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CHAPTER I.
SHADOWS OF COMING EVENTS

In a box of the Berlin Opera-House sat three young officers. All wore the uniform of the same regiment of the Guards, and all three were directing their opera-glasses towards the same opposite box.

"The girl has just got home from boarding-school, and will have a *dot* of half a million in cash," observed Lieutenant von Hohenstein, dropping his opera-glass.

"The deuce she will! No end of pity that I am such an infernal aristocrat, – it would be such a fine morsel for a poor younger son," said the younger of the Von Eichhof brothers, with a laugh, as he stroked his blonde moustache. "She has a good figure, too, and any amount of fire in her eyes."

"True," said his elder brother; "but why under heaven does the portly mamma, with her double chin, and huge satin-clad bust, plant herself so close to her Rose of Sharon, proclaiming to all the world, 'As she is now so was I once, and as I am now so shall she one day be'?"

"Take warning, Hohenstein," laughed Lothar Eichhof.

"Pshaw! there's no danger," the other replied, leaning back in his comfortable chair and stretching his long legs as far out as the limits of the box would allow.

"Councillor Kohnheim greeted you with extreme affability, I thought, just now, and you are well informed as to the financial affairs of the family," Lothar persisted, in a teasing tone.

Hohenstein put up his hand to conceal a yawn. Among his peculiarities was that of being bored everywhere and always.

"Kohnheim thinks wealth no disgrace, and loves to acquaint people with the amount of his own," he said. "Besides, he is my landlord; of course we are acquainted. To my German eyes, however, the ladies are of too Oriental a type. I have no desire to know them."

"Thank heaven! then there is nothing to fear from that quarter. I confess it vexes me when one of our good old names is allied to such a family."

"Make your mind easy on my account," rejoined Herr von Hohenstein. "I do not undervalue wealth, but I prize blood rather more."

Lothar Eichhof meanwhile was scanning the house, while his elder brother, Bernhard, had withdrawn into the shadow, and was steadily scrutinizing through his glass the foreign ambassadors' box. He now dropped his glass, shook his head, then put up his glass again, and finally said, more to himself than to his companions, "That is-Marzell Wronsky-and- He bit his lip, and

did not finish the sentence.

"Marzell Wronsky?" Lothar repeated. "Where?" But as he spoke he discovered him. "I did not know he had come back!" he exclaimed. "I wonder if the handsome blonde beside him is his wife?"

"Probably," said Hohenstein. "Where does the lady come from? Marzell's marriage was so sudden that one hardly knows anything about it."

"She is a kind of cousin of his," said Lothar, "with a Polish name, ending in 'ky' or 'ka,' and was formerly married to a Hungarian, who either died or was divorced from her. Marzell met her last year at Wiesbaden, and shortly afterwards they were betrothed and married."

"And where has he been hiding since?"

"He has been travelling with his bride. I must go over and see them in the next entr'acte. You will come, too?"

"Of course; this new addition to society must be inspected."

Bernhard Eichhof had taken no part in the conversation, but had frequently glanced towards the box where the persons under discussion were sitting. When, at the close of the act, the other two men arose, with the evident intention of visiting its occupants, he sat still, in apparent indecision.

"Well, are you not coming?" asked Lothar "Marzell is more your friend than ours. I confess I am going more from curiosity than from friendship."

Bernhard looked over at the box once more. "They are just

rising; perhaps they are going to leave the house," he said, hesitating.

"Yes, they seem to be going," said Hohenstein, resuming his seat.

"Well, then, I will go and reconnoitre," said Lothar, "and if you see me in the box you two can come over."

In five minutes he returned. "The Wronskys are really gone. Marzell seems to have adopted high and mighty manners since his marriage. He puts in an appearance only during a single act. However, we shall certainly see his wife at Eichhof, if we should fail to meet her here."

"Quite time enough for the acquaintance. I have scarcely seen Marzell since the old school-boy days, and am not at all intimate with him now," Bernhard remarked.

If his two companions had been less occupied with the new prima-donna, and with the champagne supper at a noted restaurant after the opera was over, they must have noticed that Bernhard was unusually absent-minded and monosyllabic all through the evening. But his mood was entirely unnoticed by them, – all the more since several brother officers joined their party, which did not break up until long past midnight.

When at last the young men separated, the two brothers Von Eichhof walked together to their apartments, at present beneath the same roof, and for a while not a word was exchanged between them.

Then the younger asked, suddenly, "Shall I tell you the news,

Bernhard? I'm at the end of my income, – the last thaler went to-night."

Bernhard turned with some impatience. "Lothar," he exclaimed, reproachfully, "this is really too much! When I helped you out last month you promised me-"

"Come, come, my dear fellow, there's no use in that," Lothar interrupted him. "I know as well as you do that I partake largely of the character of the domestic fly, provided, indeed, that that insect is endowed with a character. I frisk in the sunshine and buzz or grumble in the shade."

"I cannot understand your jesting in such a matter, Lothar."

"But what am I to do, then?" the other rejoined. "Whether I indulge in poor jokes or sit in sackcloth and ashes, the confounded fact remains the same. 'All I have is gone, gone, gone,'" he hummed, *sotto voce*; but suddenly he grew grave and sighed. "Shall I go to-morrow to Herr Solomon Landsberger, who has often and with great kindness offered to give me his valuable assistance?" he asked.

They walked a few steps farther in silence, and then Bernhard said, "I can't understand what becomes of your money. You have apartments just like mine and live very much the same life that I do."

"With the exception of the extra bills, which I dare not send to Eichhof."

Bernhard made an impatient gesture, but Lothar went on: "I know what you mean. You mean that I ought to think of

the future, when our positions will be so different. I ought to consider that what is all right for the future possessor of Eichhof is supreme folly for a petty lieutenant. All true and just; but why the deuce, then, did our father put me in the same regiment with yourself? and why does every one expect exactly the same from the poor lieutenant as from the eldest son and heir? and why are people so infernally stupid as not to take into account the immense difference between us?"

"It was certainly unfortunate," said Bernhard, "that you joined just this regiment; no doubt you are led here into many expenses that can hardly be avoided; but still-"

"Well, then, I'd better go to friend Solomon to-morrow, and try my luck with him," Lothar interrupted him.

Bernhard stamped his foot impatiently.

"Don't talk nonsense!" he exclaimed. "Of course I shall help you out, since, as you justly remark, I may send in extra accounts when I please; but pray listen to reason, Lothar. You know that we shall shortly cease to live here together. When I marry I can no longer place my means at your disposal as at present."

"Ah, when Thea is your wife, I shall quarter myself upon you so soon as my money is gone. It usually lasts until the twentieth of the month, and then I shall ensconce myself in your happy home. But I have not thanked you yet. Indeed, old fellow, you are a brick of a brother. Then I need not pay my respects to friend Solomon to-morrow?"

Meanwhile they had reached their lodgings, and, as Bernhard

was putting his key in the lock, he said, "I will help you through this time, Lothar, but remember it is the last. You must learn prudence, and it is in direct opposition to my principles to encourage this perpetual getting into debt. I did not, as you know, make the laws controlling inheritance, and I cannot alter the fact that our circumstances will be very different in the future. But I say now only just what I should say were you in my place and I in yours. Every man must cut his coat according to his cloth."

"And if one is a six-footer and has only a scrap of cloth, he is in a desperate case," thought Lothar; but he kept his thought to himself, and softly whistled an opera air as he entered their apartments with his brother.

"It's no end of a pity that we must leave our charming quarters so soon," he sighed, as he threw himself upon a lounge in their joint drawing-room, which was certainly most luxuriously fitted up for a bachelor establishment, while Bernhard opened and read, with a smile, a letter lying upon his table.

Lothar watched him for a moment, then folded his arms and raised his eyes to the ceiling, with an expression half resignation and half disdain, while his thoughts ran somewhat thus: "Of course that is a letter from Thea. What under the sun can that little country girl have to say to him? A deuced pretty girl, and she'll make a capital wife. It's very odd that I'm not angry with her, for there's not another creature in the world so confoundedly in my way. If it were not for her, we should keep our comfortable lodgings, and Bernhard, who is certainly a trump, would go on

paying my bills; and, besides, he has grown so infernally serious since he has had that little witch's betrothal-ring on his finger; before then we lived a jolly life enough. It is all Thea's fault, – his immense gravity, his ceasing to pay my debts, and our having to give up our delightful rooms. It is, therefore, Thea who prevents my enjoying my youth, as I should do otherwise, and yet, in spite of all this, I am rather fond of her. But it is not my nature to bear malice towards any woman, even although she be such an unformed little country girl as Thea, who certainly might have been content to wait a few years longer."

"Bernhard," he suddenly said aloud, "I will withdraw to my inmost apartment, and leave you to your letter and to dreams of future petticoat rule."

Bernhard put his letter in his pocket. "I have finished," he said, "and am going to bed. Thea sends her love to you."

"Of course," yawned Lothar; "thanks. We'll talk about the other matter to-morrow?"

"Yes. Good-night, Lothar."

"Good-night, old fellow."

CHAPTER II.
TWO DISCONTENTED FATHERS

A forest bridle-path. The ground is covered with gnarled, twisted roots, and the way is bordered with dark pines, and firs somewhat lighter in tone, between which only a narrow strip of spring sky shines down upon the two riders pursuing the dim pathway. Their horses, slowly walking abreast, seem by no means content to saunter thus; the chestnut upon which the man is mounted champs its bit impatiently, and the gray by its side pricks its ears, but the girl upon the back of the latter is as interested as her companion in the conversation going on between them, and neither pays any heed to the signs of their steeds' impatience, while the groom riding at some distance behind them is enjoying a huge sandwich that he has produced from his pocket, in full security from observation.

"It is too vexatious to know nothing about it all!" the girl exclaimed. "I am almost ashamed never to have been in Berlin."

"But, good heavens, you are so young, Adela!" her companion rejoined.

"If we are to continue friends, Walter, you will not begin again about my fifteen years, of which there can be no further mention after next month, when I shall be sixteen," was the irritated reply. "I am in reality much, much older, as you know, and I know that

I look older. Only the other day Lieutenant Müllheim took me for eighteen; and if papa would only allow me to dress suitably, and if it were not for that stupid Almanach de Gotha that tells everybody our ages-!" She sighed pathetically.

Walter laughed. "That sigh would sound more natural from the lips of a lady past her prime than from those of a budding girl in her teens," he said; adding instantly, with a meaning glance at his companion, "You must not look so angry with me, Adela dear. If you refuse to allow me more license in speaking than you accord to the rest of the world, I shall address you as Fräulein von Hohenstein and think all our good-comradeship at an end. Must I do so? In fact, you certainly are too much of a great lady to be my 'good comrade' any longer." He spoke without irony, and there was a mournful earnestness in his fine eyes.

She gave her horse a light cut with her whip, that his sudden start might give her the chance to conceal the bright blush that overspread her face. Then she looked up, half pouting, half in entreaty, and said, "If you want to tease me, Walter, I can't see why you came for me to ride; you might as well have stayed at home."

Walter smiled, and saluted with his riding-whip. "Well, then, let us be good comrades for the future, as neighbors' children ought to be," he cried.

Her reply was a merry glance from her blue eyes.

They had reached the borders of the forest, and before them a well-kept road, bordered by fine old trees, led directly up to an

imposing pile of buildings.

"Let us have one more canter," said Adela; and away flew the two horses so suddenly that the groom behind them was, in his surprise, nearly choked by his last mouthful of sandwich, and followed his mistress coughing and gasping all the way up the avenue to the court-yard, where the two riders drew rein.

"It has really grown so late that I cannot come in with you," said Walter. "I must hurry home; you know we are terribly punctual about our meals at Eichhof."

"Well, then, good-by; for only a short time, I hope," said Adela, giving her comrade her hand, and then vanishing with the groom behind the court-yard gate, while Walter took the road to Eichhof.

He was the third and youngest son of the Baron or Freiherr von Eichhof. A few days previously he had passed a brilliant preparatory examination in Berlin, and was now spending a few weeks at Eichhof before leaving home for some university.

As he rode on he looked so grave and thoughtful that one would hardly have suspected in him the budding student for whom, so thinks the world, everything must be *couleur de rose*. And yet it was the thought of this very student-time that occupied Walter now day and night. He knew that his father had destined him for the study of law, whilst his own wishes led him in a contrary direction. He knew further that his wishes would meet with obstinate opposition, and he had therefore avoided hitherto all explanations with his father. This state of things he felt could

not possibly continue longer, and he was pondering, as he rode on thus thoughtfully, how he should clearly explain his views.

Whilst Walter was preparing for a conversation with his father that would in all probability be far from agreeable, Adela was in the midst of an interview of a like nature.

The Baron von Hohenstein was in fact standing at the hall door as his young daughter reached it. He was just inspecting some young horses of his own breeding, from which he wished to select one for the use of his son in the capital. A magnificent gelding that had been judged by him quite worthy to support his son's soldierly form, and to maintain the reputation of his stud, had just been discovered to be lame. The Freiherr turned angrily from the horse to his daughter.

"You have been gone very long, Adela," he called to her. "And it's great nonsense your riding half the day with Walter Eichhof; you're too old for such pranks."

Adela curled her lip rebelliously as she dismounted, and without a word took her father's arm and drew him with her into the house.

"Papa," she said, "you are always saying, 'You are not old enough for this, you are too young for that,' and so on. What is the matter with me, then, that I am always too old or too young?"

But the Freiherr was not disposed to jest to-day.

"Nonsense!" he growled. "I may not think you old enough to wear a train, but you look sufficiently like a young lady to make people stare when they see you always with that school-boy."

"I beg pardon, papa, Walter has passed his examination."

"What is that to me? The long and the short of it is, that I won't have you riding with him."

"But, papa, Thea Rosen rode with Bernhard Eichhof when he was a lieutenant and she was only sixteen."

"That's an entirely different affair. Theresa Rosen was afterwards betrothed to Bernhard Eichhof, and has done very well for herself. But when such rides end in no betrothal they are a great folly; and if a fledgling scarcely out of the nest should have any entanglement with a young fellow who has neither money nor prospects, it would be a greater folly still; and I am not the man to allow my daughter to make such a fool of herself."

Adela had grown pale, and she looked at her father in a kind of terror as she left his side and slipped out of the room. What was all this? Betrothal? Such a thing had never entered her head. And to Walter? It was all perfect nonsense. Walter was her good comrade. What could put such ideas into her papa's head? And must she give up the rides which had been such a pleasure to her? No; it was simply impossible. She would tell Thea and Alma Rosen about it. What would they say? And Walter? Should she tell Walter too? She blushed, and discovered that it would not be easy to tell Walter. And he really had grown very tall and handsome since his last vacation. She must watch him, and see if he had any idea of falling in love with her. How hard it was to have no mother to turn to at such a time! Mademoiselle Belmont, her governess, was not at all a person to invite confidence. Adela

fell into a revery, and then looked into her mirror.

"I wonder whether Walter noticed that I dress my hair differently?" she thought; "and does he think it becoming? I can ask him that, at all events, when I see him next."

Meanwhile poor Walter was thinking of anything rather than of the fashion of Adela's hair.

The Countess Eichhof, his mother, had withdrawn to her room after dinner, and Walter was sitting on the castle terrace with his father, or, more correctly speaking, was walking restlessly to and fro, while his father, leaning hack in a comfortable arm-chair, was smoking a cigarette. Count Eichhof, in spite of his years and silvery hair, was a tall, handsome man, with sparkling eyes and ruddy complexion. The early bleaching of his locks was a family inheritance, and became excellently well the present representative of the Eichhof estate and title.

In his youth the Count had been an officer in the Guards, in the same regiment where were his two elder sons at present, and where he had so enjoyed life as to become convinced that it was altogether a capital invention, and might still be very entertaining even with three grown-up sons about him. He was now watching with a kind of curiosity the manner in which these same sons would turn it to account.

The eldest had betrothed himself quite young.

"He is a susceptible fellow, – he gets his temperament from me," the Count said, with a laugh.

The second, Lothar, was forever at odds with his income,

which never sufficed for his expenses.

"He is sowing his wild oats with a free hand, – a regular spendthrift, – but he gets that from me. I was just like him," the Count said, and laughed again.

And now it was Walter's turn.

In conformity to the wishes of his mother, whose family were all diplomatists and courtiers, he was not destined to enter the army, but was to pursue a juridical career. The Countess already saw in him a future ambassador or minister; the Count regarded him with a curious mixture of compassion and resignation.

"Our youngest child really should have been a daughter," he was wont to say. "Since that's impossible, they are going to make a quill-driver of him. Well, well, there's no help for it. I must make some concessions, and I had my own way with the two elder boys."

Thus, instead of entering a military school, Walter had been placed under the care of a distant relative of the Count, residing in Berlin, where he enjoyed the advantages of the principal preparatory school in the capital, to the surprise of his father's 'good friends and neighbors,' who thought that a first-class provincial establishment would have served the boy's turn quite as well, and even better.

"It is a good thing for Walter to become familiar with the capital, and to feel at home there while he is young," the Countess observed, without explaining, or indeed understanding herself, in what this 'good thing' consisted.

"Let him go to Berlin," thought the Count; "he'll have a chance there to see his brothers and his cousins in the Guards more often than elsewhere; and the deuce is in it if, after passing his examinations, the boy does not 'boot and saddle' and be a soldier. I know I should have done so in his place."

And now the 'boy' had reached this point of his career, and had already been one week at home without uttering a word upon the subject.

"There's not much of me in him," the Count thought, smoking his cigarette, as he watched his youngest son pace the terrace to and fro, – "not much of me; but he's a handsome fellow for all."

"'Tis a pity; your figure would suit a hussar's uniform much better than that dress-coat," he said aloud, involuntarily. "Walter stood still, and observed, smiling, that he could easily serve his year in the hussars.

"Are you really determined then to stick to the quill?" his father asked, incredulously. "You mean to go to the university?"

"Most certainly, father," Walter replied, seating himself beside the Count. "And, since we are upon the subject, let me tell you that I have long desired to discuss my future career with you."

"Aha! you want to change the programme?"

"Yes, father, it is my sincere desire to do so; but-"

"Now, that you get from me, Walter," the Count interrupted his son, with a laugh. "I should have done just so; there's no ignoring this soldier-blood of ours."

Walter leaned forward and fixed his eyes upon the marble pavement of the terrace. "I did not mean that, sir," he said, in a low tone.

The Count looked at him in surprise.

"You don't mean that?" he repeated. "What the deuce do you mean, then?"

"I wish to continue my studies, but I have not the slightest predilection for the law," the young man began again.

The Count looked at his son as though he were speaking some unknown tongue.

"What is there for one of your name save the law or the army?" he asked, his expression, which had hitherto been one of amusement, suddenly becoming very serious. "You must be aware that those are the only careers open to a nobleman."

"Both cost too much money and insure no independence. As a lieutenant of the Guards, or as an ambassadorial attaché, my expenses would be very great."

"The like of this I never before imagined!" the Count exclaimed, with a resounding slap upon his knee. "The fellow is my son, nineteen years old; and is thinking of the amount of his expenses. What the deuce put that into your head?"

"I know that our property lies chiefly in real estate, and that Lothar uses a great deal of money," Walter replied, shyly.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the Count. "You are a most extraordinary specimen of an Eichhof. I can't tell where you got that economic vein; but since there it is, let me tell you something, my boy.

The net income of the Eichhof estates amounts to some hundred and fifty thousand marks. I have so improved and repaired everywhere that nothing more is required in that quarter; and we are not going to Berlin any more, it is too much for your mother's nerves. Well, then, we can easily live, and live well, upon sixty thousand marks a year. Therefore, if you use only sixty thousand marks yearly for the next five years, we shall have laid up a capital of four hundred and fifty thousand marks, without reckoning the interest. Add to that about a hundred thousand marks of income derived from other sources, and-you need not tell Lothar, for he spends quite enough, – but you can easily see that you will be very comfortable one of these days. We enjoyed our youth. Age exacts less of life; it will not be hard for us to retrench our expenses somewhat. And since there never was an Eichhof who died before he was at least fifty-five, – most of them live to be seventy or eighty, – there is quite time enough to save money. Poor fellow! your prudence is quite thrown away."

The Count was always rather inclined to pity his youngest son, and he did so now from the bottom of his heart, as he twisted himself a fresh cigarette.

But Walter did not yet seem quite satisfied.

"You are very kind to your children, sir," he began once more, after a pause; "but it was not only pecuniary considerations that influenced my desire to change my studies. There is a profession which I should embrace with enthusiasm, yes, which would even be more attractive to me, could I cease to see in it a means of

income. There is a study that interests me far more than that of law, – a science to which I should gladly devote any talent that I may possess."

"Well, well, if we must discuss the matter, at least speak intelligibly, Walter," the Count exclaimed, impatiently. "What's all this about profession and science?"

"Father," Walter said, taking his hand and looking full into his face with sparkling eyes and flushed cheeks, "I want to be a naturalist and a physician."

If some one had informed the Count that Castle Eichhof was to be immediately converted into a lunatic asylum, he could not have looked more amazed and indignant than now upon hearing his son declare that he wished to be a physician.

"Physician?" he repeated. "Physician!"

He rose from his arm-chair and stood proudly erect. "You are insane, Walter!" he said, angrily. But with the anger there was evidently mingled a large share of that compassion upon which Walter seemed now to have established a special claim.

Walter, too, had risen, and looked frankly and honestly at his father. "It is the only calling for which I shall ever really care," he said, warmly, "and I know that I could devote myself to it heart and soul. I entreat you, do not force me into another career for which I am quite unfit. Give your consent to what, believe me, is no passing whim of mine. I have had opportunity to observe this calling in all its aspects. I pondered the matter earnestly before mentioning it to you. I-"

"Enough!" exclaimed the Count, and a dark shadow clouded his usually jovial face. "Enough of this nonsense! You may be in earnest, Walter, but I, – I too am just as much in earnest, and I solemnly declare to you that I never will consent that an Eichhof-a son of mine-should embrace such a senseless career. I will not have it; do you understand? I will not have it; and my will must be your law."

And the Count left the terrace with an echoing tread, while Walter stood still, utterly cast down.

"I knew it," he murmured, "and yet-and yet-"

He threw himself into the arm-chair that his father had left, and leaned his head on his hand.

Nevertheless there must have been in his veins some particle of the soldier-blood of the Eichhofs, for he had not sat there long lost in thought, when he suddenly sprang up, saying, -

"Well, that was the first attack, and it has been repulsed. Now for besieging the fortress, which may yield at last."

But the Count did not yield. He persisted in his refusal, and the Countess shed tears over Walter's 'inconceivable desire.' She was sure the idea must have been suggested to him by some association unfitting his rank and position, and she was, as we shall see, not far wrong in her surmises.

There followed some very disagreeable days at Castle Eichhof, and the result was that Walter, with a heavy heart, resolved to conform to his parents' wishes, and at least to attempt the study of law. He could not see how to act otherwise at present.

He must, he thought, furnish this proof of his willingness to obey, but in secret he did not relinquish the hope of one day carrying out his own plans. The Count was seriously out of sorts for a few days, but upon Walter's submission his brow cleared again, and his thoughts turned from this annoying intermezzo to the approaching Easter holidays, when he expected his two other sons at Castle Eichhof, which should once more be, as he expressed it, "the headquarters of youthful fun and frolic."

"The boys must be entertained when they come home," was his watchword. The Countess had the ball-room newly decorated, and made out lists for dinner- and dancing-parties. Walter was a great deal alone in the library writing letters, and took many a lonely ride. He rode once to Rollin to invite Adela Hohenstein to ride with him, but the Baron declared that the physician had forbidden so much horseback exercise, and Adela's manner towards him was so strangely altered that, instead of confiding his grief to her as he had intended to do, he soon rode home again.

"Adela is playing the young lady, I see, – she really coquetted with me to-day," he said to himself; "but I am no longer in the mood to be entertained by her upon the subject of the fashion in which her hair is dressed. If she will no longer be my good comrade, she may let it alone. These young girls are very little good after all."

Still, oddly enough, he thought oftener than usual of Adela that day, and when he was occupied with the most serious plans

for the future her fair curly head would intrude upon his thoughts in a most unnecessary and uncalled-for manner. "She certainly has grown extremely pretty of late, – there is no doubt of that," he thought.

CHAPTER III.
HIDDEN SPRINGS

Thus Easter came 'slowly up this way,' and with the holidays the 'sons' from Berlin came to Eichhof and to Rollin.

No finer sight was to be seen than the handsome Count Eichhof and his wife, whose rather faded face and figure retained the traces of former beauty, surrounded by their three sons, the two elder models of manly strength and grace, while a kind of vague nimbus of future distinction hovered around Walter, for which, as the reader knows, his mother was far more responsible than himself. When her high-handed lord had yielded a reluctant consent that her youngest boy should be moulded according to his mother's desire, her imagination instantly perceived in him the future diplomat, – the one of her children born to act a part in the world's history. He was in her eyes a most remarkable child, and, since he really was a very docile, amiable boy, and in consideration of the fact that one of his uncles was an ambassador and another a lord of the treasury, there were found family friends on all sides ready, whenever Walter was spoken of, to whisper significantly, "A wonderful young fellow! He has a brilliant career before him!"

To complete the charming family picture another figure was now added, in the person of Bernhard's lovely betrothed. She

was the daughter of a Herr von Rosen, whose estates were in the neighbourhood of Eichhof. Bernhard and she had been boy and girl lovers. Bernhard, indeed, knew something of society and of other women, but Therese-or Thea, as she was called-knew absolutely nothing of the outside world. Without her being in the least aware of it, the love of the child had grown into the pure devotion of the maiden. It had seemed the most natural thing in the world to be betrothed to Bernhard, – that he should henceforth be the centre around which every thought and hope of her heart should cling, and that he should typify to her all that she could conceive of beauty and excellence.

And now he was at home on leave. She saw him daily, and in May they were to be married.

"Thea is 'fearfully happy,'" said her younger sister Alma, Adela's bosom friend; and the servants at Eichhof, who were wont to consider their verdict as important in such cases, as well as all the neighbouring gentry, rung the changes upon the same theme.

The neighbours were soon offered a special opportunity for admiring and discussing the 'charming Eichhofs,' since very early in the Easter holidays they were bidden to a grand dinner at the castle. The state apartments were thrown open, and worthy representatives of the noblest of the county families-the Hohensteins, the Rosens, the Lindenstadts, and many others-gladly accepted this first invitation issued after the return home of the soldier sons.

And yet the betrothed pair were not on this occasion the cynosure of every eye, the theme of every tongue, as might have been expected. These guests were all either distantly related to one another or intimate from the association of years. One of them, however, appeared to-day for the first time in this exclusive circle, exciting universal attention and remark. This was the young wife of Marzell Wronsky, who, himself a very German of the Germans, had lately, by marrying a distant Polish cousin, revived in the minds of all the memory of his Polish ancestry.

"What do you think of young Madame Wronsky?" was a question often whispered at this dinner behind a lady's fan or in the recess of some window. The answer would consist either of a shrug of the shoulders and an elevation of the eyebrows, signifying 'not much,' or in the whispered reply, "Very elegant, yes, undeniably elegant, but not at all handsome; scarcely good-looking. Why, she has red hair and green eyes, and then she is so very pale."

But when Madame Wronsky came to be discussed after dinner in the smoking-room over a bowl of punch, – her husband having rejoined the ladies, – the opinions expressed concerning her were rather different.

"A striking creature, the Wronsky," was heard from Lieutenant Hohenstein, – "decided air of race; she would create a *furor* in Berlin."

"A perfect Undine," murmured the Assessor von Schönburg; "coy, cold, and immovable at first, but as soon as she is interested,

all fire and passion, – indescribably attractive."

"Schönburg is off on his old romantic track," laughed Lieutenant von Z. "I rather think your fair Undine is quite capable of giving an eager admirer a bath of very cold water; there is something absolutely freezing in her eye at times, and she has a way of throwing back her head that reminds one of an obstinate horse."

"A profane simile!" the Assessor declared, with a shrug, swallowing his irritation in a glass of punch.

"In what capital taste the Wronsky was dressed!" came from the other side of the table. "Everything about her is so *chic*. She's a great acquisition to the neighbourhood."

"Still, she is not regularly beautiful," said Lothar Eichhof.

Hohenstein looked at him with his eyes half closed, after his listless manner. "You are either in love with her, or she has treated you badly," he said, in a low tone. "I tell you that if the Wronskys go to Berlin next year, as Marzell says they think of doing, that woman will create a perfect *furor*. Remember this."

Meanwhile, the object of this discussion was leaning back negligently in one of the low arm-chairs in the drawing-room, adding a word now and then in broken German to the general conversation, while, with eyes cast down as though finding nothing worthy of their special notice, she toyed with a costly lace fan. Her dark arched eyebrows contrasted strangely with the transparent pallor of her face, and when a slanting sunbeam called forth brilliant sparkles of light from the diamonds in her

hair, certainly, in her light-blue gown trimmed with water-lilies, she justified the Assessor's declaration that she was an Undine.

"How reserved and haughty she looks!" Thea Rosen whispered to her lover, as she was walking through the room upon his arm towards the conservatories.

"I do not think her attractive," he rejoined. "I cannot conceive how Marzell Wronsky could ever fall in love with that woman."

"It is a pity you do not like her."

"You never could be friends with her, my darling."

"Why not?" asked Thea, lifting her lovely eyes to his.

"Why not? I can hardly tell you; it's a matter of sentiment. You are my rosebud, you know, and the Countess Wronsky, if she can be likened to any flower, resembles one of those strange, unnatural orchids."

Thea looked up. Just above her hung one of the fantastic blossoms of which he spoke.

"Well, at all events, an orchid is far more distinguished than a poor little rose, that only needs a little sunlight to blossom and grow, while the grander flower must be petted in a hot-house."

"Do not talk so," said Bernhard, closing her lips with a kiss in the solitude of the conservatory. "I will not have you compared with that woman. What is she to us? You are and always will be my May rose, and I wish May were here, and that we were married. We will have charming apartments in a villa in the Thiergarten, with roses blossoming all over the door, and a wild grape-vine growing about the windows to the very roof. Such a

pretty, comfortable, cosey nest as it shall be, with a boudoir- But no, I'll tell you nothing about that; it shall be a surprise."

While these happy lovers were building their airy castles in one of the conservatories, in another two young people were also carrying on an eager conversation. There was much mention of "rides" and "papa's strange ideas," whereat Fräulein Adela von Hohenstein would frequently blush rosy red, and Herr Walter von Eichhof would put on a very grave and thoughtful expression.

In the mean time, the smokers were growing rather noisy in their talk and laughter, and there was now and then a suppressed yawn in the drawing-room, when suddenly new life was infused into the guests by the lighting of the candles and the throwing open of the ball-room, whence came the strains of the polonaise.

The gentlemen in the drawing-room were immediately largely reinforced, and all led their partners to the brilliant ball-room.

"A delightful surprise this for the young people," said Frau von Rosen, who, on Count Eichhof's arm, led the polonaise.

"We must entertain our children," the Count replied, with a smile; "and since we have enjoyed dancing ourselves, it seems to us the best thing to provide for the young."

"You have been rather sly about this evening, however, my dear Count," the lady continued. "If I had known that our pleasant dinner was to be followed by a small ball, I should have left my little Alma at home. She was, as you know, confirmed but very lately."

The Count laughed. "All the better then that you did not

know it," he replied; "we could ill spare the buds from among our blossoms. Only look at Adela von Hohenstein; the child has prevailed upon her father to let her appear to-night in a train for the first time, and she really looks a finished little lady, who would have probably cried herself to sleep had she been forced to stay at home to-night, although she is just Fräulein Alma's age."

"Adela is too precocious; but then the poor child has no mother, and has been forced to judge for herself and to depend upon her own intuitions now for so many years."

"And if she should be betrothed at eighteen, like our Thea, it is well that she should begin to enjoy herself now. I like to see these very young girls about us. Oho! *changement de dames*," he suddenly called out as he made a turn, resigned Frau von Rosen to another gentleman, and took for his partner Frau von Wronsky, who blushed a little at this distinction, then smiled, and really looked very charming.

The Count made a sign to the musicians, and the dignified polonaise was converted into a rapid waltz.

"*Au galop*," he called gayly, and away he flew with his partner, followed by all the younger dancers, while their elders smilingly retired from among them. The Freiherr von Hohenstein alone, who never would be outdone in anything by his neighbour Eichhof, joined in the galop, while his son, with Lothar Eichhof, to both of whom elderly partners had been assigned, after having led these to their seats, stood together and clapped applause of their several fathers whirling like the wind from one end to the

other of the ball-room.

"Your governor dances famously," Hohenstein said to Lothar, who assented, -

"Yes, he is as light on his feet as any one of us. The Wronsky dances well."

"Just wait, my son, and you'll see what you will see. Then think of me!"

With these oracular words Lieutenant Hohenstein retreated privately to the smoking-room, for he was, as he expressed it, long past the age for the passion for dancing, and found his El-Dorado in the smoking-room, where card-tables were now laid ready for him and such as he.

The ball-room windows at Eichhof gleamed brilliantly until long after midnight, and the cocks were already beginning their morning concert, when the sisters Thea and Alma Rosen, leaning back among the cushions of their carriage, began to dream of the vanished delights of the evening.

Immediately after their departure, Herr von Wronsky's carriage drew up before the castle terrace. Frau von Wronsky appeared with her husband at the hall door, where Bernhard, who had just taken leave of his betrothed, was still standing.

The lights on the castle wall shone upon the equipage and the horses. Wronsky detected something wrong in the harness of the latter; and as he descended the steps to direct the groom to repair the error, his wife was left for a few moments alone in the vestibule with Bernhard. Their eyes met, and in hers there was

a hasty, mute inquiry. Bernhard stepped close to her side. He looked very grave, and there was a gloomy fire in his glance, as he gazed steadfastly into her face, and said in a low tone, and yet so as to be distinctly heard by her, "You may rely upon my silence, but I impose certain conditions. Confine your intercourse with us within as narrow bounds as is possible without exciting remark, and never, never attempt to make friends with my future wife!"

The young wife's cheek first flushed crimson and then grew deadly pale, while the eyes, which were for one moment opened wide and riveted upon Bernhard's face, seemed fairly to flash fire. Then the eyelids drooped over them, and the same cold, proud countenance that had been shown all the evening in the ball-room looked out from among the snowy folds of her white wrap.

"Good-night, Herr von Eichhof," she said, calmly, putting her hand upon her husband's arm as he returned to her, and, passing the young man with the air of a queen dismissing a subject, she descended the steps and entered her carriage.

Bernhard followed the vehicle with his eyes as it rolled away. "Did she really suppose until this moment that I had not recognized her?" he thought. "She certainly betrayed herself by no look or gesture. Poor Wronsky, how could he-"

His thoughts were interrupted by other guests, who at that moment thronged into the hall. There was the usual bustle of departure, calling of carriages, searching for wraps, etc., and as the son of the house he was obliged to make himself as useful

as possible.

At last every guest had left Castle Eichhof, the lights were extinguished, and its inmates were wrapped in the slumber which was to refresh them after past enjoyments. But Bernhard's dreams were not of his lovely betrothed, but of the brilliant eyes of Frau von Wronsky, and, instead of the cold 'good-night' she had given him, he heard her say, "I hate you, and I will work your ruin!"

CHAPTER IV.
GOSSIP

Bernhard and Lothar returned to Berlin as soon as the holidays were over, and Hohenstein shortly followed them thither.

"I am glad he has gone," said Adela, one afternoon that she was spending with her friend Alma Rosen. "I am glad not to have him here any longer, for he grows more and more tiresome, and it spoils my enjoyment of everything to see him lounging about and yawning all the time."

"You ought not to say that so openly, dear child," said Frau von Rosen, who happened to be in the room, and who thought it her duty to admonish the motherless girl now and then. "It is sad enough when brothers and sisters do not agree perfectly, but there is no need to publish such lack of harmony to the world."

"But indeed I do not care. I am perfectly willing that everybody should know it," said Adela. "It is the truth, and I detest hypocrisy."

"No one requires hypocrisy from you, my dear," Frau von Rosen replied; "but there is a very wide difference between hypocrisy and a discreet reserve. Besides, there are, I think, certain sensations and opinions that are undesirably strengthened by being put into words."

"Ah, yes, dear Frau von Rosen, it is easy for you to speak so;

you know nothing of such trials," Adela rejoined. "If you had any sons, Thea and Alma would have their own opinion too of fraternal amenities."

"Ah, Adela, I have always so longed for a brother!" Alma exclaimed. "When I see Lothar Eichhof he always seems like half a brother; and how delightful it must be to have a real one!"

"That is because you know nothing about it," said Adela, with a wise shake of her curls. "I will tell you how my brother Hugo conducts himself. Let me speak just this once," she went on, turning to Frau von Rosen; "it is such a relief to speak it all out, and you know I would not mention it anywhere else. Well, when he comes home he first goes directly to the stables, and in fact it is there only that he ever shows a pleasant face. Then he comes into the house, drops into an arm-chair in the drawing-room, and looks about him with a sneering expression which he knows I detest. If I chance to be alone with him, he says, languidly, 'Frightful taste, the furniture of this room! I really cannot understand why my father does not have this old-fashioned stuff replaced by something decent. If he will commission me to attend to it I will see that you have something here really *chic*.' If my patience gives way and I remind him that the furniture was all of our mother's selection, and that papa would never think of altering a single article, he sneers again, – that same odious sneer, – and either whistles some popular air or remarks, 'Of course not. I, however, never would live in such a beastly hole. In fact, Rollin is an infernally tiresome old nest, only

fit for breeding horses, or some such colt as you are!' meaning me. Is that not enough to vex one? And papa is so kind and good to him, granting all he asks, and getting nothing from him in return but disappointment and grief."

"But, Adela, your father has great satisfaction in him nevertheless," Frau von Rosen observed. "He is an excellent officer, and very popular with his comrades, as I know from Bernhard."

But Adela would hear nothing of that. "Ah, that indeed!" she exclaimed, irritably. "You would hear very little more of his popularity if papa did not give him so much money. Walter says he gambles, and that his comrades win his money."

"Walter Eichhof says that?" Thea exclaimed. "And how came you, Adela, to discuss such matters with Walter?"

Adela blushed slightly, and replied that she had happened to speak of Hugo to Walter because he had been in Berlin and had heard about many things there.

Frau von Rosen looked grave, and shook her head, but Adela, now fairly roused, went on unheeding: "I know myself that papa has often to send him a great deal of money, and is always in a very bad humour for days afterwards, and very cross to the inspector and the steward and to me. And it is all Hugo's fault. He alone is to blame-"

"Hush, hush, Adela!" said Frau von Rosen. "If you do not choose to suppress your own sentiments with regard to your brother, it is at least your bounden duty to have nothing whatever

to say of circumstances with which you have nothing to do, and which concern your father and brother only. Of such matters I must distinctly forbid you to speak here."

Adela stopped, rather startled, but her flushed, indignant face showed plainly that she thought herself unjustly treated. Frau von Rosen approached her, and gently laid her hand upon her fair curly head.

"Dear child," she said, softly, "have you not confidence in my affection for you?"

Adela was silent, evidently a prey to a conflict of feeling.

"I was your mother's friend," Frau von Rosen continued, gently, "and when I hear you utter such sharp, decided opinions upon matters of which you are, perhaps, incapable of judging, I cannot help fancying what your mother would feel if she heard you. Do you think she would be pleased with you at this moment?"

The tears started from Adela's eyes, and she hastily, almost passionately, pressed Frau von Rosen's hand to her lips.

"Oh, if my mother were only living!" she exclaimed. "Everything at home would be so different!"

Frau von Rosen clasped her in her arms and kissed her. "You have a tender and loving father," she said, softly: "be to him a good daughter in the true sense of the word."

Adela dried her tears, and smiled at the remembrance of her father. "Oh, yes, he is very, very kind," she said. "I know he is, even when he pretends to be angry. I know, too, that he will

always do what I want in the end, if I do not contradict him. He has given me leave to ride with Walter again if I will only tell him when and where we are going, and I always like to do that. And then, too, he has let me wear long dresses at last. Yes, he is the dearest old papa, – but indeed Hugo spoils him!"

Frau von Rosen was rather shocked at the conversation's taking this turn, but when she looked into Adela's honest eyes-now gazing so frankly into her own-she found it impossible to be angry with the child. She thought it best to take no notice of her last words, and only said, "Remember, then, always that it is your first duty to requite your father for all the care and kindness he has lavished upon his children."

"Oh!" cried Adela, "if papa should ever have a fall from his horse, and break his leg or anything, I would nurse him day and night, and never leave his side; but then," she added, rather ruefully, "nothing of that sort ever happens to him."

Frau von Rosen smiled involuntarily. "There is no need, dear, of any extraordinary occasion for testifying affection," she said. "The greatest proof of love lies in overcoming one's self for the gratification of others. Think of this, Adela dear; you are quite old enough and sensible enough to know of yourself everything that I can tell you. Promise me to reflect upon it all. Will you try?"

Adela promised, with a mixture of emotion and of satisfaction with her own good sense.

Thea and Alma, who had withdrawn to the other end of the

room during this conversation, now came forward and begged Adela to go with them into the garden.

Frau von Rosen nodded kindly, and the three girls went off together, at first somewhat embarrassed, but soon talking and laughing together as usual. The Easter holidays were indeed a fruitful theme for conversation, and the name of Eichhof occurred very frequently in their talk.

"Only think," said Alma Rosen, "Lothar told me that Walter wanted to be a doctor!"

Adela burst into a laugh. "Walter a doctor!" she exclaimed. "What a delightful idea of Lothar's! Walter a doctor? It is too comical!"

"Only ask Thea; she knows about it too," said Alma.

And her sister added, "Yes, it is true; Walter did get such an idea into his head, but he has given it up, and there is to be no more said upon the subject."

"Now I know why Walter has been so queer all through these last holidays," said Adela. "It is perfectly odious in him not to tell me a word of it. I will tease him well about it to-morrow if we ride together."

"Do you often ride together now?"

"Oh, yes. That was a perfectly ridiculous idea of papa's; I soon talked him out of it. He had consented to our rides even before we went to the ball at Eichhof. There's one good to be gained from Hugo's being at home, papa is so full of business at such times that he will almost always say 'yes' just to be rid of me.

I take very few lessons now with Mademoiselle Belmont, and the good soul is being gradually transformed from a governess into a companion. I got papa to tell her that she might look upon herself as rather occupying the latter position. The only thing to do is to take papa just when he happens to be in a good humour; but-" She suddenly clapped her hand upon her mouth. "There, I promised your mother that I would not speak of that. I should like to know what kind of girls we should all be if I had a mother and you had a couple of brothers."

"Well, Bernhard soon will be my brother," said Alma.

"Oh, that's very different," rejoined Adela; "made-up brothers like that never do anything to vex you. I know all about that, for I look upon Walter Eichhof as a kind of brother, and-but I forgot," she interrupted herself, hesitating, – "he does vex me sometimes. I'll have my revenge to-morrow at all events, and I wish to-morrow were here."

Twenty-four hours later this wish of Adela's was fulfilled, and Walter and she were slowly riding towards the forest, followed at a discreet distance by the groom with a taste for sandwiches.

"I have been hearing sad tales of you, Walter," Adela began her attack, "and the saddest part of them is that you never, by word or look, confided anything with regard to your evil schemes to your faithful comrade."

"My evil schemes?"

"Yes. Would you not, if you could, torture poor mortals, cut off their arms and legs, and heaven knows what besides that is

horrible and cruel?"

"Since you call that cruel, you certainly must admit that I was perfectly right not to mention to you the profession at which you jeer, but which I consider the noblest that can be embraced."

The gravity with which he spoke made some impression upon Adela. She looked at him almost timidly, and said, shyly, "Were you really in earnest, then, about being a doctor?"

"I have found it very hard to relinquish the idea, – for the present at least. But why should we speak of all this? Rather let us admire the exquisite beauty of the afternoon, and of the woods and trees. Shall we canter?"

Strangely enough, Adela instantly forgot all her vexation and her determination to be revenged upon Walter. She saw that he refused her his confidence, and, instead of being angry that this was so, she became very sad.

"You are very fond of that Doctor Nordstedt of whom you were telling me awhile ago, are you not?" she asked, suddenly reining in her mare after a long canter.

Walter turned and looked her full in the face. "I thought you had forgotten all that," he said. "I certainly thought that my comrade had grown to be altogether too much of a fine lady, too much taken up with dressing and visiting, to feel any interest in what I could tell her."

Adela blushed. Certainly she did very much desire to be a fine lady, but she could not give up her comrade. She replied, "Well, and what now, when you find that in spite of dressing and visiting

I still have time to think of Dr. Nordstedt?"

"Now I tell you that I certainly honour and love him, and that I am proud to consider myself his friend."

"It is his fault, then, that you want to be a doctor?"

"On the contrary, it is he who is always pointing out to me all the difficulties of the profession."

"Good heavens! how did you ever come to make such an acquaintance? Your sight was always good. Certainly you had no need for consulting an oculist-the man is an oculist, is he not?"

"Yes; and I never went near him on account of my eyes. But, as I told you before, he is my aunt's family physician, and it was through her that I became acquainted with him and with his family."

"Oh, yes, – his family! And of whom does this family consist?"

"This family consists of the father, Herr Nordstedt, – a self-made man, sprung from the people, – of his wife, and of their son, my friend. They are charming people; you ought to know them, Adela."

"Do they speak the Berlin *patois* and mix up their parts of speech?" Adela asked, slightly turning up her pretty little nose.

Walter laughed. "What an idea!" he exclaimed. "It is true that Herr Nordstedt has worked hard with his hands to amass the modest competence that he now possesses, but he is too clever a man to have allowed his brain to lie idle in the mean while. His information is extensive and various, and upon every question of the day his opinions are those of the cultured class.

The advantages of education of which he was deprived he has, however, taken good care that his son shall enjoy to the fullest extent. My friend is now entirely independent, pecuniarily, of his father, and takes pride in being so."

"I wish Hugo would take a few lessons of him, then," said Adela; "I think papa has to pay more and more for him every year. But then," she added, hastily, "I really should not like him to be a doctor."

Walter smiled. "And would you dislike to have me one?" he asked.

"Very much," she replied, emphatically.

Walter touched his horse with the spur, and started upon another canter.

"How rude you are!" Adela exclaimed; but she followed him, and in the rapid pace which Walter seemed to enjoy so much on this particular day there was no opportunity for any further serious conversation between them.

CHAPTER V.
MARRIAGE

The larks were soaring high in air above the tender green of the fields, and the blossoming cherry-trees looked like white bridal bouquets in the midst of the sunny landscape, as the villagers of Schönthal, in their gayest holiday dresses, streamed towards their little church.

While the bells rang out their merriest peal, the brilliant marriage-train left the lordly mansion-house and walked down the broad avenue of chestnut-trees, the drooping buds of which had not yet begun to 'spread into the perfect fan.' No equipage of any kind hid either bridal pair or guests from the delighted gaze of the peasants who lined the wayside. Little girls dressed in white, their fair hair braided and tied with white ribbons, scattered violets and May flowers upon the broad carpet stretched, as a protection for satin-slippered feet, from the hall door to the gateway of the neighbouring church, and immediately behind them came the bridal pair.

An admiring "Ah!" from the spectators among whom they had grown up accompanied them as they walked slowly on; and certainly they were a fair sight to look upon. Bernhard, in his brilliant uniform, beaming with pride and happiness, could scarcely turn his eyes from Thea, hanging blushing upon his arm.

Thus they trod beneath their feet the spring flowers scattered in their path on their road-to what? To happiness? Are these flowers of spring to be followed by the roses of summer and the golden fruits of autumn, or is a premature winter with its ice and snow to wither them all too soon? Who can tell? And who would ask such a question? Not Alma and Adela, the two bridesmaids, who follow Bernhard and Thea, conducted by Lothar and Walter Eichhof, and certainly not Count Eichhof, who, as he looks at the three couples with a smile of pride, reflects that flowers must always strew the pathway of the heir of Eichhof, and that there will be enough left to provide handsomely for the two other sons. He certainly seems right to-day at least, for Lothar and Walter look extremely happy. Lothar's debts have just been paid again 'for the last time,' and Walter had returned the previous night from a journey which seemed to have delighted and refreshed him.

The train vanishes beneath the church-portals; the solemn rite is performed, the mystic rings are exchanged, and two mortals plight faith and affection to each other until death shall separate them.

It is all over. The gay procession returns through the chestnut avenue, and the old mansion of Schönthal once more opens its portals to receive the maiden flower that has blossomed beneath its roof, to leave it to-day for another home.

Gradually the solemnity of mood which very naturally possessed every one during the ceremony vanishes.

Congratulations have been showered upon the pair. There have been tender embraces, cordial hand-shakes; the due amount of 'my dear old friends' and 'precious darlings' has been uttered, and the evidences of unusual emotion disappear from all countenances, save those of the bride and her mother, who cannot quite regain their wonted composure. Gay laughter and lively conversation resound from all sides of the table, where justice is done to the wedding breakfast. Speeches are made, toasts proposed, and healths drunk amid much clinking of glasses. The wit of the gentlemen and the smiles of the ladies grow brighter with every toast. There are many new titles of relationship exchanged between the young people of the two allied houses, and blushes and smiles are frequent when Count Eichhof arises, glass in hand, and, repeating the old proverb, -

> "Never a marriage here below
> From which a second did not grow,"

proposes the health of the "next bride and bridegroom." Alma Rosen's hand trembles slightly as it touches Lothar Eichhof's when they clink their glasses; and when later in the day, before he left her, he declared that a kiss was his right in pledge of their new relationship, and calmly availed himself of this right, he had no idea of how fast and loud her heart beat the while.

"She is a perfect child," he said, after they had risen from table, to Hugo Hohenstein, who had taken Frau von Wronsky

to breakfast. "A perfect child, but a pretty little puss, and *faute de mieux*-" And he snapped his fingers, and then paused as his glance lighted upon his new sister-in-law, standing talking with Adela Hohenstein by one of the windows, her girlish figure draped in white satin and shrouded in her lace veil.

"*À propos*, Thea is quite dazzling," he said. "I never should have given her credit for so much dignity and self-possession."

Hohenstein put up his eye-glass, and bestowed a critical glance upon the bride.

"Yes, she has a good figure and rather fine features," he said, with the oracular air of a connoisseur. "Her face is an unwritten page as yet; but time will change all that, even although it may never show such a startling romance as may be read in the Wronsky's eyes."

Lothar was still gazing at his sister-in-law, and only half heard Hohenstein's words.

"Was the lady very entertaining at table?" he asked, rather absently.

"Why, either she is not in a good humour today, or she is playing a part; I cannot make out which," Hohenstein replied. "At all events, she is excessively interesting. Before her marriage there was some very piquant story about her; she has had experiences. I know nothing explicit, but that woman has been through an immense deal, you may be certain."

Thea left the room to put on her travelling-dress, and Bernhard, who until now had been constantly near her, went into

an antechamber, whence he was instantly about to withdraw upon finding it occupied by Frau von Wronsky, who was seated in a negligent attitude on a divan, her head resting on her hand. She called him, however, by name, and involuntarily, although with an air of constraint, he paused on the threshold.

"I should like to speak with you for a moment," she said, in a low, hurried tone. "You ought at least to know that I had resolved not to inflict my presence upon you to-day; that I have done so is owing entirely to your father, who paid us a visit the day before yesterday and was so pertinacious in his request that we should be present to-day that-"

"There is no need of this apology, madame," Bernhard replied, coldly. "It would have excited remark if you had absented yourself without sufficient reason, and it is my especial desire that your conduct towards us should be such as to invite no observation."

The lady's face was agitated for an instant as if by the suppression of a passionate outburst, but she only bent her head, and replied, "You have nothing to fear. However painful the consciousness may be, I know that you are right in not allowing me any intimacy with your wife. Believe me, I feel only too intensely and grievously the gulf that divides us. I know how hardly you judge me, and that you have a right to do so, even although I am more to be pitied than blamed."

"Madame," Bernhard rejoined, approaching her in some confusion, "I pray you let the past rest."

"Ah, I wish it would rest, that I could forget! But even when I succeed in doing so for a moment, as when but now, attracted irresistibly by the grace and loveliness of your wife, I longed to approach her as any other woman might do, my past rises as an avenger, and I bow before the Nemesis; for, hard as it is to endure, I know it is not wholly undeserved."

Her voice, as she uttered these words, was full of such melancholy sweetness, her eyes shone so with unshed tears, and she arose and stood with such touching humility before Bernhard, that he could not help expressing his regret at having recalled to her an unhappy past. She cut his phrases short by a forbidding wave of her hand.

"You were quite right," she said. "Forget all this, and may you be happy, very happy!"

Tone and manner were so full of a heart-felt sincerity that Bernhard was almost moved to offer her his hand. He bethought himself in time, however, and, in obedience to a wave of dismissal, left the room.

"Forget all this," she had said, but he never could forget the look or the tone with which these words were uttered.

Thea returned clad in travelling costume to bid farewell to all. Bernhard hastily changed his dress, and, when the travelling-carriage drove up, led his young wife down the steps of the hall, which were thronged with bridesmaids and their attendant squires. Alma burst into tears as she threw her arms around her sister's neck. Herr and Frau von Rosen called out their adieux in

faltering tones.

The wedding guests waved their kerchiefs from the open windows, and servants and peasants crowded about the carriage for one last look at their "dear young Fräulein." The swallows stretched out their heads from their nest under the eaves, and seemed to twitter "Good-by, good-by," and the hanging wreaths of the wild grapevine in which the veranda was embowered seemed to wave a mute farewell.

"Farewell, farewell!"

The carriage rolled out of the court-yard, and Thea hid her tearful face on Bernhard's shoulder. "Oh, Bernhard," she whispered, "you will always love me dearly, very dearly, will you not?"

He kissed away her tears. "My darling, what a question to ask!" he replied. "You know that you are my sweetest, loveliest May rosebud."

She smiled at him through her tears, and he vowed inwardly that she never should shed a tear caused by word or deed of his.

The road here made a turn, and the mansion of Schönthal, upon the windows of which the last beams of the setting sun were shining, came into view once more.

Thea leaned from the carriage window and looked back. Bernhard, clasping her hand firmly in his own, looked back also. The windows of the balconied room, the same in which he had spoken with Frau von Wronsky scarcely an hour before, gleamed brilliantly.

"Is she there still?" he thought, and he seemed to hear again her low, penetrating tones, "Forget all this," – her pale face and brilliant figure were like a shadow dimming the sunshine of his marriage-day.

CHAPTER VI.
A FAREWELL GLASS AND A DEATH-BED

Far removed from the fashionable quarter of Berlin, in one of those east-end streets where labourers' carts are far more numerous than gay equipages, stood Herr Nordstedt's house. It was quite a stately structure, with two projecting wings, between which extended a little front garden, lending a retired air to the whole, and distinguishing it pleasantly among the old and rather shabby houses of the neighbourhood. The hall door was adorned by rich carvings in wood, – "The old cabinet-maker in me takes great delight in such things," Herr Nordstedt was wont to say, – and yet was so simply fashioned that it must always be regarded as a door, never as a 'portal.' Through this door on a certain evening in May walked Walter Eichhof, who had returned to town shortly after his brother's marriage, and who, before departing to continue his studies in a university town on the Rhine, desired to take leave personally of his friend Dr. Nordstedt. He passed through the hall leading to a small court-yard, and into a garden which was really very large for a city so closely built as Berlin. The wing looking upon this garden contained Dr. Nordstedt's study and his office, where he received all in need of his advice as oculist.

Walter made sure of finding him in his study, and was not disappointed. He was seated at his table, writing busily.

"I have been expecting you, my dear fellow," the doctor exclaimed, springing up and holding out both hands. "As you did not write, I knew you would come. Well, and-?" He looked expectantly at the young man for an instant. "Hm!" he went on, "clouds in the sky, I see. Well, well, I expected them. But come, take a cigar, and tell me all about it."

"There's not much to be told. It was very short work, and what will come next I do not know, – which is what troubles me," replied Walter. "At present I am on my way to Bonn to study law."

The doctor silently nodded.

"There would have been entire estrangement from my parents if I had insisted upon my wishes," Walter continued.

"And I think you are quite right in yielding," said his friend. "You owe it to your parents to make an attempt at least to adopt the career in life that they have chosen for you. There must be difficulties to be encountered everywhere. We cannot escape them, whatever freedom of choice may be granted us."

"If I could only get up some small amount of interest in the law," sighed Walter.

"You know nothing about it yet," the doctor replied, seriously. "Reflect, investigate, contemplate the *corpus juris* in every possible light, and depend upon it you will attain that ideal standpoint which is what you desire, and which will give you

all the interest you lack in the study of equity. The struggle will strengthen your mental muscles."

"At present, however, any old skull or bone interests me more than the most complicated legal process," said Walter.

The doctor leaned back in his arm-chair, and puffed forth clouds of smoke.

"Well, go on," he said, when Walter paused.

The young man looked at him surprised. His friend smiled. "Apparently you come to-day not to discuss this matter, but to bewail it," he said. "For many people this is a positive necessity when they find themselves face to face with irritating circumstances. So go on, my dear fellow, I entreat."

Walter arose and paced the room hastily to and fro. "If I did not know you better I should take my leave of you this instant, convinced that you were the most unsympathetic man in the world," he said; "but I am sure that, in spite of your ridicule, you thoroughly understand what I feel, and only mask with sarcasm your compassion for me."

"And I am sure that, in spite of your groans and plaints, you will apply yourself to your new task like a man of courage," cried the doctor. "There is genuine content and satisfaction to be found in the conscientious performance of duty, however irksome that duty may be. You have excellent powers of mind, and I know you will use them well."

Walter paused in front of his friend, and offered him his hand.

"I will try," he said. "You are right. 'Things without all remedy

should be without regard.' So there's an end of my groaning."

"When do you leave town?" asked the doctor.

"To-morrow, or the day after," was the reply. "There is not much time left before the long vacation, and my father wishes me to spend that in travelling."

"You will like that, at all events."

"Yes, that will be pleasant enough."

"I believe you. At your age it would have been the realization of my most cherished hopes."

"Have you never travelled?"

"I spent a couple of years in Paris."

"Oh, yes, studying your profession; but you would have liked entire freedom, and to wander where the paths were not quite so well worn, if I am not mistaken in you."

The doctor laughed again. "He first bewails his own fate, and now is bewailing mine," he exclaimed. "My dear Eichhof, you are in a deucedly morbid, sentimental mood to-day, and farewells are scarcely propitious to the cure of such maladies. If you are really going away to-morrow, come and say good-by to my father and mother, and afterwards I will walk home with you."

They repaired to Herr Nordstedt's study in the main portion of the house.

"Ah, Herr von Eichhof," said the old man, as Walter entered. "Glad to see you once more before you go to the university. Well, what cheer? Is all right between you and your father? Has the Baron consented?"

His son in a few words made him acquainted with the state of the case.

"Well, well," said the father, running his fingers through his thick hair, only faintly streaked with gray, as was his wont when anything went "against the grain" with him, as he expressed it, – "well, well, it will all come right in the end, and you will reconcile yourself to the law, as I did to carpentering. You see, Herr von Eichhof, I believed I was more of an artist than an artisan, and I was wild to take up the brush instead of the chisel and plane. I longed to study, but that would have cost money. I turned to the plane instead, and, thank God, all came right in the end."

"And you never could have married me, Nikolas," said Frau Nordstedt, who had entered the room meanwhile, "if you had been a learned man. For I have heard my blessed father say a hundred times that like should mate with like, and that a master-carpenter's daughter should marry some one skilled in her father's trade."

"So, you see, my carpentering brought me happiness," said old Nordstedt. "Nevertheless, now that my days are all holidays, I look back with indulgence upon my youthful dreams. And since my wife and I took our Italian journey together, she has nothing but respect and admiration for art."

"As if I ever had anything else for what you delighted in," his wife said, parenthetically.

"Take care," the old man rejoined, holding up a warning finger. "But no, Therese, I must admit that you are and always

were the most sensible of women."

"We women always are sensible," she said; "and, since you acknowledge the fact so frankly, you shall have some punch brewed by my own hands in which to drink success to Herr von Eichhof."

She left the room on hospitable thoughts intent; the doctor pushed forward the large, leather-covered arm-chair in which Walter had so often sat, and the young man took his place between the father and son and discussed the past, present, and future. The old man related many an episode from his past life, which had been full of trials and struggles, which he recounted as a soldier recounts the victories he has won, lingering upon the incidents of many a well-fought field. And the punch having been brought in and placed upon the table by a stout maid-servant, Frau Nordstedt filled the glasses of the three men, and in snowy cap and apron seated herself with her knitting at her husband's elbow, nodding now and then with a smile as he spoke of early days in their life together, her kind old eyes beaming with placid content and pride in her 'boy' and his father.

"It is strange, and no less true than strange, Herr von Eichhof," said the latter, "that life is made up so largely of mistakes and errors. And it is an impregnable fact that content is the result of the performance of one's duty, and that no man need look for anything beyond genuine content."

"You are right, Herr Nordstedt," Walter said, eagerly, and the doctor nodded a silent assent.

"To a faithful discharge of duty, then, and a successful career at the university," exclaimed the old man, as he raised his glass filled with the steaming mixture. The others touched it with their own and exchanged a silent pressure of hands.

Shortly afterwards Walter took his leave, carrying with him the farewell blessings of both the old people.

"How often I shall think of our pleasant evenings here!" he said to the doctor as they crossed the street together. The doctor muttered a few low words in reply, and strode on as if he were in a great hurry. Walter knew him well, and that he always grew monosyllabic when agitated by any emotion. Thus they reached Walter's lodgings in silence.

"And now good-by," the doctor said, grasping the young man's hand; "I know how I shall miss you, so I will cut short all leave-taking."

His voice was deep and low, as though he feared to betray how much he felt his friend's departure. Then he turned hastily away, and walked down the street with a rapid stride. Just as he reached his own door a dark figure emerged from the shadow where it had apparently been crouching, and said, timidly, "Ah, Herr Doctor."

"Is that you, Marianne?" he said, with a hasty glance at the woman. "What do you want? Is anything going wrong?"

"Ah, Herr Doctor, very, very wrong, I am afraid," she sighed. "He is out again, and indeed it would be better he should not come home, for he earned a trifle to-day, and he is spending it

in drink, I suppose. If he should come home in one of his raging moods the lady will die-"

"Is she worse?" the doctor asked, hastily.

"Ah, good heavens! I don't know, but she talks so strange-like that I begged Christine, who lives just over me, to sit by her for a moment, and I ran all the way here to beg you to come to her if you can. She talked about you, and then prayed, and called herself wicked and ungrateful; it's hard to hear her talk so, when I know how good and gentle and unhappy she is, and how thankful she is for everything that is done for her. I thought to myself that the Herr Doctor would know just what to do, when you are so good as to pay my rent to the landlord to let me nurse the poor lady, and I came directly to you; and when they told me you were not at home I waited here until you should come, for- But here we are already; indeed, doctor, you can run faster than I can."

Whilst Marianne had talked on they had reached the house where was lodged the patient whom the doctor had been called to visit at this late hour.

"Only wait one instant, Herr Doctor, till I light a candle," Marianne called out, when they had entered the passage-way. But before her match was lighted the doctor had groped his way up the narrow staircase and stood at the door of the sick-room.

The woman hastened after him, and both entered a low room but feebly illuminated by the light of a tallow candle.

A young girl, from her dress one of the working class, arose from the bedside where she had been sitting and came towards

them.

"How is she, Christine?" the doctor asked, under his breath.

"She is sleeping," was the whispered reply.

Nordstedt went to the bed, upon which lay a young woman, her face turned to the wall, while her abundant fair hair hung down from the pillows in two thick braids. Her little emaciated hand, upon the third finger of which glistened a broad golden ring, lay upon the coverlet, now and then twitching nervously in its owner's feverish sleep.

The doctor noiselessly took his seat by the bedside, and his eyes grew dim with moisture as they glanced from the fair braids to the small hand, and then to the bare, smoky walls of the room. Some minutes passed in profound silence. Christine had left the place; Marianne sat by the stove, her hands folded in her lap, looking anxiously towards the bed where the sleeper was breathing painfully. The doctor leaned over her, and smoothed her pillows with the tender skill of a father watching beside the sick-bed of his child. Suddenly the invalid sat up in bed and gazed at him from large blue eyes that gleamed with unnatural brilliancy in the poor little face, deadly pale but for the hectic flush of fever. "I cannot help it, Robert; don't be angry with me!" she cried, clasping her hands in entreaty.

The doctor laid his own cool, strong hand upon them. "Robert is not here," he said; "be quiet and calm."

She gazed at him, the eager, distressed expression fading from her eyes, her face growing more natural and placid. "Oh, it is

you!" she said, with a sigh of relief, sinking back upon her pillows. "I have had such a terrible dream! How kind of you to come to me when it is so late!" she added, softly. "How can I ever thank you!"

"Hush, hush, child! you must not talk so much, and there is no occasion for any gratitude. It is a doctor's duty to look after his patients."

She gazed at him with an intensity of fervour in her gleaming eyes. "I shall not give you much more trouble," she said; "but I have something to say to you," she added, entreatingly; "tell Marianne to go out of the room."

The doctor motioned to the woman, who left the room, and then turned to the invalid, saying, "But I cannot let you talk much; you must say only a very few words."

A sad, weary smile passed over her face. "Nothing now can either harm or help me. You know as well as I do that I shall soon be at rest."

The doctor would have interrupted her, but she begged him by a look to let her speak, and he mutely inclined his head.

"I know that the end is near, and I am so glad of it," she said, softly; "but before it comes I want so much to thank you, – thank you from my very heart, and to beg you to think of me kindly when I am no longer here. Tell me that you have forgiven me. Although you have shown me your forgiveness in a hundred ways, I long to hear your lips utter it."

"Hedwig," he murmured, and his lips quivered; for a moment

the strong man was unable to utter a word.

"Have you quite forgiven me?" she asked again, looking eagerly up at him.

"Utterly and entirely," he replied, controlling his emotion.

"Ah, how happy you make me! My suffering has atoned for my sin against you. Ah, how I thank you, – I thank you!" She paused suddenly and put her handkerchief to her lips.

The doctor sprang up and called aloud to Marianne, as he raised the invalid's head from the pillows and supported her in his arms.

She opened her eyes and gazed into his. "Friedrich," she whispered. But a crimson stream choked the words she would have spoken. A spasm passed through her frame; she threw back her head. All was over. The doctor gently laid her back upon the pillows, and, kneeling beside her, pressed his lips upon the cold little hand that lay motionless on the coverlet.

Marianne was not in the next room; she did not appear in answer to the doctor's call, and her presence was not needed.

A moment afterwards he arose, covered the quiet figure, so that only the pale, calm face was visible, and then sat down beside the bed, riveting his gaze upon the marble features as if to call them back to life, – the life that now informed them in his mind's eye. Yes, she stood vividly before him, a little fair-haired girl, the daughter of a neighbouring tradesman, his playfellow through many childish years. And then she was again the blushing, still childlike girl, who replied to his passionate wooing by a low

'yes,' breathed almost inaudibly as she hid her face on his breast. Then came a change in the picture. The petty tradesman, her father, embarked in a lucky speculation and suddenly achieved wealth. And the girl was clad in costly silks and velvets, and lived in a showy villa surrounded by luxurious gardens, – a fit home for a parvenu millionaire, where the daughter, but lately so shrinking and modest, suddenly learned to talk and laugh loudly and to bandy pert jests with the young fortune-hunters that thronged about her. She grew to delight in their homage, and would have missed it had it been withdrawn. She never was haughty or arrogant towards the friend of her youth, but she began to suppress a yawn when he spoke of his love. She had just begun to live, she said, and wished to enjoy for a while. They had deferred any public announcement of their mutual affection until Nordstedt should have passed the coming examinations, and he left her to her new-found enjoyment, coming but seldom to visit her. The day before he was to go up for examination he went to her house, and was told that she had been betrothed the week before, and was paying some visits of ceremony. He turned away, and a few steps from the house passed her carriage returning home. He saw her smile, saw the handsome faded face of her lover, and the satisfaction in her father's air. He was proud of the wealthy son-in-law, who had, moreover, lately become his partner. Nordstedt hurried along the street where he had so often walked with his head and heart filled with dreams of future happiness, and from that day her name never passed his lips.

Thenceforth he belonged only to his books and his patients. The years went by. He knew that her father had become bankrupt, and that her husband had suffered some losses in consequence. But he did not know how soon the remainder of his property had been lost or squandered. Without either the capacity or the desire to exert himself, the man had sunk into depths of abject poverty, until at last his wretched wife was discovered by chance by the lover of her youth in a garret room, the victim of a mortal disease. He did not now dwell upon the care that he had from that moment lavished upon the first, the only woman whom he had ever loved; pictures of a distant past floated too vividly before him, and the quiet face on the pillow was to him as a last greeting from his youth, the faint, fading shadow of what once had been. Youth and love, how far away and unattainable they were now! Lost, gone forever. He bade a long farewell to that pale face and to all of which it spoke to him.

At last he arose, and, walking slowly and like one in a dream, left the room, and, calling Marianne, gave her directions as to the decent burial of his lost love. And as the street door closed behind him and the black night received him, the strong man shivered. "She is dead, and Walter is gone," he muttered to himself. "It is my lot to be a lonely man."

CHAPTER VII.
UNEXPECTED

Summer had gone, and autumn was tinging forest and field with crimson and gold.

The Freiherr von Hohenstein was driving in a little open vehicle through his forest, – that is, over that part of his estate which a few years previously had been covered with fine old trees, but where now some labourers were removing a few stumps, while at intervals a solitary giant of the woods seemed to tell of his brothers, certain of whom were now sailing the seas, while others upheld the roofs of city dwellings.

The Freiherr von Hohenstein looked gloomily about him upon the desert plain, dotted here and there with small spots of future forest in the shape of low scraggy shrubs, and found as much food for vexation in the quick disappearance of the former forest as in the slow growth of the young trees. He was powerless, however, to alter either of these annoying facts, and he sighed heavily as his thoughts wandered oddly enough, and yet by a strictly logical train of ideas, from the forest-trees to his son Hugo, who had not indeed any personal connection with ship-builders and carpenters, but who could have told a great deal about the money paid by them for the trees.

"The deuce knows how it is all to end!" the Freiherr growled

to himself. "Every year living is dearer and the income smaller; everything to be bought goes up in price, everything to be sold comes down. It is enough to drive me mad!"

Such had now for some time been the usual conclusion of the Freiherr's reflections, and after these deep-drawn sighs he was wont to fall into a still gloomier revery, in which he arrived at no single clear idea except that fate was using him with singular injustice in so complicating his financial affairs from year to year.

"Was he extravagant in any direction? No, assuredly not! It is true, he bred racers, and in order to do so was obliged to employ certain people who required high wages; but it was his only pleasure, and could not be altered. His domestic affairs were conducted upon a very liberal scale; but, as the neighbour and friend of the Eichhofs, it was his duty not to allow any difference to be observed between the Baron's style of living and his own; he surely owed this to his rank and station in life. His son required enormous sums; but the Freiherr had but two children, and his daughter cost him almost nothing. And it was natural that Hugo should enjoy life, – he must represent his name worthily. The Hohensteins had never been bookworms or arithmeticians, and if the young fellow sometimes went too far and his father resolved that he should be 'brought to book' the very next time, still his debts must be paid; the boy could not be dishonoured. All these expenses were really matters of course; they would not have troubled the Freiherr in the least except for this unaccountable yearly deficit in his income.

"I suppose the bad harvest years are at the bottom of the mischief," the Freiherr thought, and consoled himself with the reflection that the good years must come, and that then the 'unavoidable expenses' would be met, and the 'inconceivable deficits' be made up. He had of late positively loathed the books of the estate, and had in consequence rather neglected them. Now he remembered that the time was at hand for the first instalment to be paid of a loan he had had of Count Eichhof, and that he could not possibly pay it. He looked up from his gloomy contemplation of the soil which had once been forest-land, and which was to be forest-land again in the future, and drove over to Eichhof to discuss matters with the Count. But he did not find him at home. "The Herr Count is hunting to-day," the footman informed the visitor. The Freiherr decided to await the Count's return. He could not be long away, for twilight was close at hand. He asked for the Countess, was most graciously received by her, and inquired after the welfare of her sons. When the Countess talked of her sons she adopted a manner and bearing which plainly indicated that, although the young men might very possibly conduct themselves pretty much after the fashion of other young people of their age and rank in society, still they were unquestionably very remarkable men, as she and indeed many others well knew. Bernhard was at present, after the usual wedding-tour among the Alps, installed in his vine-wreathed villa in one of the Thiergarten streets.

"He writes seldom," said the Countess, "and seems to spend

much of his time at home. I could have wished that they had continued to travel until the *saison morte* was over in Berlin; for, although he is extremely happy with his little wife, a man of his force and intellect needs social excitement."

"Oh, your daughter-in-law is so charming that her husband's distaste for general society is easily understood," the Freiherr observed.

"She is a good child," said the Countess.

A more attentive listener than the Freiherr could possibly be at this time would have plainly heard in the Countess's intonation as she uttered the words 'good child' the unspoken thought, "but much too insignificant for my Bernhard." The Freiherr, however, was only listening to catch the first sound of the hoofs of the horses that were bringing home the hunting-party, and just as the Countess was preparing to tell him of the charming letter she had just received from her cousin the ambassador, with whom she had begun a correspondence "solely upon Walter's account," the wished-for cadence struck upon his ear.

"I think your husband has returned," he said, "Allow me to go and meet him."

"I don't think it is my husband," was the reply. "His voice usually makes itself unmistakably heard upon his return from hunting. But pray inform yourself about it, my dear Baron."

The Freiherr left the room, although there was still no sound of the Count's voice. The Countess sat gazing towards the western sky, where the last gleams of the dying day faintly lingered, and

began to wonder why the servant had not brought in the lamp, and why the house was so silent, since, as the Freiherr did not return, her husband must surely be at home.

The room grew darker and darker, and silence still prevailed. This quiet was positively oppressive. The Countess arose, passed through the antechamber, and opened the door leading out to the landing of the grand staircase. No light was burning here either, but from below came a dull gleam, and the smothered sounds of hurried words and whispers.

"What is the matter? Why are the lamps not lighted?" the Countess asked, standing at the head of the stairs. The Freiherr, who stood at their foot with a candle in his hand, looked up at her with a face so pale and horror-stricken that a cold shudder ran through her as she repeated her question, "What is the matter? For God's sake tell me what has happened!"

"Be calm," said the Baron, who stood beside her in an instant, while his voice trembled as perceptibly as did the candle in his hand. "Be calm, I entreat you, dearest madame; your husband has met with an accident."

The Countess grew pale to the very lips. "Oh, God!" she shrieked; "where is he? where is he?" And she would have rushed down the staircase, but the Freiherr detained her. "He is not yet here, – he is coming. One of his huntsmen brought us the news."

"He is coming?" she cried; "he is only wounded, – he must be only wounded?"

"He is seriously injured, very seriously," said the Freiherr. "I

fear we must be prepared for everything, – even for the worst!"

The Countess stared at him with eyes wide with horror; her lips twitched convulsively, as though unable to utter the terrible word written so plainly in the Freiherr's face, – uttered so distinctly in this fearful silence, which was interrupted only by the sounds of suppressed sobs from the group of servants in the hall below.

Suddenly she threw up her arms. "Dead!" she shrieked, "dead!"

The word was spoken, and she fell back senseless into the Baron's arms.

At that moment a vehicle drew up in the castle court-yard, and the Count, surrounded by his huntsmen, and a few others whom the accident had called together, was slowly carried up the terrace steps. They bore him into the castle through the same portal which he had left lusty and joyous only a few hours before, never to behold it again.

With drooping tail, and now and then uttering a melancholy whine, his favourite hound followed his master's body; he had long been the faithful companion of his sport. And in the wagon that had brought his master home dead lay the gun, which all shunned to touch, for it had caused all this woe, by its accidental discharge as the Count was leaping a ditch in the ardour of the chase.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.