spagna. He jumped into the first cab he could find, and made the man drive as fast as he possibly could to the Villa Brancaleone.

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An awful stillness prevailed at the Casino there, broken every now and then by the sound of rushing feet coming from some part of the building.

It was some time before Werner could get hold of anybody to make inquiries. And when he did, it was only a servant-girl with a bucket of ice.

Summoning to his help all the little Italian he was master of, he managed to make her understand that he must see Sulzer for a few minutes. Sulzer came to him. Every drop of blood had left the poor old man's countenance; his eyes were swollen with weeping and his hands trembled violently.

Werner learned, in reply to his questions, as he had feared, that what the young Belgian had told him was true, in the main. But the facts, of course, were seen in a quite different aspect in the light of what the old servant had to report. His dear countess had always been extraordinarily kind to poor people! When any one of the servants was ill, man or woman she took the greatest care of the invalid, and always saw after the person herself, never caring whether the illness was contagious or not. And Sulzer's opinion was quite decided. His poor lady must have been suddenly seized with the fever when with the dying girl, and become delirious at once, more or less, and gone into the orange-grove without knowing what she was about.

"Who is the physician that has been called in to the countess?" asked Werner.

Sulzer told him. It was the kindly young Austrian gentleman who had attended Werner after the duel. He was with the countess at that moment.

"Shall I send him to you, baron, when he comes out?"

"Pray do so!" answered Werner.

Then Werner went, to wait till the doctor came, into the White Hall, where, so very few days before, he had seen Lena standing in that attitude, fixed in his memory forever, between the weeping Eros and the white flowers of the oleander-trees.

It seemed to him as though years went over his head before anybody came. At last the young Austrian doctor made his appearance. His face wore the impassive aspect under which men of his profession are wont to cover their feelings in the presence of the sick and the dying.

The moment he came into the hall, Werner made an exclamation of agitated inquiry.

"Things look badly, very badly, I am sorry to say!" replied the physician.

"No hope?"

"Not the least! I have already been in consultation with a native physician; he agrees with me that recovery is out of the question."

"Does she know that she is dying?"

"Yes. She insisted upon knowing the truth. She is quite prepared: astonishing self-possession!"

"How long before the end must come?"

"This evening, most probably. She may possibly last through the night, but certainly not more than an hour or two after daybreak," said the physician, very, very sadly. It seemed a relief to him to take the professional mask off for a moment.

"Is she quite alone?"

"For the moment, yes."

"Can I have a word with her?" asked the unhappy man. Then his brain seemed to go on fire; but he felt that it was positively necessary for him to say something to excuse or explain a wish that seemed so out of place at that dreadful moment. "I am one of her oldest friends, and the husband of the dearest friend she has in the world!" And, as he added the last words, he felt as if somebody was seizing his throat with both hands and strangling him.

"Just at this moment she is unconscious," said the physician; "but, perhaps, a little later."

The physician left him.

Werner did not leave. He remained there the whole day, without touching food and without sitting down, except for a few very brief moments. Most of the time he spent pacing up and down the loggia, which occupied nearly a whole side of the house. Every now and then he stood

quite still, painfully straining his faculties to catch any sound that might reach him. And, now and then, he would try to find some one who could bring him news of what was passing in the sick-room. But he learned nothing except from the physician, who made one or two hasty visits there in the subsequent course of the day, but who did not take off the embargo he had placed upon Werner's own proposed visit.

If any one had asked the wretched man, thereafter, to give some coherent account of what had passed through his mind during those terrible hours, he would have been totally unable to do so. All that his memory carried away from them was an agonizing confusion of mental and physical pain; a frightful sense of weight crushing him all the time to earth, a sense of darkness, as though the light had gone out of his eyes or a black pall had been spread over the whole earth, a fire in his brain that he feared would never be quenched, fierce and violent pulsations over his whole frame, which made every breath a difficulty to him. Hours they were of a complicated agony such as he had never before experienced; never was again to experience; and which few men have ever passed through and lived.

At about six in the evening Lena recovered consciousness once more, and for the last time. Sulzer brought him a short note from her. The address was almost illegible, and had cost the writer much painful effort. In an envelope,

with it, was Else's last letter to her. And, on the back of this letter, were the words, hastily scrawled:

"Received the 15th May, at half-past seven in the evening."

The note to Werner was as follows:

"I entreat you to read the note for Else that comes with this, and to post it at once with your own hand. Make Else happy! God protect you both! LENA."

The note to Else was inclosed, addressed to her, in another envelope, and contained the following words:

"DEAR ANGEL — Everything has been explained. There is no idea of such a thing as divorce in Werner's mind. It has all been only a misunderstanding. In a few days he will be with you. Thy faithful friend, LENA."

This little note was miserably written, scarcely legible, in fact; but the last three words, "thy faithful friend," were formed with astonishing precision.

Werner sent in a note to the dying woman containing an imploring entreaty to grant him one moment's interview.

She sent out word that she could not see

him, and that she entreated him to post the letter immediately. And he left the house in despair!

* * * * * * * *

Lena lay in her bed. The fever had subsided a little about noon; but, as evening drew in, it heightened considerably. And, with the increase of the fever, the patient's consciousness gradually left her, until nothing remained of it but sensations of terrible pain, dull, heavy, continuous pain, aggravated by delirium and hallucinations, in which the wrecked imagination of the dying woman took a fearful advantage of her helplessness and her bodily anguish.

It seemed to her that she had been put to lie upon a couch of stinging thorns, and there to toss about unceasingly, in the vain effort to get some relief. And all the while there hovered all around her black, demoniacal forms that spat fire upon her defenseless frame. And these black, monstrous things were constantly increasing in number, and closing round her nearer and ever nearer!

This lasted till midnight. But, with the first faint light of the dawn, she became more tranquil. The black monsters disappeared slowly, one after the other, leaving only one behind. And even that one presently fled the scene with a slow, lingering movement of its horrible wings.

Then a refreshing coolness seemed to take possession of her tortured frame, and her couch of

thorns was gradually changed into a broad, noble river, which seemed to flow with a weird mixture of water and light. Life seemed to glide from her, as a soiled dress is put off at eventide. And all that had narrowed and burdened the soul, in its tenement of clay, seemed to be lifted away. And thus—restored to the pure essence of Being which was her true and native element—she floated down this River of Light to a region where all was clearness, purity; where the day is Infinity, and knows neither heat nor burden; where the seasons are no more, and the Demon of the Spring is allowed neither entrance nor power.

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On the following morning, when Werner came to the villa, she was dead.

Once again, once only, he gazed upon her form. It was seen in the red light of torches. In her coffin!

She lay there, shrunk in size, it seemed, sweet and quiet, like some modest Being rather than a corpse. Or, if corpse it was, the motionless figure seemed to breathe a peculiar charm, such charm as is seen in the face and form of a sleeping child. This countenance, which looked out from its coffin, was not that of the woman, so famous for her beauty and her mind, the woman whom all the world had known, worshiped and admired, the woman whom he had crushed and destroyed with his own ruthless hand. No; that face it was not! It was another face, known to

him, and to him only, of all human beings; the sweet small face of the Water-nymph whom he had rescued from the waters of Rhine. And it smiled up to him, with a strange, mysterious, loving smile, as from lineaments that had never been distorted by a single bitter pain, or a single bitter thought.

The dead woman seemed to be enveloped in an atmosphere of purity, purity so absolute that, one might deem, no defilement ever had approached, or ever could have approached it.

Yea, indeed! Death had restored Lena to all, more than all, the purity of her earliest, saddened years. And, if the fever of life *had* touched her great soul with any trace of sin, that trace was effaced as though such impairment had never been.

And, as he gazed upon that motionless Form, she who had been its tenant became once more the sainted, sacred woman to him; the one woman to whom he had looked for the healing of his life; became so; and remained so.

And, on the day after, he followed her coffin—with Enzendorff at his side—they two only—to her grave.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

It was early, one fresh, dewy, odorous morning—a German morning, one is fain to call it.

The old trees in the Leipzig Place were rustling in a dreamy tone that had a touch of the mystery of home in it; the grass at their feet had all the freshness and green of early summer, and early morn. And outside of the shadows cast by the trees the dew shone and quivered and glittered on that grass. And from the direction of the great Park of Berlin, there came upon the vast city, thrusting away its fogs and mists, a mighty breath of morning air, with all the coolness of the night in it; genuine, fresh, pungent, glorious German morning air.

The first cab came rattling through the morning stillness. A portmanteau and a plaid shawl were by the driver on the box. In the left corner of the vehicle lay back a man who looked as if he had just come out of a serious illness, or was about to fall into one. His clothes hung loose upon his frame. His face was of a pale yellow. His eyes were sunk deep in their sockets.

The wife of the porter, who had just come out to sweep the front steps, stared at him with all her eyes.

"Baron!" she exclaimed, in her astonishment. "Who'd have thought it! Goodness gracious!"

"Is all well upstairs?" he asked, hastily.

"Yes; all right! The bairns are blooming like roses. Only the baroness, dear lady, looks a little pale; but"—here the worthy woman smiled a little roguishly—"that will soon be set right!" Then, looking a little closer at Werner, she said: "But, surely, the baron must be ill himself! Isn't it so? The baron looks very poorly, indeed!"

He made no answer, but looked up with serious eyes to the green tops of the trees shivering and whispering with such mysterious sounds and movements, while the porter's wife helped the cabman to take the baggage down from the box.

"Unfortunately, my husband is not at home to help to carry it upstairs; perhaps the cabman—"

"Oh! it doesn't signify," he replied. "Let the things remain in the hall; I will send Brown for them."

The cabman was paid, and the vehicle rolled away. He drew a deep, slow breath, and, as he did so, an extraordinary feeling of satisfaction came over him. He felt like a creature suddenly restored to its native element after long exile from it. This pungent, ordorous morning air tasted to him like nectar after the poisonous atmosphere of the exhausting sirocco which he

had been breathing during these last weeks. He could not have imagined that he would experience such a revolution of feeling. He had never realized how precious this pure German air really was to him. He had never suspected that it was the medium in which alone his physical and spiritual health could find their suitable aliment; that it was the only one in which he could at once respire and aspire. How delightful, how full of all sweetness and charm, this home-coming might have been if— His foot hesitated to cross the threshold which he felt as though he had forfeited all moral right to step over. But he gathered up his strength, stepped on into the house, and went up the stairs. Any one observing him, as he ascended them, might well have mistaken him for an aged man; his gait was feeble, and he dragged rather than lifted his feet. He felt as though he should never reach the floor where his dwelling was, so was he weighed down by the heart in his bosom; that heart which carried about with it a woman's corpse!

At last he arrived at the door of his apartments. And, before he could ring, the door opened.

It was his mother who confronted him, with eyes opened to their utmost, and filled with wrathful reproach. But he had not time to observe this suppressed anger in the loving face; for the moment those maternal eyes fell upon his countenance and figure, their anger was changed into alarm.

"For God's sake! What is the matter with you?" she exclaimed.

"Quietly, mother, quietly!" he said, in tones of entreaty. "Is Else awake?"

"I think not, yet. She is in the room on the other side, that looks upon the garden. She could not have heard you come up."

"Then do not wake her!" he begged his mother. "Before I go in to her, I wish to have some conversation with yourself."

"Come!" she said, in a dry voice. She had given him no kiss; she had not even held out her hand to him. He followed her without saying a word, his head sunk on his chest, where she led him, which was into his study. She closed the door behind her.

"How is it that I find you here in Berlin, mother?" The depression in his voice was sad to hear.

"Me? Why, Else sent for me! She was at her wits' end what to do with that stepdaughter of ours, Thilda, who was going on more like a lunatic than anything else. Not that the girl's idiotic proceedings are anything to me! It's her own lookout, if she wants to throw herself away upon some transatlantic mountebank or other. No! She might be guilty of all the sillinesses under heaven for me! But, unfortunately, she's something worse than silly. She's mischievous and spiteful as well, more's the pity. And when it comes to her venting her malice and spite upon one so dear to me as Else, and reducing

the poor girl to such a condition as I found her in when I got here, that's quite a different matter, and calls for strong measures!"

"And is it better with Else since you came?" Werner asked, with the same depression in his voice. It seemed so fastened upon him that he could not even try to shake it off.

"Yes. Two days ago a note came to her from a friend of hers at Rome. The moment she got hold of that she began to pick up, and from that moment she has done scarcely anything but stand at the window, morning, noon and night, looking out for you. But, for the first few days after I came she was the very picture of grief, let me tell you! And, do what I would, I could not get out of her what it was that was so distressing her. For, if I put to her any question that seemed to reflect upon you in the very slightest degree, she was up in arms at once to defend you from the slightest imputation, and I seemed to do her nothing but harm. So all I know about the whole wretched business is what I've got from Thilda. And *she* thinks she's done a very fine thing indeed! She positively boasted to me of having forced Else's eyes open to facts which the poor girl ought to know, and of having betrayed to her that, when you engaged yourself to her, your thoughts were occupied by somebody else. I've done my best to talk the poor girl out of the idea. But there seem to be all sorts of other cards in the game, which I know nothing about." Then, fixing him with her eyes, and looking very sternly into his, she

asked, sharply: "Is it true that you have written to Counselor D——, your schoolfellow, asking about the proper steps for a divorce?"

Werner's eyes fell to the ground. "Yes, it is true," he said, in low tones.

"Am I really to understand that you have been seriously entertaining the idea of putting away Else and the children?"

He replied not a word.

There was a pause, one of those pauses in which the very air seems to grow heavy, and the tie between hearts to be strained to breaking-point. Then the old woman said, in a harsh voice:

"It can't have been for that Croatian woman! Who was it?"

His head sank lower and lower.

"Who was it, I say?" the old lady insisted, in almost terrible tones. "It was the other woman! Do I not speak truly?"

"What other woman?" said Werner, in the voice almost of a dying man. His tongue clave to the roof of his mouth.

"The other woman, the other woman! The woman who is in everybody's mouth here, from poor Else's down to little Lizzie's; the woman whom they're all so attached to, in whom Else places the most unbounded confidence — one Lena!"

For an instant the conventional duty created by his dreadful position prevailed in his mind. He tried to bring out some indignant denial; but the words refused to come. He tried to find

some speech which should cover up the dead woman's reputation from the mother confronting him, even as he would be bound in honor, and would find the strength to do, in the face of the world without. That duty, springing from the lower and conventional sense of honor, he could and would be able to comply with. To the world he would know how to turn an impassive face. From the world he would know how to shield the dead woman, ill as he had shielded the living, with a shield so impenetrable that all shafts of suspicion and malice should glance away from it hurtless. But his mother! His mother, who, more than five-and-thirty years before these dreadful moments, had received him, a poor, helpless, naked little creature, from the very hand of God! Between his mother and those considerations of the world's requirements and restrictions there was nothing in common. Before the mother that had borne him he was as defenseless now as he had been then, when he drew the first breath of the life he had derived from her.

And he was haunted by the feeling, so common with those who have gravely offended, that life would be impossible unless he could share the burden of his offense with some other soul, in full confession. And, even as he had owed his life, at its origin, to his mother, so, here and now, in the mysterious workings of the Creative Mind, his mother had come to give him the chance of another life, endurable, if not renovated.

And well he knew that, of all the human souls who could sit in judgment on his, at that hour, the mother's soul, though it might equal the others in severity, would be the only one to accompany that severity with any healing tenderness.

"Mother, I have a confession to make. To you only can I speak. Let me have your promise that you will carry what I have to tell with you to the grave, and never breathe word of it to a single human soul!"

Thus he began.

She gave him the promise he required.

And then he poured out to her his whole heart, and the whole history of his relations with the woman whose name had just come, with almost a hissing and a scorn, from his mother's lips. It began with that first meeting of the two, on the banks of the Rhine, and ended with the moment when his eyes rested for the last time on the frame of the dead woman in her coffin. He made his mother see that dead form as he had seen it himself, shrunk from the larger dimensions of the glorious womanhood to the softer outlines of the girlhood he had first seen her in, with the illumination of some liberating, higher sphere upon the dead face, of which the red quavering glare of the torches, by which his earthly vision saw her for the last time, had seemed to him the symbol. In all the story, as he told it, there was no word which bore the semblance of excuse or palliation for himself.

Indeed, it seemed as though it were a sort of satisfaction to him to represent his own conduct in as ugly and hateful a light as possible, in order to make a foil to the character, as he depicted it, of the woman to whom his passion had been so fatal. And, in depicting that character, it seemed as though no words of his could be tender enough, powerful enough, clear enough, to convey an adequate impression of the strangely compounded being of the dear dead woman, with its deep core of nobility, principle, sentiment of duty, capacity for devotion, and the variability of temper and conduct that played upon its surface.

He showed his mother the letter she had written him, which he had so terribly misconstrued when it had come to his hands, and, in misconstruing, destroyed her, but which was now to him, as it must be to his mother, irrefragable proof of the grandeur of soul which his blind passion then would not let him see. And when, in fine, he came to the point where he could not conceal the one moment of weakness which was all that could be set on the other side of the account against a life of unbroken purity and goodness, he as little concealed his own conviction that, if that life had come to a close so swiftly after, it was because he had murdered it with his own unscrupulous hand, when it was most defenseless and most appealed to his protection.

And, when he had fully told the terrible story, which had culminated in such tragedy and such

guilt, he would fain that all he had said had remained unsaid; so greatly did he fear that the exalted plane of principle, whereon his mother had always stood, might make it impossible for her to see aright a character which, with all its moral grandeur, could never be represented as having wholly escaped the tainting clutch of sin.

This fear made him lay especial stress upon the manner of her death. He could not doubt that she had sought that death voluntarily. Suicide it was; but suicide into which he had driven a woman too great to live with a conscience not absolutely flawless in her own eyes, and, for the moment, too little mistress of herself to be responsible for her act.

He had wrought himself up to such a pitch of emotion that he broke down here and could say no more. And his mother was silent too. But when he mustered up courage to look into the mother's face, which he feared so much, he saw why it was she was able to say no word. It was because she was choked with tears.

He could not but take some comfort and hope from the compassion and sympathy which he had so strongly evoked. And it would have been an immense relief to him if he could have felt the maternal love wrapping him away, in its warm folds, from the grief and anguish of his own soul. But that was not yet to be. The compassion and sympathy in those tears were for the dead woman only. The stern reprobation of the living son was still strong upon her.

"Poor woman! poor woman!" she said, in very low tones.

She looked fixedly at the dead woman's letter, which she still held in her hands; and, before she gave it back to Werner, she passed those hands over it, as though with a fond, lingering caress.

"Well, mother, have you no word for me?" said Werner, despairingly.

"Words for you! There is but one word that fits this situation; and it is one which you ought to be able to speak for yourself," replied his mother, in tones very little softened. "Make Else happy now—it's the only thing left for you to do—and so redeem yourself!"

He passed his hands over his brows, like a man distraught. What was this that his mother would have him to do? Oh! impossible, impossible! What? Take upon his shoulders the awful burden of Else's inexhaustible sweetness and affection for him; enjoy it like a cowardly thief, with all that burden of offense against her on his conscience! There was something in him that protested against this. No! He would confess everything to Else, and then join the next exploring expedition bound for the wilds of Africa. He would go somewhere into the thickest of the fire of some battle, or where some epidemic was raging at its worst, to seek the honorable death which was all his self-respect would allow him to look forward to now. Why, what was he fit for now, except something like that? In the home he had profaned, in the normal,

quiet relations of life from which he had so widely wandered, impossible that he could ever shake from his soul the torturing recollection of the misery he had wrought; impossible that, with all that on his soul, he could live and move at all!

All this he poured out to his mother, who sat listening with an air of unshaken severity. And very stern was the voice with which she met it all.

"You *must* so live and move! It is your duty, and you simply must! The death you talk of would be nothing but aggravation of the wrong you have already down. Son! if repentance is really in your thoughts, and not some specious, spurious, self-glorifying sacrifice by which you may cheat yourself into self-approval once again, very different is the path you must walk in now from that you have been talking about so wildly. Get rid of all that as fast as you can—the quicker the better—and fix your mind on the only course which true repentance dictates. The true repentance consists only in action which expiates and atones for the past, and in healing those whom we have wronged. A false repentance it is that cuts off our power for such atonement and healing. You, and the unhappy woman you have told me of, have both alike sinned against Else. She might expiate and wipe out her sin by death; she might do so, and has done so. But you can expiate yours only by living, and living to atone; you can, and you must!"

"But, mother, mother! Can I expect Else to live by the side of a man who has murder on his soul, as I have?"

"Murder!" cried his mother, in angry impatience. "Big words, nothing but big words! You see in all this, just now, one death alone, and would fain believe that all your offense is absorbed and merged in that one calamity and consequence. Boy, most seriously do you misread your doings! The really worst, most hateful, ugliest part of it all was your purpose of divorcing yourself and thrusting your wife and your children out of your life. As to all the rest, which is all you seem to deplore—the catastrophe of your victim's death, especially—it was only the inevitable result of a set of circumstances which only the weaknesses of your character could have made possible from first to last. You never led that poor soul astray of set purpose, and God knows, she never did you! Both of you have been the victims of passion; which she, alas! knew better how to resist than you. It is in the guidance and restraint of self that your life has failed hitherto. You must live it out, now, on quite different terms. And you want all the longest years of the longest life man can lead, believe me, to make good all your offenses against the dead woman and the living!"

"But is it not my duty to confess everything to Else?" he urged upon his mother.

"If I could see that it would serve any useful purpose, I should say, Yes," his mother replied;

"but it is quite clear to me that it would not, and could not. It might do something to take some of the weight off your own heart, but it would only be laid on Else's heart instead. And you ought now to do nothing that can interfere with your making that poor girl as happy as you possibly can; that is your foremost earthly duty now, without which all other duty will be very little more than a name with you. Besides, silence now is part of your duty to the dead too. Never, except this once to me, should word be uttered or thing be done by you to impair the sacredness of that name. And what was her last wish? For what did she lay down her life? See that that last wish be fulfilled! See to it that that last sacrifice was not made in vain, if you would have her rest quietly in her grave!"

Even in these solemn moments, when the parting of the ways stood before him, with his mother's hand pointing with such noble decision to the right one, the weaknesses and vacillations of his character asserted themselves yet again. He was to rise out of these weaknesses thereafter.

And they were now, it may be, waging their last struggle within him. And those defects had been elevated into system within him by the evil doctrines, confusing the clear outlines of duty and action, with which he had trifled so long, as is the way of his sick generation and age. He objected this that and the other difficulty to his mother's peremptory suggestions,

until she all but lost her patience with him altogether.

"Spare me any more of your subtleties!" she cried. "Duty is not the complicated, casuistical, metaphysical thing you would make it. No indeed! It is something quite different, quite simple. Duty is to be found and done only in the spirit of resignation; the resignation which teaches us to go carrying to the end, without murmuring and without shrinking, the little bit of burden which God has seen fit to lay on our shoulders. Duty is the same thing in principle, one with the discipline which makes the good soldier, however tired he may be, drag on with him the weapons intrusted to him and go straight to his death, without asking questions as to why he should so endure and die. But all that pawing things over, and drawing distinctions, all that fine speculation you are so addicted to, comes straight from the pit, and tends to draw people down into it. If you had laid that truth to heart earlier, you would not be standing where you do now! If it be, as you say, that you have ruined your life irretrievably—which God forbid, and I cannot believe—spare the lives of others now! And whatever you suffer in doing so matters not one jot. And now let there be an end! Go to Else, and let her see your face and hear a word of love from you once more!"

He remained yet a moment or two sunk in thought and silence. Then he rose. He put out his hand very shyly and took his mother's hand. But she withdrew it from him. He

turned away, and went toward the door with dull, heavy steps from which all hope and courage seemed to have fled, when he heard behind him the cry:

"Werner!"

His mother stood close behind him, her old frame all a tremble with agitation, love, compassion. She opened her arms to her suffering child.

"My poor boy! my poor, poor boy!" she sobbed, and clasped him to her bosom.

A minute later he was kneeling by Else's bed.

"My darling!" he murmured, in low tones.

She opened her blue eyes wide, wide; looked at him uncertainly, as though the sight in them had to return slowly, and then began to sob, throwing both arms round his neck.

Her pure, artless tenderness and caress gave his soul the same sort of satisfaction as had been afforded him by the refreshing pungency of the air of the morning in the street. And again the thought shot through him, with keen pain, how delightful and beautiful this moment of return to his home might have been but for—!

"Oh! you dear, naughty, naughty fellow!" sobbed Else. "And it was all nothing but a misunderstanding, really nothing more?"

"Yes, yes; nothing but a misunderstanding!" he murmured.

"Lena wrote and told me so. Oh! if you could only have the least idea what a load her few lines took from my heart! Tell me about

Lena. What *is* Lena doing with herself? How is she?"

"Lena is dead!" he said, in a hoarse voice. "She was seized with the perniciosa, and before twenty-four hours were over she was gone!"

"Dead! Lena!" Else trembled violently in his arms. "Dead! Lena dead! God be merciful to us! That spoils all my delight in having you with me again!"

Then she added, in very low, very soft and tender tones:

"Poor Lena! poor Lena! poor Lena! She was a good and true friend to me, if woman ever was to woman!"

"She was, indeed!" declared Werner.

And strange, solemn indeed, was the voice in which the words were uttered. A solemnity it was well fitting the words and the man, who felt that, even as they passed his lips, he was burying the worst—and, alas! perhaps, too, some part of the best—of himself in the grave where the dead woman slept!

EPILOGUE.

MANY years have elapsed since the sad events which we have chronicled above.

These years have brought with them many of the changes which it is the peculiar function of time to bring to pass. But there are some things which defy time altogether, and which remain unaltered till they are swept into final oblivion by powers greater than time. And, accordingly, some of the things and persons whereof we have narrated remain, at this later date, in the same plight and condition as when we left them. Among these unaltered and, probably, unalterable things is the maiden state of Thilda. She is still Thilda Schlitzing, Mrs. Ryder-Smythe having, in point of fact, died before she was born. This result, however, is by no means to be attributed to any overwhelming influence exercised by her family with the lady. That influence proved itself so powerless to contend with the ardors of her passion for the young gentleman in question, that it had to retire discomfited and in great disorder from the field of action. At five-and-forty years of age, the lady felt that there could be no trifling with so critical a question, and fought desperately for her probably last chance.

But, when it came to the point of marriage settlements, the extraordinary result declared itself that money, after all, weighed at least as much as love with the romantic and emancipated spinster. A document had been prepared which secured to the lady exclusive control over the whole of her fortune. And the gentleman, alas! found it impossible to reconcile himself to arrangements inconsistent with his self-respect. But Thilda held her ground firmly. And the two loving hearts never became one.

Ryder-Smythe disappeared from the scene of our narrative very soon after this catastrophe of their loves. And, for a long time, Berlin heard no report of him. But he appears to have turned up at the great World's Fair, at Chicago, where the "colossal" quality of his pianoforte playing, sympathetic as it was with the vastness of everything there, is insuring him a "colossal" success. This new fame of the artist has probably caused Thilda's passion to spring up again from the ashes of its fires. At all events, she makes frequent allusions to it now, and usually in the remarkable shape of lamentation that she had not been able to overcome the prejudices of her rank and station, and give her hand to the man of genius, and of her heart.

Linden is still a bachelor. When Lena died, it went very hard with him indeed. He is growing quite gray now, and his devotion to Else and her children becomes greater with every year. He is one of the many unsatisfied, in the deepest life of the heart. But his pure affection

and friendship for the woman who first touched his fancy, and for her children, and the warm return they make him, make a better substitution for the unattained best than it is given to most men to enjoy. But Linden deserves it. It is not probable that he will, a second time, wander in any direction other than of Else and the love of his first youth.

In Else herself there is much alteration, as we see her after the years. She is still one of the prettiest, most charming, best loved women in all Berlin. But more than one white hair catches the light now, when it falls upon her sweet blonde head. And there is a gravity about her which seems to be not so much the opposite of her youthful manner and temperament as a noble flower, into which these have developed under the stress of experience and pain.

For it would seem, indeed there can be no doubt, that Werner, unhappy man, did, in spite of the fixed resolution formed under the stress of his mother's influence, betray to his young wife the secret of the guilt that was on his soul, and of the tragic fate of her unhappy friend. Not willfully, not voluntarily, however. In the daylight hours he had sufficient resolution and self-command to keep inviolate the seal that he had put upon his lips. But man is not master of himself during all the hours when his heart beats. And Sleep, so gentle and true with those who have no remorse on their souls, is cruel—and treacherous, we might almost say—to the burdened conscience. And so it was that Werner,

in those dreams of terror and anguish which visited him so frequently in the dreadful nights following his return to wife and home, revealed matter which he had sworn to himself that his wife, in this world at least, should never know.

But the sweet young creature, under this trial, proved that, underneath all the childlike graces of her character, there was a magnanimity and greatness of soul equal to the occasion, and wonderful in its power of stoical self-suppression. She showed herself capable of that which only the elect and very few of the sons and daughters of men are capable of, forgiveness and silence; of the supreme dignity which is above resentment and above complaint. Hers was the noble forgiveness of the strong, not the ignoble of the weak. And, if she thus put away the offense done to her into this admirable oblivion, it was because, deep as was her devotion to and need of her husband, she knew, all the more because of that revelation, how much more necessary she was to him than he to her.

But Werner's perceptions were naturally keen, and self-suppression had made them keener. And the fact could not escape him that Else had become mistress of his secret. And, from that hour, there were no bounds to the reverent tenderness for her which his gratitude for her angelic conduct inspired in him. When we see them again the parts of husband and wife seem strangely inverted with them. It is Else, now, who is the prop, the support, the one fixed standing-ground

and best motive-power of his life. She is the one counselor in his perplexities and difficulties, and at once the best of wives and the most faithful of friends. And in her love, which has suffered neither alteration nor diminution in spite of all its trials, he sees that restoration of himself to self-respect, without which, being what he is, he could probably not have lived on at all. And all that he could do, to return devotion so singular, so exemplary, he faithfully did. Never was wife so cherished and exalted. Never was husband so careful to remove every stone of stumbling from the foot of wife. In his anxious care of her, it was as though her very mother lived again. In his anxious love for her, it was as though they were always now in the very honeymoon of a wedded love, so great that no third soul could ever have disturbed it for a moment. And in this atmosphere of love, tenderness, watchfulness, her children grew up about her blooming like plants for whom all the elements of air and earth conspire in kindliness. And Werner was blessed with the feeling that all this delightful prosperity of wife and children and home was, in no small part, his own work.

And he had other sources of satisfaction besides this domestic happiness. At Krugenberg, his wife's property, he was simply worshiped; and well he might be. For there was no human being in that neighborhood so lowly in estate as not to experience the benefit of all his kindest effort to alleviate its troubles and improve its

fortunes. In his desire to escape from the pressure of introspection—a thing which was so indispensable, if his great crisis of anguish and repentance was to be overcome without death or madness—he found no medicine so healing as the steady practice of beneficence to his fellow-creatures. And he found increasing opportunity for such practice as time went on, enlarging, as it did, the sphere in which his work had to be done and his influence was felt. And thus, by work and sympathy for others, he kept at bay the enemy in his own bosom, until its powers of destruction were spent.

The speculative side of him never came into a state of equilibrium and satisfaction. No more than any other man ever has been, was he capable of solving the problem of existence, its final end and aim, by his individual, speculative efforts. But he was happier than others of his generation in this, that, finding himself unable to reach any solution of that problem, he gave up trying to do so altogether. And, finally, he settled down into a conclusion which was enough for him.

It was simply this: That, whether we are creatures of Eternity or not; whether our lives are bounded by one time and a grave, or are for all time and a Heaven; that life is so filled with griefs, troubles, anxieties, distresses, that any one who keeps his hands in his pockets and does not his best and uttermost to help his kind—is simply a scoundrel.

In the education of his children he is careful to inculcate the principles of old-fashioned morality. Bitter experience has taught him that there can be no trifling with these; and that if human lives ever do really have any true peace and satisfaction, these are found in the things that they renounce rather than in those whereof they permit themselves fruition.

The political career, which he had at an earlier date aimed at without success, came to him not long since in a summary way. The electors of his district, convinced of his worth, pressed upon him its representation in the German Parliament, and would take no denial. And they are very disposed to think that they have found in him the coming man for whom their Fatherland is looking.

At the date when we are about to take our leave of him, he is, then, a member of the Parliament of the Empire; a very grave man, with hair too gray for his years, and eyes from which the light of youth has departed, leaving them full of watchfulness and attention to the outer world, eyes which seem almost to listen as well as to see; as it should be with the eyes of a public man in this day of wordy warfare. When he first took his seat in the House, it was far from his thoughts or purpose to be more than a silent working member; and, but for the stimulus of a moment of crisis in its debates, he would probably have been content, like many another worthy person there, to follow in his leader's footsteps with disciplined

silence, until his parliamentary career came to a close. But an occasion came when the discussion in the House—albeit on serious matter—seemed to languish, as though no one had a prompt and useful word at command. And Werner—in the same spirit as would have led him to put out his hand to give a helping shove to a cart sticking in the mud—felt some words coming so irresistibly to his lips that he rose and made, then and there, without premeditation or preparation, his maiden speech. It was very simple in style, very lucid, and very impressive, and of a significance and distinction he himself did not suspect. For he was greatly astonished when all the members of his party crowded round him with their congratulations when he had done.

And from that moment he stepped into the class of the marked men whom not his party alone, but his country, too, expect to go far.

His old mother, who, in spite of her years, is still as lively and bustling as ever, finds no difficulty now in spending as many weeks or months in her son's house as Else wishes. And the best of all his triumphs has been that his mother, one day, her eyes wet with tears, drew his head down to her bosom and whispered to him:

"You have had much to repair, Werner; but you are my own boy, my own brave boy, after all!"

Else is very proud of him. She is happy—so

happy that her happiness seems to radiate from her like heat and light.

And he? He has a wife whom he worships, loves with all his heart. He has delightful children, who look up to him as a being almost more than human. He has occupation than which none could interest him more; occupation in which, without any overvaluing of himself, he may expect not only promotion, but much opportunity of serving his fellow-men. He has the esteem and sympathy of all who know him.

And yet—

Over the stone which covers Lena's grave, in the lovely churchyard in Rome where the Protestants sleep, the moss grows thick. The strangers who come there find it difficult to decipher the name of the tenant of that grave.

The world has forgotten that name. It never now crosses the lips even of those who loved her best in life.

* * * * * * *

But does *he* forget? He, whose weaknesses and defects lie buried in that all but nameless and unmentioned grave. Does he forget the woman who did in truth redeem him from his lower and weaker self, though, alas! in a way so different from that which had been her purpose? Does he forget? Can he forget?

Let the question remain unanswered. Only; one thing let us bear in mind. If this life of ours—passed as it has to be between two im-

penetrable abysses, one the past, the future another—is endurable to us at all, it is, not because of the joys it gives, but because of the capacity we are endowed with of forgetting what it takes away. Most justly, indeed, did a great soldier —great as warrior and thinker—say, not very long ago:

"It is Memory and what Memory stores that enriches and beautifies our lives; but those lives would not be possible at all were we not gifted with the power—to Forget."

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