

**E.WERNER**

CLEAR THE  
TRACK! A  
STORY OF TO-  
DAY

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# E. Werner

## «Clear the Track!» A Story of To-day

### CHAPTER I.

### THE FEAST OF FLOWERS AT NICE

A spring day at the South! Sky and sea are radiant in their deep blue, flooded with light and splendor, the waves breaking gently upon the shores of the Riviera, to which spring had already come in all its glory, while, at the North, snow-storms are still raging.

Here rests golden sunshine upon the white houses and villas of the town, that embraces the shore within the radius of a vast semicircle, adorned by lofty palms, and embowered in the green of the laurel and myrtle. Among thousands of shrubs, the camellia is conspicuous from its wealth of bloom, in every stage of perfection, its colors ranging from pure white to richest crimson; and could anything excel the richness of its glistening foliage? From the adjacent hills hoary monasteries look down, and modern churches surrounded by tall cypress trees; friendly orchards stand out from pine and olive groves, and in the distance the blue Alps, with their snow-crowned summits, are half hidden in sunny mist.

Nice was celebrating one of its spring-and-flower festivals, and the whole city and its environs had turned out in gala-attire, whether stranger or native-born. Gayly-decked equipages passed by in endless procession, every window and balcony being filled with spectators, and on the sidewalks, under the palms, thronged a merry multitude, the brown and picturesque forms of fishermen and peasants being everywhere conspicuous.

The battle of flowers on the Corso was in full swing, the sweet missiles being constantly shot through the air, here hitting their mark, there missing it: blossoms, that are treasured at the North as rare and expensive, were here scattered heedlessly and lavishly. Added to this, there were everywhere waving handkerchiefs, shouts of joy, bands of music playing, and the intoxicating perfume of violets,—the whole of this enchantingly beautiful picture being enhanced by the golden sunshine of spring with which heaven and earth was filled.

Upon the terrace of one of the fashionable hotels stood a small group of gentlemen, evidently foreigners, who had chanced to meet here, for they conversed in the German language. The lively interest with which the two younger men gazed upon the entrancing scene betrayed the fact that it was new to them; while the third, a man of riper years, looked rather listlessly upon what was going on.

"I must go now," said he, with a glance at his watch. "One soon gets tired of all this hubbub and confusion, and longs after a quiet spot. You, gentlemen, it seems, want to stay a while longer?"

His companions certainly seemed to have that intention, and one of them, a handsome man, with slender figure, evidently an officer in civilian's dress, answered laughingly:

"Of course we do, Herr von Stettin. We feel no need for rest whatever. The scene has a fairy-like aspect for us Northmen, has it not, Wittenau?—Ah! there come the Wildenrods! That is what I call taste; one can hardly see the carriage for the flowers, and the lovely Cecilia looks the very impersonation of Spring."

The carriage that was just driving by was indeed remarkable through its peculiarly rich ornamentation of flowers. Everywhere appeared camellias, the coachman and outriders wore bunches of them in their hats, and even the horses were decked with them.

On the front seat were a gentleman of proud and noble bearing, and a young lady in a changeable silk dress of reddish hue, her dark hair surmounted by a dainty little white hat trimmed with roses. Upon the back seat a young man had taken his place, who exerted himself to take care of the heaps

of flowers that were fairly showered upon this particular equipage. Among them were the costliest bouquets, evidently given in compliment to the beautiful girl, who sat smiling in the midst of all her floral treasures, and looking with great, beaming eyes upon the festive scene around her.

The officer, also, had taken a bunch of violets, and dexterously flung it into the carriage, but instead of the lady, her escort caught it, and carelessly added it to the pile of floral offerings heaped up on the seat beside him.

"That was not exactly meant for Herr Dernburg," said the dispenser of flowers rather irritably. "There he is again in the Wildenrod carriage. He is never to be seen but when dancing attendance upon them."

"Yes, since this Dernburg has put in his appearance, the attentions of all other men seem superfluous," chimed in Wittenau, sending a dark look after the carriage.

"Have your observations, too, carried you so far already?" said the young officer tauntingly. "Yes, millionaires; alas! are always to the fore, and I believe Herr von Wildenrod knows how to appreciate this quality in his friends, for I hear that luck sometimes deserts him over yonder at Monaco."

"You must be mistaken; there can be no talk of any such thing as that," replied Wittenau, almost indignantly. "The Baron produces the impression that he is a perfect gentleman, and associates here with our very first people."

The other laughingly shrugged his shoulders.

"That is not saying much, dear Wittenau. Just here, at Nice, the line separating the *élite* from the world of adventurers is strangely lost sight of. One never rightly knows where the one ceases and the other begins, and there is some mystery about this Wildenrod. As to whether his claim to nobility is altogether genuine—"

"Undoubtedly genuine, I can certify as to that," said Stettin, who had hitherto been a silent listener, but now came forward and joined in the conversation.

"Ah, you are acquainted with the family, are you?"

"Years ago, I used to visit at the house of the old Baron, who has died since, and there I also met his son. I cannot pretend to have any particular acquaintance with the latter, but he has a full right to the name and title that he bears."

"So much the better," said the officer, lightly. "As for the rest, it is only a traveling acquaintance, and no obligation is incurred."

"Assuredly not, if one lays aside such relations as easily as they are assumed," remarked Stettin with a peculiar intonation. "But I must be off now—I hope to meet you soon again, gentlemen!"

"I am going with you," said Wittenau, who seemed suddenly to have lost his appetite for sight-seeing. "The rows of carriages begin to thin out already. Nevertheless, it will be a hard matter to get through."

They took leave of their comrade, who was not thinking of departure yet, and had just supplied himself with flowers again, and together left the terrace. It was certainly no easy thing to make one's way through the densely-packed throng, and quite a while elapsed ere they left noise and stir behind them. Gradually, however, their way grew clearer, while the shouts of the multitude died away in the distance.

The talk between the two gentlemen was rather monosyllabic. The younger one, particularly, appeared to be either out of sorts or absent-minded, and suddenly remarked, quite irrelevantly:

"It seems that you know all about the Wildenrods, and yet mention it to-day for the first time. And, moreover, you have had nothing to do with them."

"No," said Herr von Stettin coolly, "and I should have preferred other associates for you. I several times intimated as much to you, but you would not understand my hints."

"I was introduced to them by a fellow-countryman, and you said nothing decided—"

"Because I know nothing decided. The associations of which I told you, a while ago, date twelve years back, and many changes have taken place since then. Your friend is right, the line of demarcation between the Bohemian and man of society gets strangely confused, and I am afraid that Wildenrod is on the wrong side of the barrier."

"You do not believe him to be wealthy, then?" asked Wittenau, with some emotion. "He lives with his sister, in high style, being apparently in the easiest circumstances, and, at all events, has command of abundant means, for the present."

Stettin significantly shrugged his shoulders.

"Inquire at the faro-bank of Monaco; he is a regular guest there, and is said, too, to have good luck in play, for the most part—so long as it lasts! One hears, too, occasionally of other things, that are yet more significant. I have not felt disposed to renew the former acquaintance, although our intercourse had been rather frequent, for what used to be the Wildenrod possessions lay in the immediate neighborhood of our family property, that is now in my hands."

"What used to be?" asked the young man. "Those possessions have been sold, then? I perceive, however, that you do not like to speak on the subject."

"To strangers, most assuredly not. I shall give what information I have to you, though, because you have a real interest in the matter. Remember, however, that what I say is strictly confidential!"

"My word upon it, that nothing you tell me shall go any farther."

"Well, then," said Stettin gravely, "it is a brief, melancholy, but, alas! not an unusual story. Although the estate had long been heavily encumbered with debt, the establishment was maintained upon a most expensive scale. The old Baron had contracted a second marriage, in later life, long after his son was a grown man. He could not thwart his young wife in a single wish, and her wants were many, very many. The son, who was in the diplomatic service, was also accustomed to high living; various other losses ensued, and finally came the catastrophe. The Baron suddenly died of a stroke of apoplexy—at least so it was said."

"Did he lay violent hands on himself?" asked Wittenau in a whisper.

"Probably. It has not been ascertained for certain, but it is supposed that he was not willing to survive the misery and disgrace of his ruin. Disgrace was certainly averted, for the family still holds the most honorable position. The Wildenrods rank with the highest nobility in the land, and the name was to be shielded at any price. The castle and lands adjacent became a royal domain, so that the creditors could be pacified at least, and, by the general public, the sale was deemed a voluntary one. The widow with her little daughter would have been given over to utter poverty if, by the king's grace, she had not been allowed a home in the castle and had an annuity settled upon her. As for the rest, she died soon afterwards."

"And the son? The young Baron?"

"Of course he resigned his position, had to do so, under the circumstances, for he could not be *attaché* of affairs without some fortune of his own. It must have been a severe blow upon the proud, ambitious man, who had, most likely, been kept in utter ignorance of the state of his father's affairs, and, now, all of a sudden, found himself stopped short in his career. To be sure, many another honorable calling stood open to him; friends would doubtless have secured some situation for him, but this would have necessitated descent from the sphere in which he had hitherto played a chief part; necessitated sober, unremitting toil in an obscure station, and those were things that Oscar Von Wildenrod could not brook. He rejected all offers of employment, left the country, and was no more heard of in his native place. Now, after the lapse of twelve years, I meet him here at Nice with his young sister, who, meanwhile, has come to woman's estate, but we prefer, it seems, on both sides, to treat each other as strangers."

While this narration was being made, Wittenau became very thoughtful, but made no comment whatever. Noticing this, his friend laid his hand upon his arm, and said gently:

"You should not have given young Dernburg such angry glances, for it has been his appearance upon the scene, I fancy, that has saved you from committing a folly—a great folly."

A glowing blush suffused the young man's face at this intimation, and he was evidently much embarrassed.

"Herr von Stettin, I—"

"Now, do not understand me as reproaching you on account of looking too deeply into a pair of fine eyes," interposed Stettin. "That is so natural at your age; but in this case, it might have been fatal. Ask yourself, whether a girl thus brought up, who has grown up amid such influences and surroundings, would make a good farmer's wife, or be happy in a country neighborhood. As for the rest, you would hardly have found acceptance as Cecilia Wildenrod's suitor, because her brother will give the decisive voice, and he wants a millionaire for a brother-in-law."

"And Dernburg is heir to several millions, people say," remarked Wittenau with undisguised bitterness. "So, he will be the one upon whom this honor is to be bestowed."

"It is not mere say so, it is fact. The great Dernburg iron and steel works are the most important in all Germany, and admirably conducted. Their present chief is such a man as one rarely meets. I speak from personal knowledge, having accidentally made his acquaintance a few years ago. But see, there are the Wildenrods coming back again."

There, indeed, was the Baron's equipage, which had left the Corso a little while ago, and was now on its way back to their hotel. The fiery horses, which had with difficulty been curbed in, so as to keep step with a procession, were now going at full speed, and rushed past the two gentlemen, who had stepped aside, and looked upon the cloud of dust that had been raised.

"I am sorry about that Oscar Wildenrod," said Stettin earnestly. "He does not belong to the ordinary herd of mankind, and might perhaps have accomplished great things, if fate had not so suddenly and rudely snatched him away from the sphere for which he had been born and reared. Do not look so downcast, dear Wittenau! You will get over this dream of your youth, and after you get home to your fields and meadows, will thank your stars that it was nothing but a dream."

The carriage, meanwhile, had gone on its way, and now stopped before one of those grand hotels, whose exterior sufficiently showed that it was only at the disposal of rich and distinguished guests.

The suite of rooms occupied by Baron von Wildenrod and his sister was one of the best, and, of course, most expensive in the house, and lacked none of the conveniences and luxuries to which pampered guests lay claim. The rooms were splendidly furnished, but there was about them that air of the public-house that takes away, in large measure, any sense of genuine comfort.

The gentlemen were already in the parlor. Cecilia had retired in order to lay aside her hat and gloves, while her brother, chatting pleasantly, conducted their visitor to the veranda, whence was to be seen a fine view of the sea and a portion of Nice.

Young Dernburg appeared to be twenty-four or five years old, his looks making an impression that was insignificant rather than disagreeable. His diminutive figure, with its somewhat stooping carriage and pale complexion, with that peculiar tell-tale flush upon the cheeks, betrayed the fact that he had sought the sunny shores of the Riviera, not for the sake of pleasure, but out of regard for health. His face had its attractive features, but its lineaments were much too weak for a man, and this weakness culminated in the dreamy, somewhat veiled, look of his brown eyes. The self-consciousness of the rich heir seemed to be entirely lacking in this young man, his manners being unassuming, almost shy, and had not the name he bore everywhere procured him consideration, he would have been apt to be overlooked by the generality of the world.

The Baron's personality was in every respect the reverse. Oscar von Wildenrod was no longer young, being already not far from fifty years old.

There was something imposing in his lofty stature, and his clean-cut, regular features could but be regarded as handsome still, in spite of the sharp lines engraven upon them, and the deep furrow

between the brows, that lent a rather sinister aspect to his countenance. Only a cool, considerate calm seemed perceptible in his dark eyes, and yet they flashed occasionally, with a fierceness that betokened the existence of a passionate, unbridled nature. As for the rest, there was something thoroughly distinguished in the Baron's whole appearance, his manners united the complaisance of a man of the world combined quite naturally with the pride inalienable from the scion of an ancient stock of nobility, which was manifested, however, in a manner by no means offensive.

"You are not seriously thinking of taking your leave of Nice?" asked he, in the course of conversation. "It would be much too early, for you would just be in time for that season of storms and rain, which they honor with the name of spring, in that dear Germany of ours. You have spent the whole winter in Cairo, have been just six weeks at Nice, and should not expose yourself now to the asperities of that harsh Northern climate, if you would not imperil the health that is restored to you, but can hardly be established as yet."

"The question is not one of to-day or to-morrow," said Dernburg, "but I cannot defer too long my return home. I have been more than a year in the South, feel perfectly well again, and my father urgently requests that I return to Odenburg as soon as possible, provided that the doctors give me their permission."

"That Odenburg must be a grand creation," remarked the Baron. "According to all that I hear from you and others, your father must almost occupy the position of a small potentate; only his authority is more unlimited than that of a prince."

"Certainly, but he has also the whole care and responsibility of his station. You have no idea what it is to be at the head of such an undertaking. It requires a constitution of iron, such as my father possesses; the burden that he carries on his shoulders is that of a very Atlas."

"Never mind, it is power, and power is always a delight!" said Wildenrod, with flashing eyes.

The young man smiled rather sadly.

"To you, and very likely to my father, too—I am differently constituted. I should prefer a quiet life, in a modest home, located in such a terrestrial paradise as this delicious climate supplies; but it is not worth while to talk; as an only son, it must one day devolve on me to superintend the work at Odenburg."

"You are ungrateful, Dernburg! A good fairy endowed you, when in your cradle, with a destiny such as thousands aspire to, with eager longing—and I verily believe you sigh over it."

"Because I feel that I am not qualified for it. When I behold what my father accomplishes, and reflect that one day the task will devolve upon me, of filling his place, there comes over me a sense of discouragement and timidity that I cannot control."

Wildenrod's eyes were fastened, with a peculiar expression upon the diminutive figure and pale features of the young heir.

"One day!" he repeated. "Who cares now about the distant future. Your father is still living and working in the plenitude of his powers, and in the worst case he will leave you capable officers, who have been trained in his school. So you will actually stay no longer at Nice? I am sorry for that; we shall miss you a great deal."

"We?" asked Dernburg softly. "Do you speak in your sister's name also?"

"Certainly, Cecilia will be very sorry to lose her trustiest knight. To be sure, there will be plenty to try and console her—do you know, yesterday I had a regular quarrel upon my hands with Marville, because I offered you the seat in our carriage, upon which he had surely calculated?"

This last remark was apparently made carelessly, without any design, but it had its effect. The young man's brow became clouded, and with unmistakable irritation, he replied:

"Vicomte de Marville constantly claims a place by the Baroness, and I plainly perceive that he would like to supplant me in her favor altogether."

"If you voluntarily resign your vantage-ground—very likely. So far, Cecilia has continually manifested a preference for her German compatriot, and yet there is no doubt but that the amiable

Frenchman pleases her, and the absent is always at a disadvantage, especially where young ladies are concerned."

He spoke in a jesting tone, as though no weight were to be attached to his words, since he did not look upon the matter at all in a serious light. This only made Dernburg more solicitous to come to an understanding. He made no reply, he was evidently struggling with himself, and finally began, unsteadily and with hesitation:

"Herr von Wildenrod, I have had something on my heart—for a long while already—but I have not ventured until now—"

The Baron had turned and looked at him wonderingly. There lurked in his dark eyes a half-mocking, half-compassionate expression, the look seeming to say: "You have millions to offer and yet hesitate?" but aloud he replied: "Speak out, pray; we are no strangers, and I hope that I have a claim to your confidence."

"It is, perhaps, no longer a secret to you that I love your sister," said Dernburg almost timidly. "But allow me to say to you, that I should account myself the happiest of men, if I could hope to win Cecilia—that I would do everything to make her happy—may I hope?"

Wildenrod did not indeed affect any surprise at this confession, he only smiled, but it was a smile that was full of promise.

"First of all, you must address your question to Cecilia herself. Young ladies are rather self-willed on such points, and my sister peculiarly so. Perhaps I am too considerate of her, and she is completely spoiled in society now, how much so you saw for yourself again to-day, during our ride on the Corso."

"Yes, I saw it," and the young man's tone showed deep depression, "and just on that account, I have never before been able to find the courage to speak of my love."

"Really? Well, then, I shall have to come to the help of your timidity. It is true that our whimsical little princess is not to be counted upon, but, to speak confidentially, I have no fear of your being rejected by her."

"Do you really think so?" exclaimed Dernburg rapturously. "And how as to yourself, Herr von Wildenrod?"

"I shall gladly welcome you as a brother-in-law, and see my sister's happiness entrusted to you without a quail of anxiety. My sole desire is to see this child happy and beloved, for you must know that my relation to her has always been that of a father rather than a brother."

He extended his hand, which was grasped by the young suitor, and warmly pressed.

"I thank you. You make me very, very happy by this consent, by the hope that you give me, and now—"

"You would like to hear this consent spoken by other lips," said Wildenrod, laughingly finishing his sentence for him. "I'll gladly give you the opportunity to speak, but you must plead your own cause. I allow my sister entire freedom to act as pleases her best. I think, however, my blabbing has inspired you with courage, so venture boldly, dear Eric."

He gave him a friendly nod, and went. Eric Dernburg also returned again to the parlor, and his glance took in the quantities of flowers that the servant had brought up and piled upon the table. Yes, indeed, Cecilia Wildenrod was petted and spoiled as is the lot of few of her sex. Again to-day how had she been overwhelmed with flowers and tokens of homage! She had only to choose: dared he indulge the hope that her choice would fall upon one like him? He had wealth to offer, but she was rich herself, for her brother's style of living left no doubt on that head, and moreover she came of an ancient and noble family. As he thus pondered, the scale oscillated painfully. In spite of the encouragement that he had received, the young man's face showed that he feared just as much as he hoped.

Wildenrod, meanwhile, had passed through the adjoining apartment, and now entered his sister's chamber.

"Ah, is that you, Oscar? I am coming directly. I only want to stick another flower in my hair."

The Baron looked at the magnificent bunch of pale yellow roses that lay half-loosened upon the dressing-table, and asked abruptly:

"Are those the flowers that Dernburg gave you?"

"Certainly; he brought them to me, when he came for the drive on the Corso."

"Good! adorn yourself with them!"

"And I should have done so all the same without your most gracious permission," laughed the young lady, "for they are the loveliest of all."

She selected one of the roses, and held it, experimentally, against her hair: there was an uncommon, but indeed very conscious, grace in this movement: the slender girl of nineteen resembled her brother little, if at all: at first sight they seemed to have nothing in common but the dark color of their hair and eyes, otherwise hardly a feature betrayed the nearness of their relationship.

Cecilia Wildenrod had that style of appearance which seems to have an irresistible fascination for the opposite sex. Her features were more irregular than those of her brother, but their mobility and variety of expression gave them a peculiar charm that never wore out. Her dark hair, that was so abundant as not to be always brought down to the requirements of the latest fashion, and complexion, that was of the clear brunette type, made one suspect that she could not be of purely German origin; and from beneath long black eyelashes gleamed a pair of lustrous eyes, that allured one who looked deeply into them with all the fascination of a riddle to be solved. In these mysterious depths, too, glowed a spark that might well be fanned into a flame; they, too, having some of that glow of passion, which in Oscar's case was hidden under a semblance of excessive coldness. This constituted the sole resemblance between the brother and sister, but it was a resemblance that stood for much.

Cecilia still wore the silk dress in which she had appeared on the Corso, already a few pale yellow, half-open, rosebuds adorned her bosom, and now she placed a full-blown rose among the dark waves of her hair. Nature's adorning became her wondrously, and her brother's glance rested upon her with evident satisfaction. He had closed both doors carefully behind him, nevertheless he now lowered his voice and said in a whisper:

"Eric Dernburg has something besides roses to offer you—his hand. He has just had a talk with me, and is now going to address himself to you."

The young lady likewise heard this news without any surprise.

She turned her head to one side, that she might see how the flower looked in her hair, and asked with apparent indifference:

"So soon?"

"Soon? Why, I have been expecting a declaration from him this long while, and he would have made it, too, only you seem to have given him poor encouragement."

A fold appeared between Cecilia's brows, exactly in the same spot where a deep furrow had seamed her brother's.

"If he were only not so abominably tiresome!" murmured she.

"Cecilia, you know that I am anxious for this marriage, exceedingly anxious, and I hope that you will regulate your conduct accordingly."

His tone was very positive, seeming to preclude any chance of opposition on the part of his sister, who now pushed away the rest of the roses with a gesture of impatience.

"Why had it to be this Dernburg, and no one else? Vicomte de Marville is much handsomer, much more agreeable—"

"But is not thinking of offering you his hand," interposed Wildenrod. "He, just as little as all the other triflers who swarm around you. You need not put on that injured air, Cecilia, you may rely implicitly upon my judgment: I know men, I tell you, girl. Now this union with Dernburg secures to you a brilliant destiny; he is very rich."

"Well, so are we, for that matter."

"No," said the Baron shortly and sharply.

The young lady looked at him in amazement: he stepped up to her and laid his hand upon her arm.

"We are *not* rich! I am obliged to tell you this now, that you may not ruin your future prospects, through caprice or childishness, and I confidently expect you to accept this offer."

Cecilia still looked at her brother, half shocked, half-incredulous, but she was evidently accustomed to submitting to his will in silence, and attempted no further opposition.

"As if I should dare to say 'no,' when my stern brother dictates a 'yes,'" pouted she. "But I can tell Dernburg one thing, he need not flatter himself with the idea that I am going to bury myself with him in that horrid Odensburg. To live among droves of day-laborers, at those iron works, full of dust and soot—it makes me shudder just to think of it."

"All that can be accommodated afterwards," said Wildenrod calmly. "As for the rest, you have no idea what it is to be some day master of the Odensburg works, and what a stand you will take in the world, by his side. When you do come to comprehend the situation fully, you will be grateful to me for the choice that I have made. But come, we should not keep your future husband waiting any longer."

He took her arm, and led her to the parlor, where Dernburg was awaiting them in restless suspense. The Baron pretended not to observe his uneasiness, and chatted unrestrainedly with him and his sister about their drive on the Corso, and various little incidents that had occurred, until it suddenly occurred to him to admire the sunset, that promised to be particularly beautiful this evening. He stepped out upon the veranda, as if undesignedly, let the glass doors fall to behind him, and thus gave the young couple an opportunity to be alone.

"Why, it looks just like a flower-market!" exclaimed Cecilia laughingly, as she pointed to the table that was overladen with bouquets. "Francis has, of course, piled them up with a reckless disregard of taste: I must really arrange them better. Will you not help me to do so, Herr Dernburg?"

She began to divide out the various sorts and put them in vases and bowls, and with the remainder to decorate the hearth. Dernburg helped her, but he was not a very efficient helper, for he could not take his eyes off the slender form, flitting to and fro, in dainty garb, with that lovely rose in her dark hair.

At the first glance, he had perceived that those were his roses that she wore, and a happy smile played about his lips. He wondered if her brother had already given her a hint? She was so free from embarrassment, laughed so heartily at his absence of mind, and treated him with the same pretty insolence as usual—she could not possibly know that he meant to address her!

In Cecilia's manner, there was most assuredly nothing of the sweet shyness and embarrassment of a young girl who, for the first time, listens to the addresses of a lover. In fact, it hardly seemed that she comprehended the seriousness of the situation. She would soon be twenty years old, at which age girls in her circle often married or, rather, were given in marriage, for their families usually decided the matter for them. Individually, moreover, she had no objection to marrying. It would be very pleasant to enjoy the freedom allowed a married woman, to be wholly untrammelled as to expenditure in dress, jewels, etc., and to be no longer obliged to submit to the will of a brother, who was at times very despotic, only—how much handsomer and more agreeable was Viscount de Marville than this Dernburg, who had not even rank to recommend him. It was really outrageous, that a Baroness Wildenrod would, in future, have to bear the name of a simple citizen!

She had just taken up the last bouquet, preparatory to decorating the hearth with it, when she heard her name breathed softly but fervently.

"Cecilia!"

She turned around and met the gaze of Eric, who stood beside her, and continued in the same tone:

"You have only eyes and thoughts for the flowers—have you not a single glance for me?"

"Why, do you stand so much in need of that glance?" asked Cecilia archly.

"Oh! how very much I need it! It is to give me courage for a confession—will you hear it?"

She smiled and laid down the bunch of flowers that she held in her hand.

"Why, that sounds quite portentous. Is it something so important?"

"No less than the happiness of my life, for which I look to you!" replied Dernburg impetuously. "I love you, Cecilia, have done so from the first moment that my eyes rested upon you. You must have known this for a long while, could not help guessing it, but I always saw you so surrounded by admirers, and so rarely obtained the least excuse for the indulgence of hope, that I dared not press my suit. Now, though, that the time for my departure draws near, I cannot go, without certainty as to my fate. Will you be mine, Cecilia? I will lay everything, everything, at your feet, gratify every wish, and all my life long guard you as the most precious of treasures. Say one word, only a single one, that shall give me hope, but do not say 'no,' for that I could not stand."

He had caught both her hands, his face, commonly so pale, was now suffused with a bright flush, and his voice quivered with emotion. This was no stormy, passionate declaration, but each word expressed the truest love, the fullest tenderness, and the young girl who had so often been besieged by flattery and adulation, heard this tone for the first time, and listened, half perplexed, half fascinated.

Cecilia had not supposed the quiet, bashful lover, whom she had often treated with great disdain, capable of such a wooing, and as he now went on, more tenderly, more urgently, the 'yes' pleaded for came at last from her lips, rather hesitatingly, it is true, but without any sign of repugnance.

In a transport of rapture, Dernburg wanted to fold his betrothed to his heart, but she shrank back. It was an involuntary, half unconscious movement of shyness, almost aversion, such as perhaps would have wounded and chilled anybody else, but Eric only saw in it the sweet modesty of the young girl, and while he still softly clasped her hands, he whispered:

"Oh, Cecilia, if you did but know how I love you!"

There was no mistaking in his tone the genuine accents of devoted love, and it did not fail to make its impression upon Cecilia, who now began to realize that she had no right to be so reserved with the man to whom she had plighted her troth.

"Well, then, you deserve that I should give you a little love in return, Eric!" said she, with a charming smile, at the same time suffering him to draw her to his side and imprint a first kiss upon her lips.

Wildenrod was still standing out upon the veranda, and turned around with a smile as the young couple approached him. Beaming with pride and happiness, Dernburg led his betrothed up to him, and received the congratulations of his future brother-in-law, who first embraced his sister, then Eric.

Then there began a lively, cheerful conversation, out upon the balcony, where the soft breezes of spring were still sporting. The dazzling splendor of daylight was already breaking up into that gorgeous blending of colors, as is only witnessed in the South, at sundown. The city and surrounding heights were glorified, as it were, by the resplendent sheen that glistened and sparkled like molten gold upon the waves of the sea, and while the distant mountains were veiled in a roseate mist, the sun itself, a fiery ball, sank lower and lower, until it finally vanished from view.

Eric had slipped his arm around the waist of his betrothed, and whispered into her ear tender and loving words. Irradiated with glory as was the lovely landscape before them, so seemed the future to him, by the side of that precious girl. Wildenrod stood apart, apparently wholly absorbed in the contemplation of that magnificent spectacle, but nevertheless, a deep sigh of relief escaped his chest, and while his eyes flashed in triumph, he murmured, almost inaudibly: "At last!"

## CHAPTER II. IN COUNCIL

"I Am sorry, gentlemen, but I have to pronounce all your plans and proposals unsatisfactory. The question is to draw all the water-power we need from the Radefeld low-grounds, in the shortest way, and with the least possible expense. But, without exception, your designs call for such vast and expensive outlays, that it is not worth while to talk of their being carried into effect."

It was Eberhard Dernburg, the proprietor of the Odensburg Works, who thus declined the plans laid before him by his officers, in this decided manner. The gentlemen shrugged their shoulders and looked at the plans and drawings that were spread out upon the table, when, finally, one of them said:

"But, you see, Herr Dernburg, that we have to contend here with the greatest difficulties. The land lies in the most unfavorable of all ways, mountains and valleys alternating along the whole line."

"And the pipes must be secured against all casualties," remarked a second; while the third added:

"The laying of them down will certainly occasion a large expenditure, but as things are now, this cannot be altered."

These three gentlemen, the director and head-manager of the Odensburg works, the superintendent of the technical bureau, and the chief-engineer, were unanimous in their views. This conference was being held in Dernburg's office, where that gentleman usually received the reports of his subordinates, with whom his son also was found to-day. It was a large apartment, quite plainly furnished, but its walls were lined with bookcases. His desk was heaped up with letters and other papers; on the side-tables lay plans and maps of all sorts; and the great portfolios, that were visible in an open press, seemed to contain similar matter. It was evident, that this room was the central point, whence came the guidance of the whole gigantic enterprise,—a spot devoted to never-ending toil and unflagging activity.

"You do not, then, think any other solution possible?" began Dernburg again, as he drew out a paper from a portfolio near by, and spread it out before him. "Please glance at this, gentlemen! Here the course taken is to start from the higher ground, but it penetrates the Buchberg, and then, without further difficulty, is to be conveyed to the works across Radefeld itself—there is the solution sought for."

The officers looked somewhat chagrined, and eagerly bent over the drawing. Evidently none of them had thought of this plan, and yet they did not seem to consider it with any special good-will.

"The Buchberg is to be penetrated, did you say?" asked the director. "A very bold thought, that would assuredly offer great advantages, but I do not deem it feasible."

"Neither do I," chimed in the chief-engineer. "At all events, a searching examination is needed, to ascertain if it is possible. The Buchberg—"

"Is to be mastered," interposed Dernburg. "The preliminary works have already been executed. Runeck established the fact of their possibility, at the outset, when he made the outer measurements, and treats of it expressly in the explanation now lying before us."

"So the plan emanates from him, does it?" asked the superintendent of the technical bureau.

"From Egbert Runeck—he and none other."

"I thought so."

"What do you mean, Herr Winning?" asked Dernburg, quickly turning upon him.

Herr Winning made haste to protest that he had no particular meaning; that the affair only interested him because the young technician was in his own department, immediately under his superintendence: the other two said nothing but cast upon their chief, strange looks of inquiry, which he did not appear to observe.

"I have decided upon adopting Runeck's plan," said he quietly, but, at the same time, with a certain sharpness. "It fulfills all my requirements, and the estimate of expenses amounts to about half of yours. We must consult, of course, over the details, but anyhow, the work is to begin as soon as possible. We'll talk it all over another time, gentlemen."

He rose from his seat, and in so doing gave the signal to disperse, for the officers bowed and took their leave; but in the ante-chamber, however, the director paused, and asked in a whisper:

"What do you say to it?"

"I do not understand Herr Dernburg," answered the chief-engineer, with a voice likewise cautiously lowered. "Is it that he actually does not or *will* not know?"

"Of course he knows it. I myself have given him information on the subject, and the Socialist gentleman himself does not pretend to make any secret of the course he is pursuing; he recklessly admits the stand that he has taken. Should any other man here at Odensburg dare to do the same, he would obtain his dismissal on the spot, but Runeck's discharge seems as yet to be a thing of the dim future. You see his plan has been accepted without any question, while we were plainly given to understand that ours were good for nothing. That surpasses anything that has happened yet—"

"You just wait," interposed Winning calmly. "On that point our chief is not to be trifled with, we all know. At the right time he will speak authoritatively, and, if Runeck does not yield then, it is all up with him, let him be ten times over the young master's bosom-friend and deliverer from death. You may rely upon that!"

"Let us hope so," said the director. "By the way, how poorly Mr. Eric does look still, and how remarkably silent he is. Why, I do not believe he uttered ten words during the whole debate."

"Because he did not understand what we were talking about," explained the chief-engineer, shrugging his shoulders. "They have taken pains enough to drill it into him, but very evidently not much has stuck to him. He has inherited nothing from his father, whether outwardly or inwardly. I must be gone, though, I have to drive out to Radefeld—Good-morning, gentlemen!"

Father and son had been left together by themselves, and the former walked silently up and down the room, evidently quite out of sorts.

In spite of his sixty years Eberhard Dernburg was still in the full vigor of life, and nothing but his gray hair and wrinkled forehead gave any indication that he had already crossed the threshold of old age. His face, with its firm, grave features, told no such story, any more than did his glance, which was keen and clear, and his tall figure was as erect as ever. His address and speech were those of a man accustomed to command, and to receive unfailing obedience, and in his outward appearance there was something that spoke of the sternness attributed to him alike by friend and foe.

It was plainly to be seen now, that his son bore not a shadow of resemblance to the father, but a glance at the half-length portrait that hung over the desk explained this, in some sort. It represented Dernburg's deceased wife, and Eric was speakingly like her. There was the same countenance, with its delicate, meaningless features, the soft, uncertain lineaments, the dreamy, reserved look.

"There sit my deputies with all their wisdom," began Dernburg, finally, in a half-mocking, half-angry tone. "For months they have been pottering over the task, concocting all manner of designs, not one of which was worth anything; and, on the other hand, there is Egbert, without any commission at all, going quietly along, taking the necessary measurements, and studying the situation, until he matures a plan, and lays on the table before me a scheme that is simply masterly! How do you like his sketch, Eric?"

The young man cast an embarrassed look upon the drawing which he still held in his hand.

"You find it excellent, father. I—pardon me—I cannot exactly get a clear idea of its bearings."

"Why, I should think it ought to be clear enough, since you have been pondering over it since yesterday evening. If you require so much time for comprehending a simple plan, for which all the necessary explanations are given, how will you acquire the quick insight into affairs, indispensably necessary for the future owner of the Odensburg works?"

"I have been absent fully a year and a half," said Eric in apology, "and during all that time, the physicians enjoined it upon me to refrain from all exertion, particularly prohibiting any mental strain. You must make allowances, father, and give me time to fit into harness again."

"You have always had to be on your guard against over-exertion, and been restricted in work," said Dernburg with a frown. "On account of your continual sickness, you were never able to pursue any serious study, or engage in anything that required bodily activity. I fixed all my hope upon your return from the South, and now—do not look so disconsolate, Eric! I do not mean to reproach you; it is not your fault, but it is a misfortune in the station to which you are now called."

Eric suppressed a sigh; once more he was feeling this enviable station to be a sorely heavy burden. His father continued impatiently:

"What is to be done, when I shall no longer be here? I have capable subordinates, but they are all dependent upon my guidance. I am accustomed to do everything myself, I never let the reins slip out of my hands, and your hands, I am afraid, will never be strong enough to manage them alone. I have long perceived the necessity of securing you a support for the future—and just at this crisis, Egbert disappoints me by being guilty of the madness of allowing himself to be caught in the net of the socialistic democrats! It is enough to drive one mad!"

He stamped passionately with his foot. Eric looked at his father, with a certain shyness, then said gently:

"Perhaps the matter is not so bad as you have been informed. The director may have exaggerated many a thing."

"Nothing has been exaggerated. My investigations have ratified every word. His period of study in that cursed Berlin has been fatal to the young man. I ought to have taken the alarm, indeed, when he wrote me word, after the first few months of his stay there, that he no longer needed the means which I had placed at his disposal, for he could manage to support himself by giving drawing-lessons and by other work. It must have been hard enough for him, but I liked his pride and independence of spirit, and let him have his way. Now I see more clearly! Those mad ideas were already beginning to seethe in his brain, the first meshes of the net were already woven about him, in which he has since been caught, and he would accept nothing more from me, for he knew that all was at an end between us, if I learned anything about it."

"I have not spoken with him yet, and therefore cannot judge. He is out at Radefeld, I hear."

"He is coming in to-day. I am expecting him before the hour is out."

"And you are going to talk to him on the subject?"

"Of course—it is high time."

"Father, let me implore you not to be hard upon Egbert. Have you forgotten—"

"That he drew you out of the water? No, but he has forgotten that since then he has been almost treated like a son of the house. Do not meddle in this matter, Eric, you do not understand it."

The young man was silent, not daring to oppose his father, who, for the last few minutes, had resumed his pacing of the floor. Now he paused in his walk, and said grumblingly: "I have on my mind all manner of disagreeable things, and lo! here you come, with your love-affairs, and prating about marriage. It was dreadfully precipitate of you to bind yourself without first obtaining my consent."

"I believed myself certain of your approval, and so did Wildenrod, when he promised me his sister's hand. What objection have you to make to my choice, father? The daughter that I am going to present to you is so lovely and sweet. How beautiful she is that picture shows. She is, moreover, rich, from a highly-esteemed family—indeed she belongs to a line of the ancient nobility—"

"I do not attach the slightest consequence to that," brusquely interrupted his father. "No matter how suitable your choice was, it should have been first referred to me; instead of which you even allowed the engagement to be announced at Nice before my answer had arrived. It almost looks as if there was a purpose to obviate any possible opposition on my part."

"But there can be no talk of that! My relations with Cecilia had not been unobserved, it was already the theme of town-talk; and Oscar explained to me that he had to acknowledge the truth, to avoid any misinterpretation of our actions."

"Never mind, it was a piece of unwarrantable presumption. My investigations have certainly proved satisfactory."

"Ah! you have had yourself informed?"

"Of course, since a family connection is at stake. I have certainly not turned to Nice—a mere transient sojourn like that offers no reliable hold—but to the native place of the Wildenrods. Their former possessions are now part of the royal domain, and I got the information I wanted from the court-marshal's office."

"That was superfluous, father," said the young man reproachfully.

"I, however, deemed it needful for your sake," was the dry rejoinder. "There is no doubt but that the Wildenrods belong to the most ancient nobility in the land. The old Baron seems to have lived rather extravagantly, but was universally respected. His estates were sold after his death, and, for a respectable sum were transferred to the king, on condition that the widow might still be allowed a home in the castle. This certainly agrees with the information furnished you by Herr von Wildenrod, a person, by the way, with whom I cannot have the slightest affinity."

"But you do not know him yet. Oscar is an intellectual man, and in many respects a remarkable one."

"That may be, but a man who no sooner succeeds to the paternal inheritance than he makes haste to dispose of the family estates, at as high a price as possible, deserting the service of his fatherland, and roving around in the wide world, without any profession or occupation of any kind,—such a man inspires me with but little respect. This gypsy life on the part of these high-born drones, that wander homeless from place to place, everywhere seeking nothing but their own pleasure, revolts me to my inmost soul. I also regard the Baron as lacking greatly in delicate feeling, when he allows his young sister to share in such a life."

"He loves Cecilia with the greatest tenderness, and she has never had anybody in the world to depend on but him. Should he commit his only sister to the hands of strangers?"

"Perhaps it would have been better. When he deprives a young girl of home and family, he takes the ground from under her feet. However, she would find both here again. You love her, at all events, and if you are really sure that she reciprocates your love—"

"Otherwise would she have plighted her troth to me?" cried Eric. "I have already described to you, father, the extent to which she was idolized and courted, with the whole world at her feet, as it were. She had so many to choose from and chose me!"

"That is just what surprises me," said Dernburg, coolly. "You do not possess one of those shining qualities which girls of her claims and education covet. However, that may be—first of all, I want to get personally acquainted with Fräulein von Wildenrod and her brother. Let us invite them to Odensburg, and we shall see what will come of it. Meanwhile, I entreat that no greater publicity be given to the affair than it has already unfortunately attained."

So saying he left the room, and went into his library, which was immediately adjacent.

## CHAPTER III.

### "See the path is clear To a grand career."

Eric remained alone. He had thrown himself into a chair, and rested his head in his hand. The manner in which his engagement had been taken at home depressed and disenchanted him. He had not thought of the possibility of objections, expecting that his father would hail his selection with joyful approval, instead of which investigations had been entered into, and doubts and scruples suggested. His father actually seemed to entertain serious mistrust, and evidently claimed, even now, the decisive voice. The young man fired up at the thought of his petted, idolized betrothed, and her haughty brother, being first put on probation, as it were, here at Odensburg, ere they should ultimately be admitted into their family. Just here the door was opened, and he started up from his reverie.

"Egbert!" he cried, joyfully springing to his feet, and hurrying to meet a young man, who came in with outstretched hand.

"Welcome home, Eric!"

"Yes, I have been away from it a long while, so long that I am quite a stranger in it," said Eric, returning the pressure of his hand, "and we have not seen one another for an eternity."

"I, too, have been away two years in England, only returning a short time ago. But first of all, how is your health now?"

Egbert Runeck was very little older than the young heir, but he had the appearance of being more mature by some years. His *personnel* made the impression of manly vigor in the highest degree, and his tall figure towered so over Eric's, that the latter had to look up when he spoke to him. His face, tanned by exposure to sun and wind, was anything but handsome, yet there was expression and energy in every feature. His light brown hair and full beard had a slightly reddish hue, and underneath a broad and massive brow shone a pair of dark-gray eyes, that had a peculiarly cold and earnest look. The man wore the air of one who had hitherto tasted only the toils of life, neither knowing nor seeking its pleasures. Moreover, there was something harsh and arrogant in his manner, that, toned down into mildness at this moment, was nevertheless the predominant trait of his whole mien. Such an appearance might be striking—attractive it was not.

"Oh, I am perfectly well again, thank you," said Eric, in answer to the inquiry after his health. "The journey has fatigued me some, of course; I am suffering, too, from the change of climate, but this is a mere passing annoyance."

Egbert's eyes were fastened upon his friend's face, that to-day looked rather pale and pinched, and his voice, too, softened as he replied:

"Certainly, you will have to get accustomed to the North, again."

"If it were only not so hard for me!" sighed Eric. "You do not know what held me fast in the sunny South so long and so irresistibly."

"Why, I guessed the truth easily enough, from those hints in your last letters—or is it to be a secret still?"

A bright, joyous smile flitted across Eric's features, while he gently shook his head.

"Not from you, Egbert. My father does not want it known at Odensburg for the present, but I may say to you, that, under the palms of the Riviera, on the shores of the blue Mediterranean, I have found happiness, such enchanting, fairy-like happiness as I never dreamed of before. If you could only see my Cecilia, with her ravishing beauty, her winning sweetness—Ah! there it is again, that cold, mocking laugh of yours, with which you used always to set at naught any romance, any warmth of feeling, you stern Cato you, who never have known nor ever will know love."

Runeck shrugged his shoulders.

"I have had to devote all my energies to work, from earliest youth, and the romantic seldom forms a large ingredient in such a life as that. The like of us has no time for what you call love."

This reckless remark hurt the feelings of the lover, who said excitedly:

"So, love is in your estimation only a pastime for the idle? You are the same old fellow, Egbert! To be sure, you never did believe in that mysterious, overpowering force, that irresistibly draws two people together, and binds them indissolubly together."

"No!" said Egbert, with an air of cool, almost mocking, superiority. "But do not let us dispute over it. You, with your soft heart, must give and receive love,—for you it is a necessity of life. I am not made for that sort of thing—have had other aims in view from the beginning—such as do not comport with dreamt of love. The name of your betrothed is Cecilia, then?"

"Cecilia von Wildenrod. What is the matter? Do you know the name?"

Runeck had certainly started when the name was pronounced, and the glance that he cast upon the friend of his youth was a peculiarly searching one.

"I believe I have heard it somewhere before," he replied. "The talk there was of a Baron von Wildenrod."

"My future brother-in-law, I suppose," said Eric with unconcern. "He belongs to a well-known family of the ancient nobility. But, first of all, you must see my Cecilia. I have introduced her to father and sister, at least, through her portrait."

He took a rather large likeness that lay on his father's desk, and handed it to his friend. Although the photograph was faithful, it had by no means the charm of the original, but it showed what a beauty she was, and the large, dark eyes looked full at the inspector. Egbert looked down upon it silently, without uttering a word, until meeting the expectant gaze of the girl's lover, he said:

"A very beautiful girl."

The tone in which he spoke these words was peculiarly frigid, and Eric was chilled by it, too. He knew, to be sure, that his old friend was not at all susceptible to the charms of female beauty, but, notwithstanding, he had calculated upon a warmer expression of admiration. They both stood by the desk—Runeck's glance fell accidentally upon a second photograph, that likewise lay there, and again there flitted across his features the same peculiar expression as a while ago, upon the mention of that name, a sudden shiver, that lasted but for an instant.

"And this one, here, I suppose, is the brother of your betrothed?" said he. "It may be seen by the likeness."

"That is Oscar von Wildenrod certainly, but, properly speaking, there is no likeness whatever. Cecilia does not resemble her brother in the least; their features are quite different."

"But the same eyes!" said Egbert slowly, continuing to regard the two pictures fixedly; then he suddenly pushed them from him, and turned away.

"And you have not even a congratulation for me?" asked Eric reproachfully, being mortified at this indifference.

"Pardon me, I forgot it. May you be happy, as happy as you deserve to be! But I must go to your father, who is expecting me, and requires, you know, undeviating punctuality."

He evidently wanted to cut short this interview. Eric, too, remembered now what was impending, and the subject that was to be brought into discussion.

"Father is in his library," he remarked, "and you know he will not be disturbed there. He has summoned you from Radefeld—do you know why?"

"I suspect so, at least. Has he spoken to you about it?"

"Yes, and from him I heard the first word on the subject, Egbert—for heaven's sake, be on your guard. You know my father, and are aware that he will never tolerate such a bent in his works."

"In general he tolerates no other bent than his own," rejoined Egbert coldly. "He never can nor will comprehend, that the boy, who has to thank him for education and culture, has become a man, who presumes to have his own views, and go his own way."

"This way seems to diverge very widely from ours," said Eric sadly. "But you did not give me the slightest intimation of this in your letters."

"Why should I? You had to be spared and guarded against excitement, and you would not have understood me, either, Eric. You have always shunned all the questions and conflicts of the present, while I have confronted them, and, of late years, stood in the very midst of them. If, thereby, a gulf has opened between us, I cannot help it."

"Do not say between *us*, Egbert! We are friends and must remain such, let happen what will. Think you that I have forgotten to whom I owe my life? Yes, I know you do not like to be reminded of it, but it ever abides in my memory—the plunge into the ice-cold flood, the deadly anguish, when the rushing waters overwhelmed me, and then the rescue, when your arm encircled me. I did not make it easy for you; I clutched you so convulsively, that I hardly left you room to move, and put you in extreme peril. Any other would have shaken off the dangerous burden, but you did not let me go, you held me with your mighty strength, and worked your way forward until we reached the blessed shore. That was an heroic deed for a lad of sixteen years."

"It put my powers as a swimmer to a good test, that was all," answered Runeck, declining any claim to merit. "I shook the water from my clothes and was all right again, while the shock and chill brought on you an illness that well-nigh proved fatal."

He broke off, for, just now Dernburg entered with a book in his hand, and responded to the young engineer's greeting as composedly as if there was no agitating subject to be broached between them.

"You enjoy meeting after your long separation, do you not?" asked he. "You see Eric for the first time to-day—how do you find him?"

"He looks rather delicate yet, and will have to be prudent for a while longer, it seems to me," said Runeck, with a glance at his friend's pale face.

"The doctor is of the same opinion. And to-day you do look especially feeble, Eric! Go to your room, and take a good rest."

The young man looked irresolutely from one to the other. He would gladly have stayed, to interpose some soothing word between these two, if the discussion grew too hot; but his father's direction sounded very peremptory, and now Egbert, also, said in a low tone:

"Go, I implore you."

With a sensation of bitterness Eric submitted, feeling that there was something humiliating in the compassionate indulgence, and that it extended further than to his bodily condition. He had never been treated by his father as an equal, capable of independent action, and properly, not by his friend either. Now he was sent away to take his rest, which meant, that they wanted to spare him from being witness to a scene that would almost assuredly be stormy, and he—he, indeed, allowed himself to be thus dismissed, depressingly conscious that his presence would be superfluous and useless!

The other two found themselves alone. Dernburg had seated himself, and again taken in hand the drawings of the Radefeld aqueduct, that he once more proceeded to inspect.

"I have decided upon carrying out your plan. Egbert," said he. "It is the best of all laid before me, and solves all the difficulties in an astonishing manner. I have to consider further on a single point; but, taken as a whole, the plan is excellent, and it is to be carried into effect forthwith. Will you undertake its superintendence? I offer you the appointment."

The young engineer seemed to be surprised; he had probably expected a totally different introduction; unmistakable satisfaction was depicted upon his features, at this recognition, emanating from his chief, who was usually so chary with his praise.

"Very gladly," replied he; "but this much I know, the chief-engineer has the affair already in hand. I was commissioned by him to attend to the outworks."

"But if I now decide differently, the chief-engineer has nothing to do but to submit;" declared Dernburg emphatically. "It depends only upon yourself, whether you shall undertake the execution

of your own plan, and, in this regard, there is certainly another matter to be discussed and cleared up first."

So far he had spoken in a calm, business-like tone, but Egbert was sufficiently prepared; he knew what subject was now to be introduced, and yet he obviously did not shrink. The transient mildness that he had manifested awhile ago in conversation with Eric had long since vanished, and the stolid and determined in his character stood forth undisguised, as he now firmly met the dark looks of his chief.

"I have long since remarked that you had come back a changed man," resumed Dernburg; "in many respects this was to have been expected. You were three years in Berlin, and two in England, where your sphere of observation was broadened; indeed, I sent you out into the world, that you might see and judge for yourself. But now things have come to my ears, concerning which I must apply to you for more exact information. I do not like long circumlocution, so briefly and clearly: is it true that you constantly associate with the socialists in our town, that you publicly own yourself to be one of them, and that you are upon very intimate terms with that Landsfeld, their leader? Yes, or no?"

"Yes," said Egbert simply.

Dernburg did not seem to have expected so reckless a confession. He frowned still more darkly.

"Really! And do you say that so composedly to my face?"

"Am I to deny the truth?"

"And since when have you been a member of that party?"

"For four years."

"The thing started, then, in Berlin: I thought as much. And you have actually allowed yourself to be thus ensnared. To be sure you were very young and inexperienced, but still I would have expected you to be wiser."

One could see that the young man was wounded by the manner in which he was spoken to. Calmly, but with sharper intonation, he replied: "Those are *your* views, Herr Dernburg; I regret that mine differ from them."

"And it is not for me to disturb myself about them, you think," supplemented Dernburg. "There you are mistaken, though. I do concern myself about the political opinions of my employés. But I do not condescend to enter into explanations with them. Whoever does not like Odensburg can quit. I force nobody to stay; but he who does remain has to submit absolutely to its regulations. Either—or! There is no third way here."

"Then I shall be obliged to choose that 'or,'" said Egbert coldly.

"Will it be so easy for you to leave us?"

The young man looked down moodily.

"I am in your debt, Herr Dernburg, I know it—"

"That you are not! If I have given you education and culture, you have saved my Eric for me; but for you I should have lost my only son. So far as that goes, we are quits, if we propose to balance accounts on a purely business basis. If that is what you propose, speak out openly, and we are done with each other."

"You do me injustice," said Runeck, with suppressed emotion. "It is hard enough for me thus to oppose you."

"Well, who forces you to do so? Only those wild ideas, that have run away with you so. Do you think it is an easy thing for me to give you up? Be reasonable, Egbert. It is not your chief who speaks to you—he would have long since cut the matter short! But for years you have been almost a child of my house."

The half-fatherly, half-masterful tone entirely missed its aim. The young engineer, with arrogant self-assertion, raised his head, as he answered:

"I *am* possessed by those 'wild ideas,' and stick to them. There comes a time when the boy becomes of age, and I reached this state when out in the world, and I cannot go back to the

irresponsibility of boyhood. Whatever you demand of the engineer, the official, shall be done to the best of my ability. The blind subjection that you demand of the man, I cannot and *will* not take upon myself. I must have free course in life."

"Which you have not with me?" asked Dernburg in an irritated tone.

"No!" said Egbert firmly. "You are a father to your subordinates so long as they submit themselves unquestioningly, but in Odensburg they recognize only one law—viz., your will. The director yields just as unconditionally as does the lowest laborer; no one has an opinion of his own at your works, or ever will have, so long as you are at the head of things."

"Those are pretty things, to be sure, that you attribute to me," said Dernburg fiercely. "You say, plainly, that I am a tyrant. You, to be sure, have always been allowed to take more liberties than all the rest put together—have done so, candidly, too. You never were passively obedient, nor was such a thing required of you, either, for we'll talk of that later. Free course! There again is one of your catch-words. With you, all is to be down, all, and then you will have free course—to destruction."

He had risen to his feet, and walked to and fro several times, like a person trying to compose himself, then he paused in front of the young man, and said with bitter scorn:

"In spite of your youth, you seem to have quite a significant part to play in your party. They make no secret of setting the greatest hopes upon you, and seeing in you one of their future leaders. Those people are not so stupid as some suppose; they know their men, and with less attractive bait would not have caught you."

"Herr Dernburg!" exclaimed Runeck, "do you believe me capable of low calculation?"

"No, but of ambition!" said the older man coldly. "You may not acknowledge to yourself what has driven you into those ranks, but I will tell you how it is: to be a clever engineer, and gradually work one's way up to be chief-engineer, is an honorable career, but much too modest a one for a man of a disposition like yours. To guide thousands by a word, a nod; to fling forth burning words in the Reichstag, such as the whole country shall hear; to be lifted upon a shield, like a conqueror, that is power, that would charm you. Do not contradict me, Egbert; with my experience I see farther than you do—in ten years let us talk together again!"

Whether the words hit home was not to be decided. Runeck stood there with lowering brow and compressed lips, but replied by not a syllable.

"Well, I suppose my Odensburg will have to do without you, meanwhile," began Dernburg again. "I am master here and suffer no rival rule, whether open or secret; tell that to your party-comrades, if they should not know it already. But what was your idea, when you came back to me with such views? You knew me! Why did you not stay in Berlin, or England, and send your challenge from there?"

Again Egbert made no answer, but this was not the defiant silence of a while ago, in which lay ten contradictions; now his eye sought the ground, and a deep blush slowly mantled his cheeks and brow. Dernburg saw this, and his countenance, just before so dark, brightened up, and there was even a slight smile upon it, as he continued in a milder tone:

"Well, we shall suppose that it was attachment for me and my family. Eric and Maia are as devoted to you as if they were your own brother and sister. Yes, ere you are completely lost to us, you are to know what you resign, and what a future you slight for the sake of your mad schemes."

Runeck gave him a questioning glance; he evidently did not guess whither the words tended.

"You mean—"

"I mean Eric's health, which still costs me constant solicitude. Even if danger to his life has been averted for the present, he has not come back from the south cured. He will always need to be spared exertion, and can never perform the duties of an able-bodied man; moreover, he is of a soft, dependent nature, accessible to influences of all sorts. I cannot conceal from myself the fact that he is not qualified to fill the position that one day will be his, and I want, after my eyes are closed, to be assured of the perpetuity of the enterprise that I have established, and this assurance I can only

have if it is left in powerful hands. Nominally, Eric will be my successor; virtually, it must be some one else—and for this I had calculated upon you, Egbert."

Egbert started, and there was stamped upon his features a surprise that was almost painful.

"On me! I am to—"

"Some day guide the reins at Odenburg, when they shall drop from my hands," said Dernburg, finishing his sentence for him. "Of all that I have reared in my school, only one is of the right stuff for it, and now he will scatter to the winds all my plans for the future. My Maia is still half a child, and I cannot foresee whether her future husband will be fitted for such a position, ardently as I desire it. I am not of the number of those fools who buy for their daughters the title of some count or baron; I care only for the man, no matter what station he occupies, and from what stock he springs, provided that he has secured the affections of my child."

He said all this slowly and with full emphasis.

That was a dazzling promise, which, although unspoken, yet loomed up plainly enough before the young man, and which he comprehended only too well. His lips quivered, impulsively he drew one step nearer, and said with suppressed emotion:

"Herr Dernburg—send me away!"

Now a smile relaxed Dernburg's features, and he laid his hand upon the shoulder of the agitated young man.

"No, my boy, I'll do no such thing. We must both make one more trial at getting along together. First of all, take charge of the Radefeld aqueduct. I'll see that you are left perfectly untrammelled. If we call in all available forces, we can finish by the autumn. Will you take hold?"

Egbert was evidently battling with himself. A few seconds elapsed ere he answered; then he said in a low tone:

"Herr Dernburg, it is a risk—for both of us!"

"Possibly, but I'll adventure it with you, and I think that there is no such haste about your making the people happy, that you cannot ponder the matter for a few months longer. Meanwhile, we declare a truce. And now, go to Eric! I know he is dreadfully anxious as to the result of our conversation, and Maia, too, will be rejoiced to see you again, for you are always out at Radefeld these days. But to-day you are not going to drive out until evening, and must dine with us. Done!"

He held out his hand, and Egbert silently laid his own within it. It was plain to see what an effect the goodness of the usually stern, unyielding man had had upon him, and, more yet, perhaps, the recognition of what he was worth to the man who thus spoke to him. Dernburg had adopted the right remedy, the only one that was of avail here. He required no promise and no sacrifice, both of which would have been rejected, but he showed implicit confidence in his unruly favorite, and in so doing disarmed him.

## CHAPTER IV. ODENSBURG MANOR

The Dernburg iron and steel works had a worldwide reputation, and could compare, indeed, with the greatest undertakings of this sort in the old as well as in the new world.

Odensburg was situated in a wooded valley between mountains, the chief wealth of which consisted in its inexhaustible mines, and, a generation before, the father of the present proprietor had established here a plain foundry and iron factory, that kept growing as the years went by. But it had only assumed its present truly vast proportions under his son, who really created the present works, that were upon an astonishingly vast scale. He had gradually bought in all the mines and forges of the region round about, absorbing also all the labor at command, and giving to his undertakings an expansion that controlled the industrial life of the whole province.

It required, indeed, an unusual amount of energy to devise such an enterprise, and then carry it on to success, but Dernburg was equal to the occasion. He had a whole array of engineers, technicians, and administrative officials; but the director, like the humblest workman, knew that all the reins joined in the master's hand, who decided everything important for himself. This master had the character of being stern and unbending, but likewise just, and if he was conscious of the whole power of his position, he had an equally high idea of its duties.

The accommodations that he provided for his workmen were on a scale commensurate with the other departments of his works, and were everywhere pronounced to be the most excellent conceivable. They were only possible for a man who had millions at his disposal, and was not stingy with his wealth, when the welfare of his subordinates was in question.

But in return for this, Dernburg demanded complete subjection to his will, and planted himself like a rock against the advent of modern ideas, such as that every individual has the right to follow his own convictions. At Odensburg, strikes, rebellion, and conflicts, such as are so common in other industrial establishments, were things unknown. It was well understood that nothing was to be gotten out of the chief by force, and, with their situations, the people well knew they lost certain provision, in the future, for themselves and their families,—thus all those incitements to insubordination, that were not lacking here either, failed to get foothold, and even if they were listened to here and there, came to nothing so far as actions were concerned.

And yet this man, who was the very embodiment of strength, had an only son for whose life he had perpetually to tremble. From his very infancy Eric had been puny and delicate, and that fall into the water, caused by his own imprudence, brought on him a dangerous illness, that lasted for months. He recovered, it is true, but could never again be called a well man, and two years before so significant a symptom as hemorrhage from the lungs had appeared, which necessitated his speedy removal from the harsh climate of home, and a long sojourn in the South.

The peculiar relation in which the youth who had saved Eric's life stood to the Dernburg family, had always been a matter of surprise in the village, and to many of envy as well. Egbert Runeck, the son of a workman employed in the foundry, had passed his early boyhood amid the plainest surroundings, and continued to move in the same sphere as his parents, until nearly grown. If, nevertheless, he learned more than any of his companions of the same age, he had, in the first place, to thank the excellent schools, which Dernburg had established for the children of his employés, and upon which he lavished uncommon care. The rarely endowed boy, with his unflagging diligence, had already, in earlier days, attracted the chief's attention, but after he had saved the life of his only son his future was decided. He shared Eric's lessons, was treated almost as a member of the family, and was finally sent to Berlin for the completion of his education.

The Manor-house lay quite apart from the works, on an eminence that commanded the whole valley. It was an imposing edifice, built in good style, with a broad terrace, long rows of windows, and a great covered piazza in front, the roof of which was supported upon columns. Dotted here and there, over the broad expanse of lawn and park, were monarchs of the forest that had been spared in clearing, the long line of wooded hills in the rear, with their grand old trees, forming an extremely effective background for the picture. It was a fair and stately abode, that might well have merited the name of castle, but Dernburg did not like it at all when they applied that designation to it, and so it was called in the end as in the beginning, "Odensburg Manor."

The family were accustomed to spend the greatest part of the year here, although Dernburg possessed several other estates that were more beautifully situated, and he also had a residence in Berlin. But he never went to the capital, unless his duty as a member of the diet called him there; for the most part, too, he only paid short and flying visits to his other estates. Odensburg needed the master's hand and eye, and was it not the creation of his own brain? Upon this ground he was unlimited ruler; here his will alone held sway; here much could be won or lost; and therefore it had been and continued to be his favorite abode.

There was as little to be found fault with in the family-life of the Dernburgs as in their outward surroundings. He and his gentle, shrinking wife, had been a model married couple, she being in perfect subjection to her domineering husband. Now his only sister, the widowed Frau von Ringstedt took the part of lady of the house. She had lived with her brother for a good many years, and tried to make up to his children for the loss of their mother, who had died young.

It was towards the end of April, but the weather was still cold and uncomfortable. In the South, for two months already Spring had gladdened the earth with her wealth of bloom, but here, at the North, buds and leaves even now hardly dared to burst their sheaths, and a gray, cloud-covered sky spanned the somber, dark green foliage of the fir-trees.

Guests were expected at the Manor to-day. The curtains to the guest-chambers of the upper story were put far back, and the little parlor belonging to that suite of rooms had a festal air. Everywhere bloomed flowers, dispensing their sweet odors around; sweet, bright-hued children of Spring, that to be sure, even now had to be grown in hot-houses, decorated in lavish profusion the room evidently destined for a lady.

Two ladies were in it at this very moment, also. One, the younger, was amusing herself with teasing a little, soft, white Spitz dog, that she incessantly egged on to bark and jump, while the other lady surveyed the parlor with a critical eye, here straightening a chair, there pushing a curtain back, and once more arranging the pretty writing-materials on the desk.

"Must you always have that pug about you, Maia?" said she discontentedly. "He puts everything out of order, and just now came very near dragging off the table the vase of flowers as well as the cloth."

"I did lock him up, but he got out and ran after me," cried Maia. "Down, Puck. You must be good. Miss Friedberg says positively you must."

She laughingly called him, and, at the same time, cut at the little beast, with her pocket handkerchief, that, of course tried to catch hold of the handkerchief with loud barking. Miss Friedberg shuddered nervously and heaved a sigh.

"And do you call these the manners of a grown-up young lady! I felt obliged recently to complain to Herr Dernburg, and tell him that nothing was to be done with you. You will not be anything but the veriest child, and, if possible, exceed Puck himself in playing all manner of monkey-tricks. Tell me, if you ever intend to be earnest and rational?"

"Not for a long while, I hope," declared Maia. "Everything is so horribly earnest and rational at Odensburg already. Papa, aunt, you, Miss Leona, and lately Eric has been intolerable, too, sighing and longing after his lady-love from morning to night. And am I, too, to be made rational? But we

do not like that, do we, Puck? We, at least, want to be merry." And so saying, she seized Puck by the fore-paws, and made him dance on his hind-legs, although he gave unmistakable signs of displeasure.

Maia Dernburg, who objected so emphatically to being rational, was evidently in the first bloom of young girlhood, not being a day over seventeen years of age. She was one of those creatures, at sight of whom the heart bounds, and who gladden the beholder as does bright sunshine. Her lovely face, that bore only a very remote likeness to her brother, beamed in the rosy freshness of youth and health, and her beautiful brown eyes had nothing mysterious about them like Eric's. They shone clear and bright, dimmed by no shadow in the world. Her fair hair, that glistened like gold, when the sun's rays struck it, only confined by a ribbon, fell in rich curls over her shoulders, while a few tiny ringlets, that would not submit to be bound, enhanced greatly the beauty of her brow. Her features were still half child-like, and the delicate, pretty figure had apparently not yet attained its full height; but this very thing gave to the young girl an unspeakable charm.

Miss Leona Friedberg, the governess of the young daughter of the house, who still filled an office that was by no means a sinecure, although, properly speaking, Maia's education was finished, was about five-and-thirty years old, and, although no longer young, had an attractive appearance: a slight, delicate form, with dark hair and eyes and a somewhat languid expression upon the pale but pleasant features. She responded to the rash remark of her pupil with a shrug of the shoulders, and then cast a searching look through the room.

"There, now we are ready! But you have been too extravagant with your flowers; Maia, the perfume is almost intoxicating."

"Oh! a promised bride must have flowers showered upon her! Cecilia is to find her future home beautiful, and flowers are the only things, with which we can welcome her. Papa will not hear of a grand reception taking place."

"Of course, since the betrothal is to be publicly announced first from here."

"And then there is to be a betrothal-party and a grand, grand wedding!" shouted Maia. "Oh! I am so curious to see Eric's betrothed. She must be beautiful, very beautiful. Eric is continually raving over her to me; but he does behave so comically as a love-sick swain. He never has a bright day now, because he is always dreaming of his Cecilia. Sometimes papa gets seriously vexed over it, and yesterday he said to me: 'You will behave more sensibly, my little Maia, when you are engaged, will you not?' Of course I shall: I'll be a model of good sense, I will!"

And to prove this incontestably, she took Puck in her arms, and whirled about the room with him, like a spinning-top.

"Oh yes! that is very likely!" cried Miss Leona, indignantly. "Maia, once more, I beseech you not to behave like a wild tom-boy, when your new connections come. What are the Baroness Wildenrod and her brother to think of your bringing-up, if they see a young lady almost seventeen years old behaving in that wild, hoydenish manner."

Maia, meanwhile, had finished her round dance and let loose her Puck, and now seated herself in a ceremonious manner, before her governess.

"I shall behave so as to satisfy the most fastidious, for I know the points thoroughly. Miss Wilson she tutored me: that English governess, you know, with the sallow face, turned-up nose, and no end of learning—do not look so provoked, Miss Leona, I am not talking about you!—Miss Wilson was really very tiresome, but I learned to curtsy as they do at court from her anyhow, look, so!" She made a low and solemn reverence. "You see I shall make an impression upon my future sister-in-law with my fine manners, and then I shall fall upon her neck and kiss her so and so;" and with this she overwhelmed the unsuspecting lady with impetuous caresses.

"But, Maia, you will choke me to death," cried the horrified lady, freeing herself with some difficulty. "Why, dear me, it is striking twelve already! We must go down. I shall only cast one more glance into the chamber, to see if all there is in order."

She left the parlor, and Maia fluttered down the steps like a butterfly, Puck bounding after her, as a matter of course. The dwelling-rooms of the family were in the lower story; there the large reception hall was likewise decorated, in honor of the expected guests with tall laurel, and orange-trees and the whole flora, of the hot-houses. There stood a young man, who seemed to be waiting for somebody, who, upon seeing the young lady of the house, made a very low and reverential bow. Maia bestowed upon him a casual nod.

"Good-day, Herr Hagenbach. Is the doctor here too?"

"He is, and at your service, Miss Dernburg," answered the person interrogated, with a second bow just as low. "My uncle is with your father, laying before him the week's report of the infirmary, and I—I am waiting here for him—with your most gracious permission."

"Oh, yes, you have my permission," said Maia, highly amused at this overstrained reverence, while Puck eyed, with somewhat critical glances, the stranger whose plaid pantaloons seemed to excite his displeasure.

Herr Hagenbach was a very young man, with exceedingly light hair, and exceedingly pale blue eyes, and a timid, awkward gait. The meeting evidently threw him into great embarrassment, for he reddened and stammered considerably. Nevertheless, he seemed to feel the necessity of showing himself versed in the usages of society, for several times he made the effort to speak in vain, and finally succeeded in getting out the words:

"May—may I venture to ask after your health, Miss Dernburg?"

"I thank you, my health is perfectly good," answered Maia, the corners of whose mouth began to twitch.

"I am exceedingly glad to hear it," asseverated the young man. He had really purposed to say something else, something intellectual, important, but nothing, alas! occurred to him, and so he continued:

"I cannot tell you how delighted I am to hear it, and I hope Madam von Ringstedt is well, too."

Maia, with difficulty suppressed a laugh, while she answered his question in the affirmative. Herr Hagenbach, who was still on his vain chase after the witty remark, meanwhile persisting convulsively in inquiring after the health of every member of the family, then asked for the third time: "And young Herr Dernburg—"

"Has gone to the railroad station," wound up Maia, who could no longer restrain her merriment. "You may be easy as to the condition of my brother, however, and of my father, as well—the whole family thank you for your extraordinary kindness in asking after our health."

Herr Hagenbach's embarrassment increased perceptibly. In his confusion he bowed down before Puck, who was still devoting his attention to the plaid pantaloons, and tried to stroke him, while he remarked: "What a dear little doggie!"

The dear little doggie, however, showed himself very unappreciative of this caress, and darted, with a loud bark, at the legs of the young man who jumped back, but Puck sprang after and stuck his teeth into the gay trousers. The person attacked, who did not dare to drive away the young lady's dog, took refuge behind the tub of flowers, at his heels his pursuer, who now aimed his attack at his legs, while Maia, instead of calling off the dog, was highly amused at the scene.

Fortunately help now came from a different direction. Out of the door leading to Dernburg's apartments, stepped an elderly gentleman, who, without further ceremony, seized the still yelping Spitz by the nape of his woolly neck, and lifted him up, while he said fretfully,

"Why did you not defend yourself, Dagobert? Were you going to let him tear your pantaloons off you? Puck is such an artful little rascal!"

Dagobert, all out of breath, stood under a laurel-tree, looking greatly relieved—and now Maia also came forward.

"Let go the evil-doer, do, Dr. Hagenbach. There would really have been no risk to your nephew's life. In the whole course of the one year of Puck's life he has never torn a single man to pieces."

"It is enough to make a dead-set at pantaloons, especially when they are such magnificent ones as the pair that has just been imperiled," answered Doctor Hagenbach pleasantly, as he set down the tiny, struggling creature. "A good-day to you, Miss Maia! No need to ask after your health, I perceive."

"No, indeed, it has certainly been sufficiently asked after, for one day," protested the young lady, with a saucy look at Dagobert. She took her little dog upon her arm and caused it to make a comical bow.

"Beg pardon, Puck, and promise that you will not do it again. Good-morning, gentlemen, I must go to papa as fast as ever I can." And with a careless salutation she flew off to her father's rooms.

Dr. Hagenbach, the surgeon for the works and Dernburg family-physician, was a man of forty-five or forty-six years, whose hair already began to be tinged with gray here and there, and whose figure tended to rather too much fullness, was, on the whole a fine-looking man, the perfect counterpart of the nephew to whom he now turned.

"You have played the part of a veritable hero, to be sure!" mocked he. "That ungovernable little thing only wanted to play, and you to run away!"

"I did not want to treat the young lady's pet roughly," explained Dagobert, solicitously examining his pantaloons, that fortunately had not been damaged. The uncle silently shrugged his shoulders.

"We shall hardly be able to make the visit to-day to Miss Friedberg," said he then. "As I just learned, they are expecting the party from Nice in about an hour, and the whole house is upset, preparing to receive them. But since we are here, I'll make the attempt, anyhow, to speak with the lady; you meanwhile can be recovering composure, both as to the outward and inner man."

He mounted the stairs, and at the top met the governess, who had just come out of the parlor. Almost daily she saw the doctor, who, for long years, had stood upon a very friendly footing with the Dernburg family, nevertheless, there was a perceptible reserve in her manner as she returned his greeting. Hagenbach seemed not to remark this, he asked lightly after her health, listening in the same way to her answer, and then said:

"I had an especial reason for calling upon you, Miss Friedberg. The time is badly chosen, it is true, for apparently you, too, are engrossed by the coming reception of the expected guests, but my request can be made in a few minutes, so permit me to lay it before you, just as we stand."

"You have a request to make of me?" asked Leona, with cool surprise. "Actually?"

"You think I can do nothing but give orders and write prescriptions, I suppose. Yes, Miss Friedberg, it is the physician's right, he must preserve his authority under all circumstances, especially when he has to do with so-called *nervous* patients."

He emphasized the word, in a way that evidently provoked his hearer, for she replied tartly:

"Why, I believe your authority remains undisputed, security is given for that by your very considerate manner of ensuring obedience."

"Even as—I know patients upon whom all love's labors are lost," replied Hagenbach composedly. "But—now to the errand that brought me here. You know my nephew, who has been three weeks at Odensburg?"

"Yes, indeed, your brother's son. The young man has no longer any parents?"

"No, he is a double orphan, and I am his guardian, having, indeed, to charge myself entirely with his future, for his parents were so unmindful of their duty as not to leave him a single penny. They thought very likely that I, as a confirmed old bachelor, might need an heir."

Leona's countenance plainly betrayed that she thought this mode of expressing himself very indelicate; the doctor saw this, too, but disturbed himself not in the least about it, but continued in the same tone:

"Dagobert has gone through the gymnasium, and also passed the examination for admission to college, with much groaning, to be sure, for he is not a specially clear-headed fellow. Now he looks

wretchedly from sitting so steadily at his books and drudging. Only think, the fellow is nervous, too, or at least fancies himself to be so, therefore I have undertaken to cure him. I'll teach him to forget that he has nerves."

"Then I only hope the young man will survive the cure," said the lady sharply. "You love heroic measures, doctor?"

"When they are in place, certainly. As for the rest I shall not put an end to my nephew, as you seem to fear. He is to spend the summer over here and take a good rest ere he enters the high school. If the fellow has nothing at all to do, he will fall into folly of various kinds, so he may as well learn a little about languages, modern languages I mean. They have drilled him sufficiently in Latin and Greek, but he seems to know very little French and English, and so I wanted to inquire if you would give him a little help in this, you speak both fluently, I hear."

"If Mr. Dernburg has no objection—"

"Mr. Dernburg is agreed. I have just spoken with him on the subject—the only question is, whether you are willing. I know, indeed, that I am not much in your favor—"

"Pray do not go on, doctor," coolly interposed the lady. "I am very glad that you give me an opportunity to prove my gratitude for the medical advice that you have given me several times."

"Yes, in your 'nervous' attacks. Very well, the matter's settled. Dagobert, boy, where are you hiding? Come up!" He shouted these last words down the steps in a very peremptory tone.

Leona fairly shrank and said disapprovingly: "You treat the young man exactly as if he were a schoolboy."

"Am I to put on more than usual ceremony with the youth? He would evidently like to take the part of a man in society—and at the same time he blushes and stammers as soon as he addresses a stranger. Well, there you are, Dagobert! This lady is going to have the goodness to take you as a pupil. Return your thanks!"

Again Dagobert made an uncommonly low and reverential bow—he seemed to have made a regular study of it—again blushed and began:

"I am very grateful to the lady—I am perfectly delighted—I cannot begin to say, how glad I am—" There he stuck fast, but Leona came to the help of his embarrassment, and turned to him kindly:

"I am not going to be a strict teacher, and I think we shall get on nicely together, Herr Hagenbach."

"Call him simply 'Dagobert,'" interrupted the doctor in his reckless way. "He has such an odd name though."

"Have you any objection to make to his name. I think it very pretty."

"I am not at all of that way of thinking," declared Hagenbach, without observing the deeply injured mien of his nephew. "By rights, he should have been named Peter, for that is my name, and I am his godfather. But that was not poetical enough for my sister-in-law, and so she fell upon Dagobert. Dagobert Hagenbach—there is a jaw-breaker for you!"

A smile, unmistakably derisive, played about Leona's lips, as she replied: "In that case your sister-in-law was undoubtedly right. The name Peter has not only poetry opposed to it."

"What objection have you to make to it?" cried the doctor irritably, while he straightened himself up, ready for combat. "Peter is a good name, a famous name, a Bible name. I should think the Apostle Peter would have been a fine enough man."

"But, you have only the quarrelsomeness of the Apostle—nothing else," remarked Leona cheerfully. "So, Herr Hagenbach, I shall look for you to-morrow afternoon, when we shall settle upon the time and plan of instruction. It will give me pleasure to push you forward as much as possible."

The shy Dagobert seemed very agreeably touched by this friendliness, and had just begun again to assure her that he was extremely glad, etc., when his uncle interposed, in a highly ungracious mood:

"We have detained the lady long enough. Come, Dagobert, else we'll be caught, and figure as unbidden guests at the family reunion."

So saying, he and his nephew took their leave. As they went downstairs the latter adventured the remark: "Fräulein Friedberg is a very amiable lady."

"But nervous and eccentric," growled Hagenbach. "Cannot bear the name Peter. Why not, I wonder? Had your lamented parents baptized you Peter, you would have been another sort of a fellow! But so, you look like a girl with the green-sickness, that was dubbed Dagobert by mistake!"

He placed a very contemptuous emphasis upon the name. Meanwhile, they had left the house, and now emerged upon the terrace, where they met Egbert Runeck. The doctor was for passing him by with a short, very formal salutation, but the young engineer stood still and said:

"I have just been to your house, doctor, to solicit your help. One of my workmen, through heedlessness, has come by a hurt. It is not dangerous, so far as I can judge, but medical aid is necessary. I have brought him to Odenburg and left him in the hospital. Let me commend him to your particular attention."

"I shall see after him immediately," replied Hagenbach. "Are you on your way to the Manor, Herr Runeck? They are just now expecting the party from Nice, and Herr Dernburg will hardly—"

"I know," interposed Runeck. "It was on that very account that I came in from Radefeld. Good-morning, doctor!" He bowed and went on his way. Hagenbach looked after him, then struck his cane hard upon the ground, and said in a low tone:

"That is going it strong!"

"Did you notice, uncle, that he wore a dress-suit under his overcoat," remarked Dagobert. "He is specially invited."

"It would really seem so!" ejaculated the doctor wrathfully. "Invited too, to this reception, which was to be strictly confined to the limits of the family circle.—Strange things happen at Odenburg!"

"And all Odenburg is talking about it too," said Dagobert, under his breath, looking cautiously around. "There is only one voice of fault-finding and regret over this incredible weakness of Herr Dernburg, for—"

"What do you know about it, saucebox?" continued the doctor. "At Odenburg nobody either finds fault with the chief or presumes to regret what he does—they simply obey him. Herr Dernburg always knows what he is about, and is not going to make any mistake in this case, either, unless his *protégé* should, perchance, disappoint him. He too is one bent on having his own way, like his lord and master, and when steel and stone meet there are sparks. But, now, make haste and get home, for I must be seeing after the Radefeld workman."

So saying, he took the path to the infirmary, and dismissed his nephew, who was evidently rejoiced to be rid of his tyrannical uncle.

## CHAPTER V. A VICTORY WON

Runeck had gone into the house and there met Miss Friedberg, who was just coming downstairs. Here, too, his salutation was not exactly received with cordiality, and the young lady drew three steps back and cast a pleading look around, which, in response, brought a somewhat derisive smile to the lips of the young engineer, as, with the greatest possible politeness, he inquired whether Herr Dernburg was in his office.

The lady was saved an answer, for, at that instant the door opened and Dernburg himself appeared with his daughter, who immediately came forward to meet Runeck and greeted him with the most unaffected cordiality.

"Is that you at last, Egbert? We thought you would miss the reception, we are expecting the carriage every minute."

"I was detained by an accident," answered Egbert, "and moreover had to drive very slowly, since I had a wounded man with me, else I should have been here long ago."

He stepped up to Dernburg and reported the case to him; while Miss Friedberg, who had looked on with real horror at Maia's friendliness with the engineer, now whispered to her pupil:

"But, Maia, what unbecoming familiarity—you are no longer a child now! How often have I implored you to remember your years and your position. Must I really have to appeal to your father's authority?"

Maia paid no heed to this lecture, not the first one which had been delivered to her on this subject, but waited impatiently until Runeck had gotten through with his report. Dernburg had himself accurately informed as to the nature of the hurt, and seemed satisfied when he heard that it was not dangerous, and that the surgeon had already been called in; finally he let Egbert off, who now turned to the young girl.

"You hear, Miss Maia, it was not my fault that I am late, so you must not be angry with me for it."

"I am very angry with you, though, for insisting upon calling me 'Miss,' as long as we have lived in the same house!" cried Maia, seeming to be highly wrought up. "I'll not stand it, Egbert, do you hear, I will not, indeed."

She stamped her little foot and pouted charmingly, while her governess darted a shocked glance at the master of the house. It was high time for him to interpose his authority, since hers had failed so ignominiously. But Dernburg appeared not at all to share her sentiments, for he said with perfect composure:

"Well, if Maia insists upon it, you must let her have her way, Egbert! You are one of our family, you know."

Miss Friedberg did not trust her own ears—the permission of such a liberty appeared so monstrous to her, that she gathered up her forces for resistance.

"Herr Dernburg, I think—"

"What, Miss Friedberg?"

His question was only a short one, spoken quite composedly, but the governess instantly lost her desire to continue her opposition.

"I think that we had better station a servant on the terrace to let us know the moment the young gentleman's carriage comes in sight."

"You are right, pray give orders to that effect," said Dernburg: "but I think we had better go in now, for Eric may be belated likewise."

He moved towards the parlor, Maia with him, but she archly looked back over her shoulder.

"You have heard your orders, Master Engineer Runeck, and you are to obey on the spot, I tell you!"

There was such a pretty playfulness in her tone and gesture, that even the grave Egbert was thawed by it, and answered with pleasant raillery.

Maia was as full of glee as a child over this victory, that put so effectually to flight the shy reserve of this friend of her youth, and Dernburg smiled at it. There was an expression of tenderness rarely seen upon his stern features, as he looked upon the bright and lovely creature at his side. It was plain to see that Maia was his favorite, and that she was closer to his heart than her brother.

The patience of the expectant group was not put to too severe a test, for they had hardly waited a quarter of an hour, before the announcement was made that the carriage was in sight, and the grand folding-doors of the entrance hall were flung wide open. There stood Dernburg with his sister, a dignified old lady rather stiff in her bearing, Maia at their side, all joy and expectation, while Egbert and the governess stayed back in the house.

Now the carriage approached, a half-covered landau drawn by a magnificent pair of bays, and halted in front of the terrace. The servant opened the carriage-door. Eric was the first to jump out and help his betrothed to alight, while behind them the tall form of the Baron became visible.

Dernburg had taken one step forward and stood erect on the threshold of his house. His demeanor betrayed all the pride of the commoner about to receive the youthful representative of a long line of noble ancestry, all the self-satisfaction of a man who has climbed aloft through the exertion of his individual force. It was he, who did an honor to the Baroness Wildenrod, when he received her into the bosom of his family.

Cecilia bowed lightly, with the grace peculiar to her, when Eric presented her to his father. She had thrown back her veil and now lifted her eyes to that stern countenance, which, however, had no terrors for her. She knew too well the witchery of her own presence, and here too it failed not of its effect. Youth and beauty make easy conquest of even cold and critical age. To be sure Dernburg's glance for a few seconds, scrutinized her features keenly and questioningly, but then he stooped down and kissed her brow.

"Welcome to my house, my dear," said he, earnestly, but kindly.

Eric secretly drew a breath of relief. With those words his father's opposition was given up. Cecilia had been received and recognized by him as a daughter: here, too, she had conquered by her mere appearance! He recognized this with joyful pride.

Frau von Ringstedt followed her brother's example and welcomed the young Baroness with simple cordiality. Wildenrod, meanwhile, exchanged greetings with the master of the house, while Maia was wholly taken up with admiration of her beautiful sister that was to be. She forgot entirely the courtesy, that she had practiced so dutifully, and, instead, impetuously threw her arms around her neck, with the exclamation:

"Oh, Cecilia, I never imagined that you were so beautiful!"

Cecilia smiled, accustomed as she was to compliments and flattery of all sorts, nevertheless, this artless, childish confession delighted her, and with a gush of real tenderness she kissed "that sweet little Maia," of whom she had heard Eric talk so much.

"You have showered so many kind attentions upon my sister, dear young lady," suddenly said a deep but sonorous voice, "that I indulge the hope that I too may obtain a friendly greeting."

Maia turned around and looked into a pair of deep, dark eyes, that rested upon her countenance, with an expression that affected her strangely, almost painfully, and yet she felt that there was admiration written there. Yet she shrank from that gaze with a slight shudder, something like a bodeful feeling of dread taking hold upon her, and her voice had not its usual joyous, saucy sound, when she replied, half interrogatively:

"Herr von Wildenrod?"

"Yes, it is Oscar von Wildenrod, who begs to be allowed to shake hands with the young lady of the house."

There was some reproof implied in these words. It was very true that Maia had not yet offered her hand to this man, who was soon to be a connection of the family, but now she extended it with hesitation, and a timidity that was something entirely new to her. Wildenrod stooped down and pressed his lips to it. This was but a common piece of courtesy, and yet the young girl trembled at the contact, while her eyes were spell-bound at the same time, by that gaze which seemed to exercise a mysterious charm upon her.

Dernburg now offered his arm to the young Baroness, to escort her in, the Baron stepped up to Frau von Ringstedt, while Maia, with a quick movement, took her brother's arm. Eric was in the happiest of moods, and pressed gratefully and tenderly the hand of the sister, who had received his betrothed with so much affection.

"Does Cecilia please you, then?" he asked. "Have I told you too much about her?"

"Oh, no, she is far, far prettier than her picture. She is just my idea of the princess in a fairy tale."

"And what do you think of my future brother-in-law? A chivalrous looking fellow, is he not, although he is far from being young?"

"I do not know," said Maia, slowly and reflectively. "He has such singular eyes—so deep and dark—almost evil-looking."

"Little simpleton, I verily believe you are afraid of him," laughed Eric. "That does not look like our high-spirited little Maia, and Oscar will not be much edified by this first impression of his character. But you must get better acquainted with him first; he is excellent company, and a really brilliant conversationalist."

Maia did not answer forthwith. Afraid? Why, yes, what she had felt was very like fear, but she was already very much ashamed of this childish feeling, and darted an extremely ungracious look at the Baron, who was walking just in front of her with her aunt. All her audacity came back to her, and tossing her head she called out, laughingly:

"Oh, I shall have to learn what the sensation of fear is, like the hero in the fairy tale."

\* \* \* \* \*

The weather, that had looked threatening in the forenoon, had now become much worse. The mountains were veiled in thick fog, from time to time showers of rain fell, and the wind howled in the trees of the park.

It was so much the more comfortable in the large parlor of the Manor-house, a vast room with lofty ceiling, richly draped and upholstered in dark crimson, with carved oak furniture, and a huge fireplace faced with black marble. The colors might have been regarded as rather dark, but through the wide glass doors that opened upon the terrace, broad light streamed in. Only a few, but choice, pictures adorned the walls, and some family portraits. In the fireplace burned a bright fire and the whole room gave the impression of solid wealth and perfect comfort.

They had just risen from table and the younger members of the family seated themselves by the fireside and engaged in lively chat: Frau von Ringstedt sat upon a sofa in the corner with Miss Friedberg, and the master of the house was absorbed in serious conversation with Oscar von Wildenrod. They were talking of the Odensburg works, in which the Baron showed not only an uncommon interest, but his questions and remarks also demonstrated, that he was by no means so little versed in such matters as Dernburg had imagined, and he had just said:

"I had no idea, that you were so familiar with all these things, Herr von Wildenrod. Such work as ours generally has no charm outside of the profession. But you seem to be well acquainted with all its bearings."

"I have read a great deal about it," lightly answered Wildenrod. "One who, like myself, has no regular profession undertakes little private studies, and I have always had a fancy for mining and the manufactory of iron. My knowledge, to be sure, represents only the superficial observations of an amateur. Perhaps you will allow me to perfect them here, in some degree?"

"It will give me pleasure to act as your guide myself, in this pursuit," said Dernburg warmly. "In your ride, you only touched upon a small section of the works, but from the terrace, here, one has quite a comprehensive view of the whole."

He opened one of the glass doors and stepped out with his guest. The mist had not yet disappeared, but the works that stretched along as far as to the foot of the mountain-chain, and the teaming life astir there that pressed up to the very Manor itself, lost nothing of its grandeur on that account, which might have struck a stranger as well-nigh overpowering. It did seem to have made this impression upon the Baron too, for his eyes turned slowly from one end of the valley to the other, while he remarked:

"A mighty creation is this Odensburg! Why, you have caused to spring up here a regular city, in the solitude of mountains and forests. Those huge buildings there that tower aloft in the center, are—"

"Those are the cylinders and foundries; yonder, farther on, are the forges."

"And those grounds to the right, that look almost like a colony of villas?"

"Those are the residences of our officers; the workmen's homes lie on the other side. To be sure I have only been able to accommodate the very smallest number in Odensburg, the most of them living about in the adjoining villages."

"I know, Eric showed me as we rode along. How many workmen, exactly, do you employ, Herr Dernburg?"

"Nine thousand here in the works: the mines up in the mountains have their own force of laborers, and their own officers."

Wildenrod looked at the man, who, with such perfect composure and evidently through no impulse of vanity, unfolded before him the description of a power and wealth that would have made any other man dizzy. Each one of those mines and furnaces, that he mentioned so casually, represented a fortune: of his other estates, that ranked among the richest in the province, he spoke not at all. And moreover, there was not the slightest trace of boasting in his words, he simply gave information asked for, nothing further. The Baron leaned against the stone parapet and looked out again, then he said slowly:

"I had already heard a great deal of your Odensburg from Eric and others, but to form a conception of the magnificence of the scale upon which the enterprise is planned one must see it with his own eyes. It must be an intoxicating feeling to know one's self to be the absolute ruler of such a world, and to be able to put ten thousand men in motion by a single word."

"It took me thirty years to reach that point," answered Dernburg coolly. "He who has had to battle for every victory won, and mount upward step by step, is not the one to be intoxicated by success. There is many a heavy burden to bear, too, which you, Herr von Wildenrod would hardly take upon yourself. The management of the property inherited from your father was a load that you shook off."

There was a certain asperity in these last words, that was understood, too, but Wildenrod evinced no sensitiveness, he quietly answered:

"You mean to reproach me for the course I took Herr Dernburg—"

"Not so; what right would I have to do such a thing? Every man's life cannot be shaped after the same model. The one seeks his happiness in work, the other—"

"In idling, do you think?"

"In the enjoyments of life, I wanted to say."

"Nevertheless I expressed your thought, and alas! I must own that you are right. But I never was attracted by activity on any but a large scale, and my inheritance was no vast estate adequate to bring

this impulse into play. I could not bear to bury myself in barren monotony of every-day country life, in the wearisome round of a management that any good overseer could conduct as well as myself. I was not made for that sort of thing."

"Why, then, did you not stay in the diplomatic service?" remarked Dernburg. "Certainly there was a field commensurate with the widest ambition."

It was an expression of unspeakable bitterness that curled Wildenrod's lips at this question, to be sure only for a second, when he quietly replied:

"Personal considerations were to blame. I had had disagreements with the chief of the bureau, believed myself slighted and overlooked, hence rashly broke my supposed chains, in a fit of sensitiveness. I was still young at that time, and the wide world with its dreams of a golden future, attracted me irresistibly—how the prospect changes, with the lapse of time! I have long since felt that my life lacked serious purpose and will feel this yet more sensibly after Cecilia leaves me. Deep dissatisfaction results from leading such an existence."

"For which you have to bear the sole responsibility, yourself," said Dernburg gravely. "You are still in the enjoyment of a full manly vigor, you have an independent fortune—Only come to a resolve."

"Quite right, a resolve is what is needed, and yet that is precisely what I have not been able to make up my mind to. To me toil and industry ever presented themselves under the image of what was small and wearisome. Here, in sight of your Odenburg, I comprehend for the first time, what a power lies in it, and what incredible results it can achieve. That could stir me up too, engage my every power, I admit. Will you kindly afford 'the idler,' Herr Dernburg, a deeper insight into your world of work? Perhaps he may yet profit by the lesson."

There was something uncommonly winning in this request and the whole manner of the Baron, and Dernburg was very agreeably impressed by this candor. His hitherto rather cool civility gave way now to a warmer tone, as he answered:

"I shall be delighted if Odenburg gives you such lessons. I indeed have had to plow my way through all the pettiness and weariness of routine. If I had not bestirred head and arms, probably the simple forge bequeathed me by my father, would still be standing here—but then, everybody need not handle a spade with one's own hands. If everybody only does something, and fills the place allotted him in life that is the main thing after all."

## CHAPTER VI.

### TO WHICH MORE THAN ONE CHARMER CHARMS

In the parlors, meanwhile, Cecilia formed the center of the group drawn up around the fireplace. She could be very amiable when she pleased, and her young sister-in-law was perfectly enchanted by her, while Eric who, to-day in general, had neither eyes nor ears for any one but his betrothed, hardly stirred from her side. Only Egbert Runeck took no part in the conversation. He looked out upon the terrace where those two gentlemen were engaged in such lively conversation, and then again his eyes rested upon the young Baroness; but in doing so his brow contracted almost threateningly.

"No, Eric, you need not try to persuade me that there ever is any spring here in your fatherland," exclaimed Cecilia laughing. "On the Riviera flowers have been blooming and diffusing sweet odors for months past; but since we have crossed the Alps, we have had nothing but storms and cold. And now, to crown all, this ride to Odensburg! Everywhere wintry wastes, nothing but the melancholy green of these everlasting fir-forests, besides mist and clouds and, for a change, sleety rain! Dear me! how I freeze in your cold, gray Germany."

She shivered, every movement she made, somehow adding charms to her naïve beauty, and then turned to the fire:

"In your Germany?" repeated Eric with tender reproach in his tone. "But, Cecilia, it is your Germany as well!"

"Of course it is, but I always have to put myself in mind, before I can realize that I am actually a child of this hateful North, where I am such a total stranger. I was hardly eight years old, when my father died, and two years later I lost my mother also. Then I was carried first to relations in Austria, and later to Lausanne, where I went to boarding-school. When I grew up, Oscar took me away, and since then we have lived mostly in the South. At Rome and Naples, the Riviera and Florence, in Switzerland, too, we have been a few times, and once in France. But Germany we have never come near!"

"Poor Cecilia! so you have never had a home!" cried Maia, compassionately.

Cecilia looked at her in great astonishment; such a life of vanity as she had led, continually changing both her society and surroundings seemed to her the only enviable one.

Home! That was quite a novel idea to her. Her eyes took a hasty survey of the parlor where they sat—yes, indeed, it wore an entirely different air from the gay and yet commonplace hotel-apartments, in which she had been living for years.

Those rich dark tapestries and curtains, that oaken furniture, every piece of which had an artistic value—the family portraits on the walls, and above all the breath of comfort that pervaded the whole! But, on the other hand, all this appeared so somber and dark, in the light of this gray, rainy day—as grave as all the people here, with the solitary exception of Maia—and the spoilt child of the world inwardly shuddered at the thought of her bridegroom's "home."

"Do you really and truly spend the largest part of the year here at Odensburg?" asked she. "It must be very monotonous. You have such a handsome residence in Berlin, as Eric has told me, and you hardly spend two months in the winter there. I do not understand it."

"My father think he has no time to move around the world," said Maia, in a wholly unembarrassed manner—"and I have only been a few times to the Baths with my aunt and governess. I like it here at Odensburg."

"Maia has not been introduced into society yet," explained Eric. "She is to come out next winter, for the first time, for she has completed her seventeenth year. Until now little sister has always had to stay up in the nursery, even when we had a large reception at home; and as to city life, she knows nothing of it whatever."

"I went into society when I was sixteen," remarked Cecilia. "Poor Maia, to think of their keeping you waiting so long—it is incomprehensible?"

The young girl laughed merrily at being the object of such genuine commiseration.

"Oh, I do not consider that as such a great misfortune, for then I must 'behave' myself as Miss Friedberg calls it, must be so dreadfully prim and staid, and no longer dance around with Puck—why, Puck! I do believe you have gone to sleep in broad daylight! Are you not ashamed? Will you wake up, I say!"

Therewith she rushed to one corner of the parlor, where Puck, greatly discontented at so little attention being paid him to-day, lay on a footstool, having yielded himself to the sweetest of slumbers. Cecilia's lip curled.

"Maia is nothing but a child, sure enough!" said she in an aside to Eric. "Well, Oscar, has the rain driven you in?"

"Yes, indeed," answered Wildenrod who had just come in. "We have been inspecting Odensburg, for the present, only from the terrace, but, Eric, your father has promised to introduce me into his realm within the next few days."

"Certainly, and Cecilia must get acquainted with it too," chimed in Eric. "Then we'll drive out, some day, to Radefeld, too, where the Buchberg is being tunneled." "Egbert," said he, turning to that young man, who had sat by, a silent listener, "you observe that we are inviting ourselves to pay you a visit some day."

"I am only afraid that our works will not interest Herr von Wildenrod," answered Egbert. "Externally they have very little of interest to show, and, as for the rest, we have not come to the tunneling yet."

Wildenrod turned to the young engineer, who had of course been presented to him upon his arrival. He knew through Eric that this friend of his youth occupied an anomalous position, but his presence here upon occasion of this exclusively family-party surprised him none the less, and he knew too how to give expression to this surprise. Through all the politeness, with which he treated Runeck, there was ever clearly transparent in his eyes the question: "What business have you here?"

"You sketched the plan for these works, did you not, Herr Runeck?" he asked. "Eric has spoken to me about it, and I am glad to make the acquaintance of so clever an engineer."

The words sounded very obliging, but the "engineer" was emphasized and thereby the barrier raised that separated the son of the worker in iron from the family of the millionaire, however much they might see fit to ignore this at Odensburg. Egbert bowed just as obligingly, while he replied:

"I have already had the pleasure of making your acquaintance, Herr von Wildenrod."

"Mine? I do not remember that we ever met before."

"That is comprehensible, for it took place at a large party—three years ago in Berlin—at the house of Frau von Sarewski."

The Baron pricked up his ears, and fixed his keen eyes searchingly upon the young engineer, but at the same time a mocking smile played about his lips.

"And so you saw me there? Really, I would not have expected you to move in such circles."

"Nor do I, in fact. It was an exceptional case, and I was not there as a guest, either. Perhaps you may remember the circumstance if I recall the day to your mind—it was the twentieth of September."

The hand which rested on the back of Cecilia's chair trembled slightly, and at the same time there flashed from Wildenrod's eyes a glance of suspicion, that was threatening as well, but it produced no effect upon the perfectly unmoved features of Runeck. It lasted, indeed, only a second; then the Baron said carelessly:

"You really expect too much of my memory. I have really been introduced to so many people traveling about as much as I have done these last ten years, that I no longer distinguish individuals. What circumstance do you allude to?"

He spoke with perfect composure, not the slightest change being perceptible in his features, although those dark gray eyes of his were fastened fixedly upon Runeck, with an expression of threatening determination.

"If you have forgotten it, sir, it is hardly worth while to recur to it," said Egbert coolly. "But your features and individuality impressed themselves upon me in a manner that I have never forgotten."

"Very flattering to me!" Wildenrod bowed haughtily to the young engineer, and then turned his back upon him. He proceeded to the other end of the parlor, where Maia was tugging at the white coat of her pet, that had by no means taken in good part being suddenly disturbed in its siesta.

The game was at an end, though, when the Baron came up, and Fräulein Maia drew herself up, in a way that said plainly she was ready for battle, for she felt the urgent necessity for having an act of oblivion cast over her former childish timidity. No opportunity for this had been given at dinner because Frau von Ringstedt had absorbed the entire attention of the new family connection who was seated beside her: but now he was to see that nobody was in the least afraid of him; now she was fully determined to let him see that she could hold her own.

Alas! Oscar Wildenrod paid no attention whatever to this warlike mood, he began, in all innocence, to tease, first the little dog, and then its mistress, and, without any embarrassment whatever, took a place at her side.

Then he began to chat of all imaginable things, in a half playful, but uncommonly fascinating manner, that was quite new to the young girl. He quietly took it for granted that the connection which was so soon to exist between their families justified him in approaching her with the freedom of a relation, and he gently and naturally asserted this claim, and finally set himself seriously to work to gain Puck's friendship, and was fully successful in the effort.

All this was not without its influence upon Maia, who gradually gave up standing on the defensive, and became more sociable. She, too, began to talk now and tell about all sorts of things. The conversation was in full swing, when Wildenrod suddenly asked, quite irrelevantly:

"So, you are no longer afraid of me?"

"I?" The young lady was disposed to contradict what was said indignantly, and yet could not hinder the hot blood from mounting to her cheeks.

"Yes, you, Fräulein Dernburg! I plainly saw it when we exchanged our first greeting—or will you deny what I say?"

The blush upon Maia's face grew still deeper. He had only seen too clearly, but she was annoyed at this inconvenient sharp-sightedness on his part, and thought it very inconsiderate in him thus to take her to task.

"You are only making sport of me, Herr von Wildenrod!" said she indignantly.

He smiled, and it was remarkable what an improvement it wrought in his face. That dark fold between his eyes seemed to smooth down, all the sharp, stern lineaments softened, and his voice, too, sounded strangely soft, as he replied:

"Do I really look as if I would make sport of you? Can you really believe it?"

Maia looked up at him. No, those eyes were not mocking, at least not now, but again they exerted the same spell over her as they had done awhile ago, and she was helpless to resist it—and there again was that inexplicably oppressive sensation. No answer occurred to the young girl, and she only gently shook her head.

"No?" asked Wildenrod. "Well then, prove to me that the guest who has arrived to-day does not inspire you with fear by gratifying me in a request—will you?"

"I must first know what your request is," said Maia, taken captive, and with a vain attempt at resuming her old petulant tone. Wildenrod stooped down to her, and his voice sank into a low whisper.

"Everybody here calls you Maia, everybody in this circle has the right to address you simply by your name, which is the prettiest one in the world. Even that Herr Runeck has been granted that

privilege—only I am left out in the cold. I am not so bold as to claim the same right as Cecilia, who uses the sisterly 'thee' when addressing you, but—may I, too, call you Maia?"

He had taken her hand, as though accidentally. His request was neither so very presumptuous nor so unusual, the elderly man might certainly be allowed this freedom in addressing a girl of seventeen, of whose brother he was soon to be the brother-in-law—nevertheless, Maia delayed her answer, delayed so long, that he asked reproachfully:

"Do you refuse me?"

"Oh, no, certainly not, you are Cecilia's brother, Herr von Wildenrod."

"Yes, indeed, and Cecilia's brother has another name, which he would also like to hear called by you, Maia,—my name is Oscar."

No answer followed, but the little hand quivered within his grasp and tried to free itself, but in vain, he held it fast.

"You will not?"

"I—I cannot!" There was an almost agonized repulse in these words. Oscar smiled again.

With a gentle pressure he released her hand. Maia! How strangely he pronounced the name, it was a sound that penetrated the young girl with a feeling never experienced before, at once sweet and torturing, but she breathed deeply, as though relieved, when Eric approached and said playfully:

"I do believe, Oscar, you are slyly paying court to our little Maia."

"For the present I am only paving my way to the intimacy of future relationship," was the cheerful reply. "Maia has just given me leave to give up addressing her formally as Miss Dernburg. You have no objection, I hope."

"Not the least," said Eric, laughing. "You will play the part of uncle to our little girl, with great dignity, I fancy. Only see to it that you treat her with all due deference!"

A singular expression flitted across Oscar's features at this harmless conception, but he made no response to it. Maia had not heard this last remark, for she had hurried to her father, who had joined the two older ladies. With an almost impetuous movement, she cuddled up to him, as though she sought shelter in his arms, shelter from some unknown peril, that still lay far away in the dim distance, and which, nevertheless, cast a shadow athwart the glowing present.

Cecilia still sat by the fireside, and Runeck, too, had not left his place—the "stony guest," as Cecilia had awhile ago styled him in a whisper to her betrothed. Egbert's silence had indeed been striking, at least to Eric and Maia, Baron Wildenrod thought it natural enough under the circumstances. The young man evidently felt out of place in the circle, to which he did not belong of right, and the favor evinced him by this invitation evidently oppressed more than it gratified him. Cecilia fully shared her brother's sentiments on this point, and, like him, up to this time, she had only taken very casual notice of the young engineer. And yet it had not escaped her that he was observing herself; she took this, of course, for admiration, and therefore, in the most gracious manner, now opened a conversation with him.

"You were already acquainted with my brother, it seems, Herr Runeck? That is a remarkable coincidence."

"Hardly, in a large city," was the quiet reply. "As for the rest it was only a very brief interview that we had, of which, as you have heard, Herr von Wildenrod thought no more."

"I remember myself, he was in Berlin three years ago. He came from there to Lausanne, to take me away from school, but, I believe, Oscar is not particularly fond of the Capital. You were there quite a long while, were you not?"

"Several years. I studied at Berlin."

"Ah, indeed! Well, I shall make acquaintance with it, too, next winter, at Eric's side. Society must be brilliant there, especially in the height of the season."

"Alas! I can give you no information on that point," said Egbert coolly. "I was in Berlin, to study and to work."

"But that does not consume all of one's time?"

"Oh, yes, noble lady, every bit of one's time."

This answer sounded very positive, almost uncouth: it thoroughly displeased Cecilia, but yet more he displeased her who had given utterance to it, and whom she took this opportunity of observing closely for the first time. This friend of Eric's youth was—coldly considered—anything but attractive in personal appearance. It is true, that his tall, commanding figure made a certain impression, but it was not at all suited to the parlor. Add to this, those homely, irregular features, where everything was stamped with such sharpness and hardness, and the stiff, disobliging manner, that did not soften even now, when one was exerting herself to draw him into conversation. Why, that answer sounded almost as if this Runeck would like to teach a lesson to her, Baroness Wildenrod! She remarked, to her astonishment, that here was nothing of timidity and conscious inferiority, and now, too, she awoke to the fact that it was not admiration which spoke in those cold, gray eyes, but rather enmity. But what would have chilled, and perhaps dismayed, any one else, was just the thing that attracted Cecilia Wildenrod, and so, instead of letting the conversation drop, she took it up again.

She propped her pretty foot against the fender and leaned far back in the arm-chair, her attitude being a negligent, but infinitely graceful one. The late afternoon hour and the dark rain-clouds out of doors had already produced twilight in this part of the parlor, and the fire, sometimes flaring up and again dying down, cast its light upon the slender form that sat there, draped in a light silk gown, covered with lace, falling upon the roses that she wore on her bosom, and upon the beautiful head that was pillowed upon a rich crimson cushion.

"Dear me! how shall I accommodate myself to this Odensburg?" said she pettishly. "Every third word here is work! They seem, in general, not to have another idea. I, frivolous worldling that I am, feel quite intimidated by it and know I shall inevitably fall into disgrace with my father-in-law-to-be, who is himself a first-class genius of work."

She spoke with an arrogance that challenged reply. It was the tone that had been deemed piquant and fascinating in the sphere of society in which she had been accustomed to move. But it made no impression here: Runeck seemed to be utterly insensible to it.

"Certainly, Herr Dernburg is a model to us all in this respect," answered he. "I certainly do not anticipate seeing you contented at Odensburg, Baroness Wildenrod. But surely, Eric must have given you a fair picture of it, ere you made up your mind to come here."

"I believe that Eric's taste is the same as mine," remarked Cecilia. "He likewise loves the joyous, sunny South, and raves of a villa on the shores of the blue Mediterranean, beneath palm-trees and laurel-bushes."

"Eric was sick and suffered under the severe climate of his native land, which, nevertheless, he loves: the South has restored him to health. As for the rest, he is rich enough to purchase a place anywhere in Italy that he chooses, and to pass there his time for recreation, although his regular home must continue to be at Odensburg."

"Do you think that so absolutely necessary?" Slight derision was perceptible in the tone of her question.

"Most assuredly, for he is the only son, and one day must take charge of the works. That is a duty which he cannot shirk and of which he as well as his future wife must render an account."

"Must?" repeated Cecilia. "That seems to be your favorite word, Herr Runeck. You use it at every opportunity. I cannot bear that uncomfortable word, and I do not believe I shall ever be reconciled to it, either."

Egbert seemed to find no special satisfaction in this sort of dialogue, his reply having a touch of impatience about it, that was entirely too suggestive of faultfinding.

"We shall do better not to dispute over it. We belong to two entirely different worlds, and so, naturally, do not understand one another."

Cecilia smiled at having finally moved this man from his imperturbable equilibrium, which she interpreted to almost as an insult. She had not been accustomed anyone denying her the toll of admiration, or speaking of "must," to her. The fire again blazed up brightly, and while Runeck stood aside in the shade, the reflection fell full upon the beautiful girl, who still reclined in her chair, in the same attitude as a while ago. There was something ensnaring in the flickering play of the flames, in the abrupt transition from light to shade; something that was akin to the appearance of the girl herself, who now looked up at the young engineer with moisture dimming the luster of her dark and glowing eyes.

"Why, there may be a bridge that can unite these two worlds," said she playfully. "Perhaps we may come to understand each other—or, think you that it is not worth the trouble?"

"No."

This "no" had a perfectly frigid sound. Cecilia suddenly straightened herself up and darted a look of withering anger upon Egbert.

"You are very—candid, Herr Runeck."

"You misunderstand me, Baroness Wildenrod," said he calmly. "I meant, of course, that it was not worth your while to descend to so inferior a world—nothing more."

Baroness Wildenrod bit her lip. He had parried her thrust in masterly style, and yet she knew what he had meant, she understood the bitter taunt, hidden behind his words. What sort of a man was this, that dared thus to confront the betrothed of his best friend, the future daughter of the house, in which he had received so many favors? Previously she had hardly had a glance to bestow upon this engineer in his subordinate station, now a burning sense of hostility seized her—he was to suffer for having provoked her!

She arose with a brisk movement and turned to Eric and her brother, who were talking together. Egbert remained where he was, but his eyes followed the brother and sister, while he murmured under his breath:

"Poor Eric, you have fallen into bad hands!"

Night had come and the family had already separated. They wanted their guests—who had made rather a fatiguing journey that day—to retire early to rest, but this they had not yet done.

In the boudoir, attached to the suite of company-rooms, were Oscar and Cecilia Wildenrod to be found. They were alone. The perfume of the flowers with which Maia had given so graceful a welcome to her future sister-in-law, still filled the room, but neither of this pair paid any heed to it. Cecilia stood in the center of the room, but the smile that she had worn and the amiability which she had manifested all day had both vanished now. She looked excited, provoked, and her voice had the intonation of suppressed passion.

"And so you are not content with me, Oscar? I should think that I had done everything possible to be done this day, and still you have fault to find with me."

"You were too incautious in your expressions," criticised Oscar; "much too incautious. You hardly took the trouble to conceal your disapproval of Odenburg. Take heed, Eric's father, is very sensitive on that point, anything like that he does not pardon."

"Am I, for whole weeks here to act a farce, and pretend to be enthusiastic over this abominable place, that is far more unbearable even than I had supposed? One is cut off here and thrust out of the world, as it were, buried between mountains and dark forests. Then the immediate proximity of those works with their noise and their crowd of coarse laborers, but above all these people here! Little Maia is the only one endurable. My future father-in-law, though, seems to have a very domineering nature, and tyrannizes over his whole household. I shudder before his stern countenance. What a look he gave me upon my arrival, as though he wanted to look me through and through. And that tiresome Frau von Ringstedt with her prim state, and that just as stupid pale-looking governess—but, above all, that so-called friend of Eric's youth, who said things to me—" she suddenly broke off, and with a

pettish movement threw her fan upon the table. Wildenrod had quietly listened to all this harangue, without making any attempt to soothe her, at those last words, however, he grew attentive.

"What things?" he asked quickly and sharply. "What did he say to you?"

"Oh, not so much in words, but I knew perfectly well what was implied, although not expressed. If we had not just met for the first time, I should believe that he hated both you and me. There was something so inimical in his cold, steel-gray eyes, when he talked to me and they had precisely the same expression when he mentioned, to you, your having met in Berlin."

Wildenrod gazed upon his sister in surprise, he had never before perceived that she was gifted with such keen powers of observation.

"You seem to have been studying him very closely," he remarked. "As for the rest, you have judged quite correctly. This Runeck is extremely disagreeable, perhaps even dangerous. We'll be even with him though."

"Once for all, I cannot stand such surroundings!" cried Cecilia with renewed heat. "You have always told me that Eric would live with me in the great world, we have never had any other idea, but here there seems to be no talk of any such thing. They regard it as a matter of course that we should take up our residence at Odensburg, and have ruthlessly made the announcement to me already. Upon my marriage, am I to renounce everything that lends life its charm for me, and under the oversight of my high-and-mighty father-in-law, learn housekeeping and all the other domestic virtues that he seems to rate so high, and for my reward to be allowed a daily promenade through his works? For there seems to be no talk here of any other pleasure."

"The question is not one of pleasure but necessity," said Oscar in a low sharp tone: "I thought I had made that sufficiently clear to you when we accepted the invitation. Already, on the day of your engagement, you forced me to give you a hint of the truth, that I would have preferred to conceal from you, and since then you have learned all without reserve. Our fortune has been all lost, how and when does not concern you, but what you have to deal with is the fact. I have hitherto managed to maintain ourselves in handsome style, through what sacrifices I alone know; but there comes a time when even the last resources fail, and to that point we have now arrived. If you cast away, through your own folly, the brilliant future that I have opened up to you by tying this knot, know that you will no longer have any pretension to what you call life: then you must descend to an existence of poverty and privation—must I once more recall this to your mind?"

This harsh exhortation had its effect: poverty and privation were two things from which Baroness Wildenrod shrank, although she had only a misty idea of what they were. Already the bare idea that she might be forced to give up the brilliant life that she had hitherto led horrified her, and broke down her resistance. She bowed her head and was silent, while her brother continued:

"I have hitherto treated you, for the most part, as they do spoiled children, not deeming it needful to show you the serious phase of life; but now I require—do you hear, Cecilia, I *require*--that you submit absolutely to my will, and do as I shall direct. You are not married yet, and Dernburg is just the man to break the engagement at the last minute, if there should arise in his mind grave doubts as to its expediency. You have to cultivate his favor first of all, for Eric is altogether passive in his disposition, and will always submit to his father's will. It is all-important to be prudent! Be assured of one thing—*my* plans are not to be thwarted through your self-will—you know me!"

This was a tone of command, of menace, and Cecilia looked up at her brother with shy eyes. It was not the first time, that he had bent her under his will, but so earnestly and darkly he had never spoken to her before. She heaved an impatient sigh and threw herself into a chair; but she did not think of making any further opposition.

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