

E.WERNER

VINETA, THE

PHANTOM CITY

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CHAPTER I.

THE WIDOW AND HER SON

The hot summer afternoon neared its close. The sun had already set, but the twilight glow still lingered in the western sky, and was mirrored in the sea, which, scarcely rippled by a zephyr's breath, caught the last splendors of the dying day.

At some distance from the shore along which ran the great promenade of the fashionable watering-place of C—, usually thronged with visitors at this hour, stood a solitary country house, modest and unpretending, but distinguished from the large and splendid villas of the neighborhood by the beauty of its situation and its outlook over the sea to the horizon's verge. It was a quiet, secluded spot, well fitted to be the abode of people seeking retirement and desiring no part in the gay, excited life around them. At an open glass door leading out upon a balcony stood a lady in deep mourning. Her stature was tall and imposing, and although she had reached the meridian of life, she was still beautiful. This face with its firm, regular outlines could never have possessed the charm of gentleness and amiability, but years had robbed it of little of its cold, severe beauty. The black dress with its heavy crape trimmings indicated a recent bereavement, but the eyes bore no trace of tears; there was no touch of sensibility in the resolute features. If sorrow had come near this woman, she had not felt it deeply, or she had conquered it.

At the lady's side stood a gentleman of equally imposing appearance; although very near her in age, he seemed ten years her senior, for time and life had left deep traces as they swept over his head. The grave, expressive face bore that impress which the world's storms and conflicts leave behind them; the dark, abundant hair was tinged with gray, the brow was furrowed, and the profound melancholy of the glance was in keeping with that look of sadness stamped upon all the features. He had been intently gazing out upon the sea, but he now turned away with an impatient gesture.

"They are not yet in sight," he said; "they will not be likely to return before dark."

"You should have announced your arrival," replied the lady. "We did not expect you for some days. The boat never comes in sight until it has doubled that wooded point yonder.—Go down to the beach, Paul," she added, speaking to a servant, "and as soon as the boat lands, inform your young master and mistress that Count Morynski has arrived."

The servant left on his errand, and the count, abandoning his watch on the balcony, entered the house with the lady and seated himself at her side. "Forgive my impatience, sister," he said; "your society ought to content me for the present, but it is a year since I have seen my little girl."

The lady smiled. "You will see a little girl no longer," she said. "A year counts much at her age, and Wanda gives promise of great beauty."

"And has her intellectual culture kept pace with her physical development? Your letters have always expressed great satisfaction in her progress."

"Her mental attainments are beyond her years; she always outstrips her tasks, and in this respect needs to be restrained rather than urged on. But I must tell you that Wanda has one great fault: self-will. I have sometimes been compelled to enforce the obedience she was inclined to deny me."

The father smiled as he answered: "This is a strange reproach from *your* lips, Maryna. Self-will, you are aware, is a distinguishing trait of your own character; it is in fact an especial trait of our family."

"But it is not to be tolerated in a young girl of sixteen," replied the sister. "I tell you once for all, Wanda's obstinacy must be controlled."

This assertion did not seem to please the count, and he tried to change the subject. "I feel sure that I could commit my child to no better hands than yours," he said, "and I am doubly rejoiced that now I have come to take Wanda home, she will still be near you. I did not count upon your return so soon after your husband's death. I supposed you would remain in Paris until Leo had completed his studies."

"I did not feel at home in Paris," replied the lady; "you know from your own experience that exile is an unenviable lot. Although my husband was banished for life from his native land, return was not denied his widow and son. Leo is the last of his race; he must represent the family. I wished to educate him at home, so that he might become in thought and feeling a true son of his fatherland. He is still very young, but the duties which are required of him are beyond his years, and he must learn to fulfil them."

"Where do you think of making your home?" asked Count Morynski; "you know that my house is at all times open to you."

"I know it," returned the princess, "and I thank you; but my great object in life is to secure a future for my Leo worthy of the name he bears. You understand our pecuniary circumstances; we have sacrificed nearly all for our country and its lost cause, and our life in exile has been full of privations. Some better fortune must be in store for us. For Leo's sake I have decided upon a step which for myself alone I would not have taken. Can you divine the reason why I have chosen C— for a summer residence?"

"No, I cannot; your choice surprises me. Herr Witold's estate lies only ten miles distant from here, and I should suppose you would wish to avoid such proximity. Have you lately been corresponding with Waldemar?"

"No," replied the princess, coldly. "During our absence in France I scarcely heard from him; in all these years he has made no inquiries after his mother."

"And has his mother inquired after him?" asked the count.

"If I had done so, it would have been to subject myself to repulsion and humiliation," replied the princess, excitedly. "Herr Witold has always hated me, and has asserted his unlimited rights as guardian of my eldest son in the most annoying ways. Here I am powerless."

"A mother's rights stand so high that if you had asserted them with your wonted decision, Witold would not have ventured to deny you all intercourse with your child. But you have not done this; be honest, Maryna, you have never loved your eldest son!"

The princess leaned her head upon her hand, and was silent. She felt the truth of her brother's words.

"I well know why Waldemar does not hold the first place in your heart," continued the count; "he is the son of an unloved husband whom you were forced to accept; he reminds you of an unblest marriage. Leo is the child of your heart and of your love."

"And his father never gave me the slightest cause for complaint," added the princess.

"You had entire influence over your last husband," said the count; "but we will waive this subject. You have a plan, it seems. Do you propose to assert a mother's claims over Waldemar?"

"I propose at least to assert the right of which my first husband's will robbed me; that unjust will, every line of which was dictated by hatred, and a resolve that the widow, as well as the mother, should be disinherited. Until now, the will has remained in full force, but it declares Waldemar of age in his twenty-first year. He has reached that age, and is now his own master. I want to put it to the test—if he will allow his mother to seek an asylum with relatives, while he is reckoned among the wealthiest proprietors of the country, and it will cost him but one word to secure an honorable existence to his mother and brother upon one of his estates."

Count Morynski shook his head. "If you reckon upon any filial sentiments in this son, I fear you delude yourself. He has been separated from you since infancy, and you may be very sure that he has been taught no love for his mother. I have seen him only once; he was then a boy of some ten years of age, and he impressed me favorably. But I remember perfectly that he was not at all pliant in disposition."

"You may well say that," returned the princess. "He is his father's own son, and must be, like him, rough, uncontrollable, and unsusceptible to high and noble influences. I think I fully understand Waldemar's character, but he will allow me to control him. Inferior natures always yield to intellectual superiority, if it is only asserted in the right way."

"Could you control the boy's father?" asked the count, gravely.

"You forget, Bronislaw, that I was at the time of my first marriage a young girl of seventeen, without experience and without knowledge of human nature. I should now know how to deal with such a character, and to mould it to my will. Besides, in dealing with Waldemar, I have a mother's authority; he will yield to me."

The count thought differently, but ere he had time to reply, a light, quick step echoed on the balcony. The door flew open, a young girl bounded into the room, and the next moment was clasped in her father's arms.

The princess rose and advanced to meet her son who stood in the doorway. "You have been absent a long while, Leo," she said; "we have waited a full hour for your return."

"I beg your pardon, mamma; the sunset upon the water was so beautiful that we wanted to gaze at it until the last moment."

With these words, Leo Zulieski took his mother's hand, and leading her to the sofa, sat down by her side. He was very young, perhaps seventeen or eighteen years of age, and bore a striking resemblance to his mother; but the cold, severe expression of that older face was absent from these youthful features, where all was warmth and animation, and from the dark, fiery eyes, which indicated an ardent, impulsive temperament. The young fellow was such a picture of youthful strength, grace, and beauty, that the pride with which his mother took his hand and led him to his uncle might well be pardoned.

"Leo has no father," she said, sadly. "Whenever he needs a man's advice and guidance, I rely upon you, Bronislaw."

The count embraced his nephew warmly and cordially, but his glances as well as his thoughts were centred upon his daughter. The joy of meeting her again overruled all other emotions.

Wanda did not bear the slightest resemblance to her father; she seemed a being unique and unlike all others. Her graceful figure, which was still that of a child, had not attained its full stature or development; her features were those of a child, although their expression was firm and resolute. Her face was pale, but not with illness: it bore the impress of perfect health; a faint flush, called forth by the least excitement or emotion, came and went on her lips and cheeks. The abundant, deep black hair made the exceeding fairness of the complexion still more striking, and the large, dark, liquid eyes were shaded by long black lashes. Wanda indeed gave promise of great beauty. She could not now be called beautiful, but she possessed that indefinable fascination we see in many young girls when standing upon that charmed boundary,

"Where the brook and river meet,
Womanhood and childhood sweet."

In this young girl's whole appearance there was a delightful blending of the petulance and innocence of the child with the gravity of the young lady, who every now and then calls to mind her sixteen years, and feels that her childhood has passed. The halo of early youth, which surrounded her like the fragrant odor around a half-opened rosebud, made her doubly enchanting.

The first joy and surprise of reunion were over, and the conversation began to flow in quiet channels. The count drew his daughter closer to his side, and playfully chided her for not having returned sooner.

"I did not know you had come, papa," she said; "and, besides, I had an adventure in the forest."

"In the forest?" interrupted her aunt. "Were you not with Leo upon the sea?"

"Only upon our return, Aunt Maryna. We had planned a sail to Buchenholm; Leo thought the distance by water less than that by the forest-path; I maintained the contrary. We disputed a while, and at last concluded to prove which was right. Leo sailed away alone, and I took the path through the forest."

"Who guided you?" asked the count.

Wanda smiled archly. "O, some satyr!—one of those old giant-ghosts which now and then flit around here. But you must question me no further, papa. Leo is dying of curiosity to know; he tormented me with questions all the way home, and for this very reason I will not tell him a syllable."

"This is all a made-up story," cried Leo, laughing; "a subterfuge to explain your late return. You would invent a whole fairy-tale rather than own I was in the right."

"Subterfuge or not," interposed the princess, "this solitary walk was highly improper. I gave you permission to take a short sail with Leo, but I had no idea he would leave you for hours alone in the forest."

"Wanda insisted upon it," replied Leo. "She was determined to settle our dispute about the distance."

"Yes, Aunt Maryna, I *would* have my own way," said Wanda, emphatically, "and Leo knew that he could not keep me back."

The princess was about to reprimand her niece for this new exhibition of self-will, but her brother said, hastily, "I feel somewhat fatigued with my journey, and would like to retire to my room. I would also speak with Wanda alone. Good night."

He rose, took his daughter's arm, and left the room.

"My uncle seems perfectly bound up in Wanda," said Leo, as the father and daughter disappeared.

The princess gazed after the two retreating forms, and said, half audibly,—

"He will spoil her. He idolizes her blindly, as he once idolized her mother. Wanda will all too soon learn her power and exercise it. I feared this before his return; I now see that my apprehensions were just. What about this forest adventure, Leo?"

"I do not know. It is very likely one of Wanda's jests. She first roused my curiosity by all sorts of hints, then obstinately refused to explain, and made herself merry over my resentment. You know her way."

"Yes, I know it," the princess said, with a slight frown. "Wanda loves to make sport of us all. You should not let this be so easy for her, Leo, where you are concerned."

Leo flushed to the forehead. "I, mamma? I often quarrel with Wanda."

"And yet you allow yourself to be a mere tool for her caprices. I am well aware, my son, who wins in all your quarrels. But this is mere childishness. I wish to speak with you of serious matters. Close the balcony door, and sit down by me."

Leo obeyed, but his face and manner showed that he was offended, perhaps less at his mother's reprimand than at the word "childishness."

Without taking the slightest notice of her son's mood, the mother began: "You know that I was a widow when I married your father, and that there is a son of the first marriage still living. You also know that he has been reared in Germany. You will soon see him and make his acquaintance."

"Do you mean my brother Waldemar?"

"Yes, Waldemar Nordeck. He lives here in the neighborhood, upon his guardian's estate. I have written to him of our arrival, and hope to see him in a few days."

Leo's ill-humor vanished, and he showed deep interest in the subject of conversation. "Mamma," he said, hesitatingly, "will you not tell me something definite concerning these family matters? I only know that your first marriage was unhappy, that you had a falling out with Waldemar's relatives and his guardian, and I learned this by hints from my uncle and the old servants of our house. I never questioned my parents; I saw that this topic wounded my father and angered you, and that you both strove to banish its remembrance."

The lady's features assumed a rigid expression, and her voice was hard and cold as she replied,—
"We do best when we shroud mortifications and humiliations in forgetfulness, and I have sought to do so in regard to that unhappy marriage, which was full of both. Do not ask an explanation from me, Leo; you know the sequel,—let that suffice. I cannot and I will not initiate you into this family tragedy, which I never recall, even at this late day, without hatred toward the dead. I have striven to blot those three years from my life; I did not dream that I should be forced to recall them."

"And what forces you to recall them?" asked Leo, excitedly. "My uncle has offered us his protection; are we not going to his house?"

"No, my son; we are going to Villica."

"To Villica!" echoed Leo, in surprise. "That is Waldemar's estate."

"It should have been my widow's dower," said the princess, resentfully; "it is now the property of my son, and ought to afford his mother a refuge."

Leo started. "What does this mean?" he said, excitedly. "I know that we are poor, but I will endure all privations and renounce all worldly advantages, rather than allow you for my sake—"

The princess rose majestically. Her glance and bearing were so imperious that her son was awed into silence. "Do you think your mother capable of humiliating you?" she asked. "Do you know her so superficially? Leave to me, my son, the care of your position, and of my own. You certainly need not define limits for my actions; I alone understand them."

Leo cast down his eyes and ventured no reply. His mother drew near him and took his hand.

"Will this fiery head never learn to think dispassionately?" she said, gently. "You have great need of calm deliberation before entering upon the life before you, my son. I shall carry out alone my plans concerning Waldemar; you, my Leo, shall experience none of the bitterness which is perhaps in store for me. You must keep your vision clear and your courage unshaken for the future that awaits you. This is your task; mine shall be to secure that future at any price. Trust your mother."

She clasped her son to her heart, and he pressed his mother's hand to his lips, as if in mute entreaty for forgiveness. As she bent to kiss the handsome young face, so bright with hope, so radiant with the promise of high achievement, it was evident that this cold, proud woman possessed all the self-forgetful care and tenderness of a mother, and that, in spite of the rigor with which she treated him, Leo was still her idol.

CHAPTER II. WALDEMAR

"Doctor, will you have the kindness to stop once for all these everlasting complaints! Nothing can be done with the lad, I tell you. I have tried often enough to make him change his ways, and have called in six private tutors to help me. We could not manage him, and you can not; so let him have his own way!"

It was the rich proprietor, Herr Witold of Altenhof, who gave this advice to his ward's tutor. Both gentlemen sat in the large corner room of the Altenhof dwelling. The windows were wide open on account of the heat, and all the surroundings showed that the people who dwelt here held such things as elegance and comfort superfluous if not disgraceful. The shabby, old-fashioned furniture was shoved here and there as convenience demanded, and without the least regard to taste or order. On the walls hung a confused medley of fowling-pieces, hunting implements, and deer-horns. Wherever a vacant space offered, a nail had been driven, and some nondescript object had been hung upon it without the least concern for appearances. Upon the writing-desk lay household accounts, tobacco-pipes, spurs, and half a dozen new riding-whips; a pile of daily newspapers upon the floor afforded a luxurious couch to the large hunting-dog, and gave evidence of frequent use. Nothing was in its place; but there was one article in the room which gave a hint of the artistic tastes of the inmates of the house; this was a very gaudy, highly-colored hunting-piece which hung over the sofa, occupying the place of honor upon the blank, grimy wall.

Herr Witold sat in his arm-chair at a window, but his face and head were quite lost in dense clouds of smoke from his meerschaum pipe. In spite of his white hair and his sixty years, he had a fresh, youthful look, and was in the fulness of strength and health. The very tall figure showed a proportionate rotundity; the ruddy face did not indicate great intelligence, but it bore the unmistakable impress of good-nature. The dress, a combination of house and hunting costume, was rather negligent, and the powerful frame and loud voice formed a striking and almost painful contrast to the slender form and timid accents of the tutor.

The doctor was evidently a little past thirty; he was of medium height, although his bowed form made him appear shorter; his face was not really plain, but it bore so marked an impress of ill health and of a subordinate place in life, that it could not be called attractive. His complexion was pale and sallow, his brow was wrinkled, and his eyes had that absent, uncertain glance peculiar to people whose thoughts seldom or never descend to the level of real and practical things. His black suit betrayed the most scrupulous care, and there was something timid and anxious in the man's whole appearance. This timidity and anxiety pervaded the tones of his voice, as he answered, mildly,—

"You know, Herr Witold, that I come to you only in cases of extreme necessity; this time I must ask you to assert your authority; I see no other way."

"What has Waldemar been doing?" asked the guardian, in a tone of great annoyance. "I know as well as you that he is ungovernable, but I cannot help you. The youngster has outgrown my authority, he no longer obeys any one. You say he runs away from his books, preferring to drive around with the hunters; that is nothing; I did the same thing when I was a lad, and I could never get this learned nonsense into my head any better than he can. You say also that he has no manners; well, they are not at all necessary. We live here all by ourselves, and if we happen to meet our neighbors, we feel no embarrassment; our manners are as good as theirs. You must admit this, doctor, if you do take to your heels whenever we have our hunting and drinking parties."

"But these are only companies of men; supposing Waldemar, with his uncultivated manners, should enter other circles and the society of ladies; supposing he should some day marry—"

"*Marry!*" echoed Herr Witold, really wounded at such a supposition. "He will not do that. Why need he marry? I have lived a bachelor all my life, and I am very happy and comfortable. My deceased relative, Nordeck, would have done far better to remain single. But we need not trouble ourselves about Waldemar's marrying, Heaven be praised! He runs away from all the girls, and there he is right!"

The old bachelor leaned back in his arm-chair with an air of supreme comfort and satisfaction. The doctor drew nearer.

"To return to the first topic of conversation," he said, hesitatingly; "you must admit that my pupil has passed entirely beyond my control, and it is high time he was sent to the university."

Herr Witold gave such a violent start that the affrighted tutor stepped back several paces.

"I thought you were coming round to the university! You have talked of nothing else for a month. And what will Waldemar do at the university? Let the professors cram his head with more learning? I thought he had already learned quite enough from you; you have taught him all a clever landlord needs to know. He is just as capable of managing an estate as my inspector; he understands better than I how to make his tenants respect him, and none excel him in riding and hunting. He is a splendid young fellow."

The tutor did not seem to share the guardian's enthusiasm for his ward, but he ventured no opinion; he only summoned up his little stock of courage, and said, very timidly,—

"The heir of Villica requires something more than the knowledge which fits a man to be a good steward or inspector; a university education seems to me highly desirable for Waldemar."

"I do not at all agree with you," replied Herr Witold. "Is it not enough that this boy who has grown so near my heart must soon leave me to take charge of his estates in that accursed Poland? Shall I send him from me to the university when he does not want to go? Don't mention the subject again, doctor; he will remain here until he goes to Villica."

He resumed his pipe in grim displeasure, taking such enormous puffs that his face again disappeared behind clouds of smoke. The tutor sighed and was silent, but even this quiet resignation seemed to annoy the tyrannical master of Altenhof.

"You may as well be content, doctor, to give up that idea of the university," he said, in a more conciliating tone. "You will never, never persuade Waldemar to go there, and as for yourself, it is far better for you to remain in Altenhof. Here you are right in your element among these giants' graves and runic stones, and whatever else you call that sort of stuff you are studying all day long. I can't for the life of me understand what you find so remarkable in this old heathen rubbish, but every living mortal has his own idea of pleasure, and I allow you yours with all my heart, for Waldemar often makes your lot hard enough; and so do I, for that matter."

"O, no, Herr Witold—" began the doctor, deprecatingly.

"No protestations," interrupted the old man, good-naturedly. "I know you must abhor our outlandish way of life here; you would long ago have left us as your six predecessors did, if it had not been for this old pagan trash to which your heart clings, and from which you cannot tear yourself away. You know I am, upon the whole, a rather good sort of a man, although I flare up now and then; and as your thoughts constantly prowl around those old barbarous times, you must feel yourself at home in Altenhof, which is so full of relics of past ages. How can you set such store by the people of those times, when they had such execrable manners? Why, the best of friends among them used to beat each other to death just for pure amusement."

Herr Witold's historical knowledge quite confounded the doctor. "I beg your pardon," he said; "the old Germans—"

"Were not at all like you, doctor," interposed Herr Witold, laughing. "I think of all people I know, Waldemar most resembles them, and I can't understand why you find so much fault with him."

"But, my dear sir, in the nineteenth century—" began Doctor Fabian; he went no further, for at this moment a shot whizzed through the open window, and the huge antlers which hung over the writing-desk fell with a crash.

Herr Witold sprang from his chair. "What does this mean? Is the young upstart going to shoot us right here in our sitting-room? Wait, I'll see about that!"

He was about to rush out of doors, but at this moment a young man burst into the room. He was in hunting costume, a large hound followed him, and he carried a fowling-piece in his hand. Without greeting or apology, he marched up to his guardian, planted himself right before him, and said, triumphantly, "Well, who was right, you or I?"

The old gentleman was really angry. "What do you mean by shooting over people's shoulders, and endangering their lives?" he cried, excitedly. "Did you really want to shoot the doctor and me?"

Waldemar shrugged his shoulders. "O, by no means! I wanted to win my wager. You declared yesterday, that I could not, firing from outside, hit that nail from which the deer-antlers hung. There is the ball!"

"Yes, there it is to be sure," reiterated Witold, admiringly and quite pacified. "But what is the matter with *you*, doctor?"

"Doctor Fabian has one of his nervous attacks," said Waldemar, with a contemptuous shrug, laying aside his gun, but making no effort to help his tutor who had sunk half fainting upon the sofa, and trembling from head to foot. The good-natured Witold held him upright and tried to reassure him.

"Don't faint because a little powder has been fired off," he said; "it isn't worth minding. We did lay a wager, but I had no idea that the youngster would decide it in that preposterous way. There, you are better now, thank God!"

Doctor Fabian rose and made an unavailing effort to control his trepidation. "You might have shot us, Waldemar," he said, with white lips.

"No, doctor, I could not have done that," replied Waldemar, unconcernedly. "You stood with my uncle at the window to the right, I shot through the window to the left, at least five paces distant. You know I never miss my aim."

"But you must stop all such foolhardy actions," said the guardian, with an effort at asserting his authority. "Henceforth I forbid your shooting in the yard."

The young fellow folded his arms, and gazed defiantly at his guardian. "You can forbid, uncle, but I shall not obey," he said. "I shall shoot wherever like."

He stood before his foster-father, the very personification of self-will and defiance. Waldemar Nordeck was moulded after the Germanic type, and bore no trace of his Polish origin. The tall, almost giant figure towered even above Witold's stately form, but it lacked symmetry; its outlines were sharp and angular. The heavy mass of blonde hair seemed a burden to his head, for it fell low over the forehead, and was every now and then thrown back with an impatient movement; the blue eyes had a sullen expression, and in moments of exasperation, like this, an almost malignant glare; the face was decidedly plain, having neither the delicate lineaments of the boy, nor the decided features of the man. The transition period from youth to manhood in Waldemar Nordeck assumed an almost repellent form, and his lack of polite culture, his entire disregard of all social customs, served to heighten the unfavorable impression produced by his appearance.

Herr Witold was one of those men whose physique indicates an energy they do not possess. Instead of resolutely opposing and correcting the obstinacy and rudeness of his ward, he passively yielded to his will in all things. "I tell you, doctor, that boy is more than a match for me," he said, with a tranquillity which showed that this was the usual conclusion of all differences between them, and that if Waldemar insisted upon having his own way, the guardian was powerless as the tutor.

The young man took no further notice of either; he threw himself on the sofa entirely oblivious to the fact that his boots, which were soaked through with ditch-water, rested on the cushions. The dog, also drenched with water, followed the example of his master, and with the same unconcern made himself comfortable on the carpet.

An ominous pause followed. Herr Witold, muttering to himself, sought to re-light his pipe; Doctor Fabian had fled to a window and was contemplating the sky with an absent, restless glance

which expressed more plainly than words his exceeding discomfort in the life around him. Herr Witold, finding his pipe empty, was meantime searching for his tobacco-box, which he presently found on the writing-desk under the spurs and riding-whips. While drawing the box from beneath a mass of rubbish, an unopened letter fell into his hands. He took it up, saying, "I had quite forgotten, Waldemar; here is a letter for you."

"For *me*?" asked Waldemar, indifferently, and yet with that accent of surprise which accompanies an unusual event.

"Yes; and there is a coronet on the seal, and a shield with all sorts of armorial bearings. It must be from your princess-mother. It is a long time since she has honored us with a specimen of her dainty handwriting."

Young Nordeck broke the seal and read the letter. It contained only a few lines, but his brow darkened as he read.

"Well, what is it?" asked the guardian. "Is the princess still in Paris? I did not notice the postmark."

"The Princess Zulieski is with her son at C-," returned Waldemar, who seemed to have an aversion to the names mother and brother. "They wish to see me there, and I shall ride over to-morrow."

"You will do no such thing!" said Herr Witold. "Your princely relatives have for years ignored you, and now you may ignore them. We care no more for them than they for us. You shall not go."

"Uncle Witold, I have had enough of your everlasting commands and prohibitions," cried Waldemar so savagely that his guardian stared at him in open-mouthed wonder. "Am I a schoolboy who must ask permission for every step I take? At twenty-one years of age, have I not a right to decide whether I will go and see my mother? I have already decided. I shall ride over to C- to-morrow morning."

"Tut! tut! don't be so furious about it," said the old gentleman, more astonished than angry at this sudden outbreak of a fury he could not understand. "Go where you like for all me, but I will have nothing to do with this Polish gentry, I tell you that!"

Waldemar found refuge in an indignant silence, and ere long, taking his fowling-piece and whistling to his dog to follow him, he left the house. Herr Witold gazed after his ward, shaking his head dubiously, but all at once a new idea seemed to dawn upon him; he took up the letter Waldemar had carelessly flung upon the table, and read it through. His brow grew dark in turn, as he read, and his voice broke out into fury.

"I thought so!" he exclaimed, striking with his clenched hand upon the table, "this is just like our lady-princess. In half a dozen lines she goads the young fellow on to revolt against me; I now see what all at once made him so defiant. Doctor, just listen to this precious epistle."

"My Son: Years have passed since I received a word or sign of life from you,'—('As if she had given him one!' interpolated the reader.)—'I know only through strangers that you are living at Altenhof with your guardian. I am at present in C—, and it will delight me to see you there and introduce you to your brother. I do not really know'—, ('Listen, doctor, now comes the sting')—'I do not really know whether you will be allowed to make this visit, as I am told that, although you have attained your majority, you are still entirely under your guardian's control.'—('Doctor, you yourself can testify how that young scoundrel defies and overreaches us every day.')—'I do not question your willingness to come, but I doubt whether you can obtain the required permission. I have thought best to write to you, and I shall see if you possess independence enough to gratify this wish of your mother, the first she has ever expressed to you, or if you *dare* not attempt it'—('This *dare* is underlined.')—'In the former case, I expect you immediately, and close with kindest greetings from your brother and myself."

""Your Mother.""

Herr Witold was so exasperated that he flung the letter upon the floor. "This is a fine piece of strategy in the princess-mother," he said. "She knows as well as I what a self-willed fellow Waldemar is; and if she had studied him for years, she could not have approached him on a weaker side. The mere thought of compulsion enrages him. I might now move heaven and earth to keep him here, and he would go, merely to prove that he has his own way. What have you to say on the subject?"

Doctor Fabian seemed fully to understand the family relations, and to regard the approaching interview with an alarm quite equal to that of Herr Witold; but it arose from entirely different reasons. "Heaven help us!" said he, anxiously. "If Waldemar, with his uncultivated manners, goes to C— and appears before the princess, what will she think of him?"

"She will think that he resembles his father and not her," was the emphatic answer. "And as soon as she sees Waldemar, it will become clear to her that she can make him no pliable tool for her intrigues; for I will wager my head that she has some intrigue on hand. Either the princely purse is empty—I believe it has never been any too full—or a little government conspiracy is on the tapis, and Villica, which lies close to the Polish boundary, is a very convenient place. Heaven only knows what she wants of my boy, but I will find out her plans and open his eyes in season."

"But, Herr Witold," remonstrated the doctor, "why widen this unfortunate breach in your family just now, when the mother offers her hand in reconciliation? Would it not be better to make peace at last?"

"You do not understand the situation," replied the guardian, with a bitterness very unusual to him. "No peace can be made with this woman without entire submission to her authority; and because my deceased relative would not yield up his will to hers, he had continual discord in his house. But I do not hold him guiltless; he had serious faults, and made his wife's life very wretched; but this Princess Maryna was no wife for him. Another and a different woman might perhaps have won unbounded influence over him, and have wrought a change in his whole character; but affection alone could have such power, and this woman has never cared for any one but herself. She is by nature heartless and arrogant. Well, she atoned for the supposed humiliation of her first marriage by a second union to a Polish prince, but the one supreme grievance of her life has been her expulsion from Villica, which would have been her widow's dower if Nordeck had not cut her off in his will. He left his entire fortune to Waldemar, and we have educated the lad in such a way that he will not be likely to make a fool of himself."

"We!" cried the doctor, in consternation. "Herr Witold, I have honestly tried to do my duty to my pupil, but I have not been able to effect the least improvement in his manners. If I had—" He stopped short.

"They would have been different," added Witold, laughing. "Well, you need have no twinges of conscience about that. The lad suits me perfectly just as he is now. If you prefer to have it so, say that I have educated him; I shall be delighted if he does not prove a suitable instrument for his mother's intriguing plans, and if my training and her Parisian culture are at loggerheads to-morrow, it will delight me still more. This, at least, will be a revenge for that malicious letter."

With these words, Herr Witold left the room. The doctor picked up the letter from the floor, folded it carefully, and murmured, with a deep sigh,—

"After all, it will be said that a certain Doctor Fabian educated the young heir. O, righteous heaven!"

CHAPTER III. VILLICA

Villica, the inheritance of Waldemar Nordeck, was situated in one of the eastern provinces of Germany, and consisted of several large estates whose central point was the old castle of Villica. The manner in which the late Nordeck had come into possession of this estate, and had finally won the hand of the Princess Maryna, affords only a new example of the spectacle so often repeated in our day,—the decline of an old, noble, and once wealthy family, and the rise of a new, plebeian element, with whose wealth comes also the power which once belonged wholly to the aristocracy.

Count Morynski and his sister had been left orphans in childhood, and had lived under the guardianship of their relatives. Maryna was educated in a convent, and before she left its walls a marriage had been arranged for her. Among noble families this is nothing unusual, and the young countess would have made no protest if the husband chosen for her had been her equal in birth, or a son of her own people. She had, however, been selected as a passive instrument for the carrying out of family plans.

In the neighborhood where the Morynski family had lived for generations, a certain Nordeck suddenly appeared. He was a German of plebeian birth, but he had amassed great wealth,—enough to acquire large landed possessions in these troublous times, when the old nobility were fugitives or impoverished in consequence of the sacrifices they had made for their country. He had purchased several incumbered estates at half their value, and had all at once become one of the richest proprietors in the country.

Although the new-comer was a man of narrow culture, rough manners, and questionable morality, his immense possessions gave him very great influence, which he used unscrupulously against the Poles and their cause. Through some secret means this wily stranger gained an insight into certain party schemes, which made him a most dangerous enemy, and his friendship must be won at any price. As the millionaire could not be approached with a bribe, it was thought best to flatter his vanity by the proposal of a marriage alliance with some noble Polish family. Villica manor had once been in the possession of the Morynski family, and for this reason the now penniless daughter of a once wealthy house was chosen as the sacrifice. The uncouth parvenu, who needed no dowry with his bride, and who felt flattered at the proposal of an alliance with a countess, eagerly consented to the plan. And so Maryna, when she left the cloister, found a destiny arranged for her at which her whole soul rebelled.

Her first step was a decided refusal. But what availed the No of a girl of seventeen years, in a matter urged on by policy as well as necessity? When commands and threats proved useless, persuasion and flattery were tried. She was reminded of the brilliant role she could play as mistress of Villica; of the absolute sway so young, beautiful, and high-born a wife must gain over the mind of her plebeian husband. Would it not be a satisfaction to her to become mistress of the estates wrested from her ancestors; to change the dreaded enemy into a friend,—into a pliant tool of the party which was seeking the liberation of her native land? Persuasion triumphed where compulsion failed. The life of a poor, dependent relation was not at all to the taste of the young countess. She was exceedingly ambitious, and her heart knew nothing as yet of love. Nordeck seemed very much in love with her, and she had reason to believe that her power over him would be boundless. So she finally yielded, and the marriage took place. All parties were doomed to disappointment; Nordeck proved to be no such man as they had thought. Instead of yielding to the will of his young wife, he asserted his own authority, and could neither be cajoled nor intimidated. When he discovered that Maryna had designed to use his interest and his property for the benefit of her family and friends, his love was turned to hatred. The birth of an heir made no change in the situation; the breach between the husband and wife seemed

rather to widen. Nordeck's character was not one to win a wife's respect, and this wife showed her contempt in ways that would have exasperated any man. Terrible scenes followed, after one of which the young mistress of Villica left the castle and fled to the protection of her brother.

The child, Waldemar, now scarcely a year old, was left with his father. Nordeck, furious at his wife's departure, imperiously demanded her return; Bronislaw did what he could to protect his sister, and the consequences would have been serious if death had not unexpectedly dissolved this unholy marriage. Nordeck was fatally injured by a fall from his horse while hunting. But even when dying, he retained strength and presence of mind enough to dictate a will, debarring his wife from any share in his property, or any part in the education of the child. Her flight from his house gave him the right to disinherit her, and he used it pitilessly. Waldemar was placed under the guardianship of Herr Witold, his father's chosen friend and distant relative, who was given full control of the boy during his minority.

The new guardian proved his sincere friendship for his deceased relative by rigidly executing the conditions of the will, and by rejecting all the widow's claims. Witold was then proprietor of Altenhof, and not disposed to reside at Villica; he therefore took his ward to Altenhof, and from infancy to majority the young heir visited his estates but seldom, and then in his guardian's company. The immense income of Villica, of which no use could be made during the boy's minority, was added to the original inheritance, and upon becoming of age, Waldemar Nordeck found himself one of the wealthiest citizens of the country.

For a time, Nordeck's widow lived with her brother, who had meantime married; but a frequent visitor at the house, Prince Zulieski, fell passionately in love with the young, handsome, and gifted woman, and at the expiration of the conventional year of mourning they were married. This second marriage proved very happy; and yet it was truly asserted that the prince, who possessed a chivalrous but not energetic nature, was entirely under his wife's control, his all-absorbing love for his wife and son making even submission a delight.

The happiness of this union was not to remain long unclouded; but the storm that now threatened came from without. Leo was an infant at the outbreak of that great revolution which ere long overspread half of Europe. In this Polish province, insurrection, so often quelled, broke out with renewed fury. Zulieski and Morynski were true sons of Poland; they flung themselves ardently into the strife for the independence of their country. This revolt, like so many previous ones, was forcibly suppressed, and the Polish provinces were treated with especial severity. Prince Zulieski and his brother-in-law fled to France, where they were soon joined by their wives and children. The Countess Morynski, a delicate, sickly woman, did not long endure the sojourn in a foreign land. She died at the expiration of a year, and Count Morynski placed his young daughter in his sister's care.

He could not remain in Paris, where everything reminded him of the loss of his idolized wife. He wandered to and fro, without any fixed abode, coming only at long intervals to see his daughter. Finally a declaration of amnesty permitted him to return home, where a large estate had fallen to him by the death of a relative. Here he settled down permanently. Prince Zulieski, having been one of the leaders of the insurrection, and not being included in the amnesty, was obliged to remain in exile. After his death, his wife and son, who had shared his banishment to the last, returned to their native land.

CHAPTER IV. THE MEETING

The hour of noon had not yet struck. The Princess Zulieski sat alone in that room of her summer villa which opened upon the balcony. She held in her hand a letter received an hour previous, containing the announcement of Waldemar's immediate coming. She gazed intently at the letter, as if from its curt, chilling words, or from its handwriting, she would read the character of the son who had become so entirely estranged from her. During the time of her residence in France she had neither seen nor heard from him. She retained in memory a distinct picture of the child she had left behind her when she fled from her husband's house, and as the infant even then resembled his father, the picture was repulsive and seemed to correspond with all she had learned of the youth. Now it was for her interest to win over this unloved son, and the princess was not the woman to shrink from a difficult undertaking. She rose, and, absorbed in thought, was walking up and down the room, when she was suddenly arrested by the sound of heavy and hurried footsteps in the hall. Paul at once opened the door, and announced, "Herr Waldemar Nordeck." The young man entered, the door closed behind him, and the mother and son stood face to face.

Waldemar advanced a few steps and then paused suddenly. The princess sought to approach him, but she felt all at once like one paralyzed. At this first moment of meeting it seemed as if a broad chasm had opened between mother and son, as if the old estrangement had widened and deepened. This moment of silence and mutual repulsion spoke more distinctly than words; it showed that no tie of affection united these two who should have been so near and yet were so far apart. The princess was first to break the spell. "I thank you for coming, my son," she said, extending her hand.

Waldemar slowly approached his mother; he held the proffered hand for an instant only, and then let it fall. There was no attempt at an embrace on either side. As the princess stood there in the sunlight, her mourning apparel falling around her like a cloud, her figure was imposingly beautiful; but although the young man gazed at her intently, her grace and majesty did not seem to make the slightest impression upon him. The mother's gaze also rested upon her son's face, but she vainly sought a single feature like her own. This son was the living image of his father—of the man she hated even in death.

"I was sure you would come," the princess said, as she sat down and motioned for Waldemar to take a place near her side. Waldemar remained standing. "Will you take a seat?" she asked, and the question reminded the young man that he could not conveniently stand during his whole visit. He drew up a chair and sat down opposite his mother, the place at her side remaining vacant.

The mother could not misunderstand this action. She set her lips firmly together, but her face betrayed no emotion. Waldemar wore, as usual, a sort of hunting costume, which, although it bore no marks of the chase, was ill-fitting and negligent, and differed widely from an elegant riding-suit. He wore no gloves, and in his left hand he held a round hat and a riding-whip. His boots were dusty, and his manner of seating himself betrayed entire ignorance of the etiquette of the *salon*. His mother saw all this at a glance, and she also marked the defiance in his compressed lips and his blue eyes. She felt that her task would be no easy one.

"We have become estranged from each other, Waldemar," she began; "and at this first meeting I cannot ask a son's embrace from you. I was forced to commit you in your childhood to the care of strangers; I have never been allowed to fulfil a mother's duties to you, nor to exercise her rights."

The angry expression which accompanied these words enraged Waldemar. "I allow no reproaches to be cast upon my Uncle Witold," he cried, furiously; "he has been a second father to me, and if you have summoned me here to listen to attacks upon him, I will leave at once. You and I can never be more than strangers."

The princess saw her error in thus giving way to animosity against the hated guardian, but it was too late to repair it. Waldemar would in all probability go away in a rage, and yet everything depended upon his remaining. At this critical juncture, help came from an unexpected source. A side door opened, and Wanda entered the room. She had just returned from a walk with her father, and knew nothing of the young man's visit.

Waldemar, who had already risen to go, stopped suddenly as if rooted to the spot. His face flushed so deeply that its intense glow seemed kindled by some inward flame; all its anger and defiance vanished, and he stood there willess and motionless, his eyes fixed intently upon the beautiful young girl. Wanda had been on the point of leaving the room when she perceived that her aunt had a visitor, but as this stranger's glance met hers, she uttered a half audible exclamation of surprise. She did not lose her self-control, however, and was not in the least embarrassed. On the contrary, she was seized with an uncontrollable desire to laugh. It was too late to retire, so she closed the door behind her and took her station near her aunt.

"My son, Waldemar Nordeck. My niece, Countess Morynski," said the princess, looking with a puzzled expression from one to the other. Wanda had quickly overcome her childish excitement, and recalled the fact that she was a young lady and must maintain the dignity of that position. Her graceful bow was in strict accordance with society etiquette, but a tell-tale smile lurked around her mouth when Waldemar acknowledged the introduction with a movement evidently intended for a bow, but which was only a jerk and a grimace.

"You seem to have already met your cousin," said the mother in an inquiring tone. Reference to the cousinly relation disconcerted the young man still more.

"I do not know," he replied, with the greatest embarrassment. "In fact, I have—a few days ago—"

"This young gentleman was so kind as to be my guide when I lost my way in the forest," said Wanda, coming to the rescue. "It was day before yesterday, on our way to the beech-holm."

The princess had considered this solitary walk through the forest a most improper proceeding; but now she had not a word of censure. She answered, very graciously,—

"It was indeed a singular meeting. But why are you both so formal? Among relatives this is quite unnecessary. Give your cousin your hand, Wanda."

The young girl extended her right hand without the least embarrassment. Her cousin Leo was gallant enough to kiss this hand when given in reconciliation after a dispute; the elder brother possessed no such gallantry. He took the delicate fingers timidly and hesitatingly as if scarce daring to touch them; then he all at once pressed them so tightly that the young lady could scarce repress a cry of pain. This new cousin was quite as much a stranger to her as to his half-brother Leo, and they had looked forward with equal curiosity to the expected visit. It was evident that Waldemar's manners and appearance surprised her greatly.

"And so you met in the woods?" resumed the princess. "Was no name mentioned by either that would have made you known to each other?"

"Unfortunately I took Herr Nordeck for a satyr," said Wanda, heedless of her aunt's warning glance; "and he did his utmost to confirm me in this belief. Dear aunt, you haven't the least idea how interesting our conversation was! During our half-hour's companionship he did not make it clear to me whether he belonged to the human race of our own day, or to the old-world prodigies of myth and fable. You must see that, under the circumstances, a formal introduction was unnecessary."

Her words had an unmistakably mocking tone, but Waldemar, who had just shown himself so excitable, did not take the least offence. His eyes rested intently on the young girl, whose satire he scarcely seemed to hear.

The princess considered it necessary to put a stop to Wanda's jests ere they ended in downright impertinence. She turned to her son with the most stately composure, and said, "Waldemar, you have seen neither your brother nor your uncle. I will take you to them. You will, of course, pass the day with us?"

"If you desire it," replied Waldemar, hesitatingly. The former defiance had vanished; he evidently had not the least idea of going.

"Most certainly I desire it. Remember this is your first visit, and it must not be broken off abruptly. Come, Wanda."

Young Nordeck still hesitated; but when Wanda seconded her aunt's request, he had no difficulty in deciding. He laid the hat and whip he had until now persistently held in his hand upon the chair which in the irritated mood of a few minutes before he had thrust from him, and passively followed the ladies. A scarcely perceptible, but still a triumphant smile played around the lips of the princess. She was too good an observer not to know that she already had the game in her own hands.

CHAPTER V. THE BROTHERS' FIRST MEETING

Count Morynski and Leo were in the sitting-room of the princess. They had been informed of Waldemar's arrival, but did not wish to intrude upon this first meeting between mother and son. The count appeared somewhat surprised at seeing Wanda enter with both, but refrained from questioning his daughter. Young Nordeck for the moment riveted his whole attention.

The princess took the hand of her younger son and led him to the elder. "You two have never met before," she said, "but from this day I hope that the estrangement may end. Leo meets you in warm brotherly love, Waldemar, and I believe he will find a brother in you."

Waldemar measured his brother with a hasty glance, but it had no hostility. The beauty of the young prince fascinated him, and he cordially grasped the hand Leo extended, with a half bashful reserve. Count Morynski now approached to greet his sister's son, but Waldemar answered all his questions in monosyllables. The conversation which, out of regard to Waldemar, was in German, would have been forced and insipid if the princess had not skilfully led it. She avoided every unpleasant topic and every offensive allusion. So admirable was her tact that for half an hour there seemed to exist the most perfect harmony between all present. Leo stood close to Waldemar, and the contrast between the two brothers was very striking. The young prince, also, had just outgrown his boyhood, and had not yet arrived at manhood; but how different was the transition state in the two brothers! The elder never appeared to greater disadvantage than when near this slender, elastic, youthful figure, with perfect symmetry in every outline, and easy assurance in every posture and movement, with the handsome head so well poised upon the graceful shoulders. Young Nordeck, with his sharp, irregular features, with his sullen eyes peering forth from under the mass of blonde hair that fell low over his forehead, justified his mother's feeling as her glance rested upon both,—upon her idol, her handsome, spirited boy, and upon that other one, who was also her son, but to whom she was united neither by similarity of feature nor by one emotion of the heart. Waldemar to-day appeared more repulsive than usual. His rude, imperious nature ordinarily corresponded with his outward appearance, and was at least characteristic; but now for the first time in his life he was timid and embarrassed, for the first time he felt himself among people superior to him in all respects. It was the presence of Wanda, more than all the others, which gave him this timidity and self-distrust. He had come prepared for a hostile encounter, but he now helplessly gave up the contest. Count Morynski's questioning glance every now and then seemed to ask if this blushing, embarrassed youth was really the Waldemar Nordeck of whose rude, ungovernable disposition he had heard so much.

When Paul came to announce dinner, the princess said, as she rose and took her brother's arm, "Leo, you will allow your brother to be Wanda's escort."

"Well, how do matters stand?" asked the count in Polish, as they passed on in advance to the dining-room.

The princess smiled significantly, then she glanced back at Waldemar who was timidly approaching Wanda, and replied in Polish, "Do not fear; he can be led, you may be sure of that."

Young Nordeck returned to Altenhof at nightfall. Leo accompanied him to the porter's gate, and then returned to the drawing-room. The princess and her brother were no longer there. Wanda stood alone on the balcony to see her cousin ride away.

"Good heavens, what a monster this Waldemar is!" she exclaimed. "How was it possible, Leo, for you to keep a sober face the whole time? See here! I have torn my handkerchief in pieces trying to keep from laughing, but now I can control myself no longer; if I do I shall suffocate!" And throwing herself upon a chair, Wanda indulged in peal after peal of merry laughter.

"We were prepared for Waldemar's peculiarities," said Leo, coming to the defence of his brother. "After all I had heard, I was certainly most agreeably disappointed in him."

"O, you have only seen him in his parlor guise," returned Wanda. "Supposing you had, like me, met this savage in his primitive forest: I tremble at the very thought of that meeting."

"But you haven't told me about it yet," Leo replied, excitedly. "It was Waldemar, then, who guided you to the beech-holm day before yesterday; at least, I infer this from your words. But why need you make such a secret of the affair?"

"Just to tease you. You were so irritated when I spoke of that delightful meeting with a stranger, supposing, of course, that my escort was some chivalrous gentleman, that I just let you go on thinking so. Now, Leo," she added, almost convulsed with laughter, "you see there was no danger of a love-affair."

"Yes, I see," replied Leo, laughing. "But Waldemar seems to have been gentleman enough to act as your guide."

"O, yes; and I shall always be grateful to him. I all at once lost the path—a path that I had often travelled and thought I knew perfectly. At every attempt to regain it I went deeper into the forest, and finally found myself in a spot entirely new to me. I did not even know the direction of the sea, for there was no breeze, and I could not hear the roar of the waves. I stood there perfectly helpless and irresolute, when all at once I heard a loud crashing in the bushes as if a whole hunting party were driving through. Suddenly a figure stood before me which I could take for nothing but a satyr. It seemed to have risen from the swamp, for it was covered with mud to the knees. A young deer just slain dangled from its shoulders, and the warm blood was trickling down over the clothes of this grotesque being. A sort of huge, tawny lion's mane,—I could scarce call it hair,—torn by the bushes, hung down over the satyr's face. Thus the apparition stood before me, rifle in hand, and a snarling hunting-hound at its heels. Could I possibly regard this sylvan monster as a man and a hunter?"

"No doubt you were terribly frightened," said Leo, teasingly.

Wanda lifted her head in scorn. "Frightened, *I*? You know I am not cowardly. Any other girl would no doubt have run away; but I held my ground, and inquired the direction to the beech-holm. I repeated the question, but received no answer. Instead of answering me, the monster stood there as if petrified, and stared at me with his great, wild eyes, not uttering a single word. I began to feel uncomfortable, and turned to go; but he came up to me in two strides, pointed to the right, and showed an unequivocal intention of guiding me."

"But it was not all in pantomime?" asked Leo. "He must have spoken to you."

"Yes, he spoke; that is, along the whole distance he honored me with a dozen words, but no more. When we started, I heard him say, 'We must go to the right;' when we had reached our goal, he added, 'There is the beech-holm.' We were a whole half-hour on the way, and these are the only words he spoke. And what a walk it was! My amiable guide went ahead through the thicket, breaking and treading down all the bushes like a bear. I really believe he laid waste half the forest making a path for me. We then came to a clearing, and pretty soon to a piece of marshy ground. Without a single word, my companion took me up under one arm as if I had been a feather's weight, and carried me safely over. I really began to be afraid, and when I glanced up in the face bending over me, I felt more uncomfortable than ever. The look in those eyes startled me. I made up my mind that this strange apparition had just risen from some giant's grave, and was going to carry off the first human being he met, to offer up upon some old heathen altar as a sacrifice to the pagan gods. Just as I had given up all for lost, I caught a glimpse of the blue sea shimmering through the trees, and recognized the vicinity of the beech-holm. My cavalier paused, stared at me with open eyes and mouth, as if ready to devour me on the spot, and turning a deaf ear to my trembling words of gratitude, incontinently vanished among the trees. The next minute I was on the strand, where I found you and your boat awaiting me. Imagine my surprise, on returning home to-day, to find my satyr, my giant-spectre,—whom I had supposed back again in his old resting-place, the bowels of the earth,—in my aunt's reception-

room, and my utter astonishment in having this monster introduced to me as my cousin Waldemar! He was really upon his good behavior to-day; he even escorted me to dinner. But, good heavens, how embarrassed he was! This must have been the first time he had ever offered a lady his arm. Did you notice how he bowed, and how awkward he was at table? Don't be offended, Leo; this new brother of yours is a true son of the wilderness; he cannot appear among civilized people without convulsing everybody with laughter. And this is the future master of Villica!"

Leo shared Wanda's opinion, but he felt in duty bound to take his brother's part. Fully conscious of his own superiority in manners and appearance, he could afford to be magnanimous. "It is not Waldemar's fault that his education has been so entirely neglected," he said; "mamma thinks that his guardian has let him run wild on purpose."

"That does not matter,—he is a monster. If such an escort to dinner is again given me, I shall decline to appear at table."

As they talked, Wanda's handkerchief had fallen, and lay under the ivy branches encircling the balcony. Leo politely stooped to pick it up; in order to reach it he had to kneel upon the floor, and in this posture he returned the handkerchief to his cousin, who, instead of thanking him, began to laugh anew.

"Why do you laugh?" cried the young prince, hastily springing to his feet.

"O, not at you, Leo,—not at all. I was only thinking how comical your brother would appear in such a position."

"But you will scarcely have the pleasure of seeing him in it. Waldemar will certainly never bend the knee to any lady, and least of all to you."

"Least of all to *me!*" repeated Wanda, in an offended tone. "Ah, yes! you think me such a child that no man would think of falling on his knees to me. I have a great mind to prove the contrary to you."

"How—by making Waldemar kneel to you?" The young girl gave him a defiant glance. "And supposing I really try to bring him to that pass?"

"Try your power over my brother as you like," said Leo, pettishly; "you may learn to duly estimate its extent."

Wanda sprang up with the eagerness of a child delighted with a new plaything.

"It is a bargain," she said; "what shall the wager be?"

"But it must be a genuine falling upon the knees, not a mere act of politeness, like that which just now brought me to your feet."

"Of course. You keep laughing. Do you consider such a thing impossible? I shall win the wager. You will see Waldemar on his knees to me before we leave this place. I make only one condition: you are to give him no hint of this transaction. His bearish nature would be aroused if he should learn that we had presumed to make his formidable self the object of a wager."

"You may rely upon my silence," Leo answered, beginning to enter into the joke, and to share Wanda's confidence in its success. "But he will be furious if you finally reject him and the truth dawns upon him. Or do you intend to say Yes?"

And so these two children of sixteen and eighteen years laughed and jested over the idea of the fine joke they were about to play upon Waldemar. Presumptuous, thoughtless children! They were so accustomed to each other's jests that they felt no compunction at drawing a third party into their sport. They did not at all consider how little the rough, intense nature of Waldemar was adapted to such foolery, and into what terrible earnest he might turn this joke, concocted in their mischievous and frivolous young heads.

CHAPTER VI. A TRANSFORMATION

Weeks had passed; the summer was drawing to a close, and the harvest at Altenhof was unusually abundant. Herr Witold, who had been out in the fields the whole forenoon overseeing his workmen, had returned to the house faint and weary, intending to take a much-needed and well-earned rest. While making the needful preparations, his glance fell upon his foster-son, who stood at the window in riding-costume, awaiting the appearance of his horse.

"Are you really going to C— in the heat of the day?" he asked, in mingled surprise and anger. "You will get sun-struck in that two hours' ride over a shadeless road. You seem unable to exist without visiting your mother at least three or four times a week."

The young man frowned. "I cannot go contrary to my mother's wishes when she asks to see me," he said. "Since we are so near, she has a right to demand frequent visits from me."

"Well, she is making good use of her authority. Still, I should like to know how she has managed to make an obedient son of you. I have been trying it in vain for nearly twenty years; she succeeded in a single day. But she always did understand governing pretty thoroughly."

"Uncle Witold, you know better than any one else that I allow no one to rule me," Waldemar replied, angrily. "My mother has met me with overtures of reconciliation which I can not and will not reject, as you have done ever since I was under your guardianship."

"No doubt they frequently tell you over there that you have attained your majority. You emphasize this fact a great deal of late; but there is no need of it, my boy. You have always had your own way, and often sorely against my will. Your becoming of age is a mere matter of form, so far as I am concerned, but it is a thing of more consequence to your princess-mother. She knows perfectly well what she is about, and this is why she is constantly reminding you that you are your own master."

"Why these everlasting suspicions? Shall I give up all intercourse with my relatives simply because you do not like them?"

"I wish you could put the affection of your dear relatives to the test," rejoined Witold. "They would not make such an ado over you if you were not master of Villica. Now don't fly into a passion! We have disputed so much of late about this matter, that I won't have my noon nap disturbed by it to-day. Your precious relatives will soon leave C—, and then we shall be rid of the whole pack."

Waldemar deigned no reply. He paced up and down the room impatiently. "I'd like to know what they're about there in the stable," he muttered, impatiently. "I gave orders to have Norman saddled, but the groom must have gone to sleep."

"You seem in a prodigious hurry to get away," said Herr Witold. "I actually believe they give you some magic potion over in C—, so that you find peace nowhere else. You are always impatient now when out of the saddle."

Waldemar's only reply was to whistle softly and beat the air with his riding-whip.

"Will the princess return to Paris?" Witold asked, abruptly.

"I do not know; it has not been settled where Leo will finish his studies. My mother will accompany him wherever he goes."

"I wish he would study in Constantinople, and that his princess-mother would go with him to Turkey; then they would be out of the way,—for a time, at least. This young Zulieski must be a prodigy of learning; you are always harping upon his acquirements."

"Leo has learned far more than I, and yet he is nearly four years younger."

"His mother, no doubt, has kept him constantly at his books; but he probably has had but one tutor, while six have run away from you, and the seventh is tempted to remain only for reasons connected with his own scientific researches."

"And why have *I* not been kept at my books?" asked young Nordeck, excitedly and reproachfully.

"I really believe the boy blames me because I have let him have his own way in everything!" exclaimed Witold, in an injured tone.

"O, no. You meant well, uncle, but you don't know how I feel at seeing Leo ahead of me in all his studies, especially when I hear them all speaking of his need of further culture, and I standing there so uncultivated, so— But, never mind, I may as well tell you at once: I am going to the university."

Herr Witold was so astonished that he let the sofa-cushion he was in the act of arranging, fall to the floor.

"To the *university*?" he repeated.

"Certainly. Doctor Fabian has for months been urging it."

"And for months you have refused."

"I have entirely changed my mind. Leo is going next year; and if he is ready to enter at nineteen, it is high time I were there. I must not remain the inferior of my younger brother. I shall consult Doctor Fabian to-morrow. Now I will go to the stable myself and see that Norman is saddled. I am all out of patience at waiting so long."

With these words he took his hat from the table and rushed out of doors. Herr Witold sat motionless on the sofa, quite forgetting to arrange the cushions for his afternoon siesta. He was too much surprised and excited for repose.

"Doctor, what has happened to the lad? What have you done to my boy?" he angrily cried out to the inoffensive doctor, who was just entering the room.

"I?" echoed the poor doctor, in alarm; "nothing, Herr Witold. Waldemar has just gone out from your presence."

"I do not mean to reproach you," returned Herr Witold, peevishly; "it is those Zulieskis and Morynskis. Since they have had him in hand he has become a changed being, I can do nothing with him. Only think, he wants to go to the university!"

"Ah, indeed!" returned the doctor, with a smile of satisfaction.

The guardian became still more exasperated at the tutor's evident delight. "O, you seem in ecstasies," he said; "you desire nothing more than to get away from here with your pupil, and leave me without a living soul to keep me company."

"You well know that I have always advised a university course for your ward. Unfortunately, I have never been listened to, and if the princess Zulieski has persuaded Waldemar to take this step, I can only consider her influence a salutary one."

"Go to the devil with your salutary influences!" cried the old man, hurling the unoffending sofa-cushion into the middle of the room. "We shall soon see what lies concealed under all this. Something has happened to the lad: he wanders about in broad daylight as if dreaming; he takes no interest in anything around him, and when questioned, gives the most preposterous answers. He returns empty-handed from the chase—he who never missed his aim; and all at once a dogged resolution enters his head to go to the university! I must find out the cause of this transformation, and you, doctor, shall help me. You must accompany him to C—."

"For heaven's sake, don't think of such a thing!" cried Doctor Fabian. "No, and a thousand times no! What should I do there?"

"Keep your eyes open. Something is going on over there, I have no doubt of that. I cannot go myself, for I stand on a war-footing with the princess, and there is always a pitched battle when we meet. I cannot endure her patronizing ways, and she is horrified at my rudeness. But you, doctor, stand on neutral ground; you are just the man."

The doctor still protested. "I am not at all qualified for such a mission," he said; "you know my timidity and helplessness in the presence of strangers, and particularly of ladies. And, besides, Waldemar will never consent to my accompanying him."

"Your protests are of no avail," interrupted Herr Witold, in a dictatorial tone. "You must go to C-, Doctor Fabian; you are the only person in whom I can place confidence. You will not fail me when I most need you." And he stormed the citadel of the doctor's never stubborn will with such an avalanche of entreaties, reproaches, and arguments, that the poor man, half bewildered, yielded, promising to do all that was required of him.

A sound of horse's hoofs was heard outside. Waldemar gave the rein to his fleet Norman, and without even a glance at the window where his guardian sat watching him, galloped away.

"There he goes!" said Witold, half angrily, half admiringly, as his adopted son swept past. "That boy sits his horse as if he and his horse were cast in bronze. And it is no slight matter to manage Norman."

"Waldemar has a peculiar passion for riding wild, young horses," observed the doctor, with a touch of anxiety. "I do not understand why. Norman should be his favorite; he is the most unmanageable beast in the whole stable."

"That is the very reason," said the guardian, laughing. "If the young fellow does not have something to subdue and to break, he cannot be happy. But come now, doctor, we will talk over your mission. You must begin the affair diplomatically."

So saying, he grasped the doctor's arm, and almost forced him to take a seat near him on the sofa. The poor tutor could do nothing but submit patiently; he had all his life yielded to the will of others, and now his only protest was to murmur sadly, yet scarce audibly,—

"I a diplomatist, Herr Witold? God help me!"

CHAPTER VII. STRATEGY AND JEALOUSY

The princess and her family mingled but very little in the society of C–, and of late they had lived even more retired than usual. Waldemar always found the family alone when he made his visits, which had become very frequent. Count Morynski, after a few days' sojourn, had departed for his estates. It had been his intention to take his daughter along with him, but the princess considered a prolonged stay necessary to Wanda's health, and she knew how to win her brother's consent, which was somewhat reluctantly granted.

In spite of the excessive noonday heat, young Nordeck had ridden in exceeding haste. Upon entering his mother's presence, he found her seated at her writing-desk. If Leo had appeared in such a heated condition, she certainly would have had a word of solicitude or of admonition for him; but Waldemar's appearance, if noticed, called forth no comment. Although this mother and son met very frequently, not the slightest confidence or intimacy had sprung up between them. The princess treated Waldemar with the greatest respect, and he endeavored to restrain his rough impulses in her presence; but there was not the least affection in this mutual effort to maintain a good understanding. They could not cross the invisible chasm that still yawned between them, although an unusual influence had bridged it over for the present. They greeted each other coldly as at their first meeting, but Waldemar's eyes wandered restlessly and inquiringly about the room.

"Are you looking for Leo and Wanda?" asked the princess. "They have gone to the beach, and will meet you there. You have doubtless arranged a sail?"

"Yes; and I will join them at once," said Waldemar, moving hastily toward the door, but his mother laid her hand upon his arm.

"Before you go, I would like to speak with you a few moments. I have something of importance to say to you."

"Will it not answer just as well after our return?" asked Waldemar, impatiently.

"I desire to speak with you alone," the princess replied. "You will still be in time for the sail; it can be postponed for a quarter of an hour."

Young Nordeck showed great annoyance at this request, and accepted his mother's invitation to be seated with evident reluctance. It was impossible to fix his attention, for his eyes constantly turned to the window near which he sat, and which commanded a view of the sea-shore.

"Our sojourn in C– is drawing to a close," the princess began; "we must soon think of departure."

Waldemar seemed unpleasantly surprised. "So soon?" he said. "September promises to be fine; why not pass it here?"

"I must leave on Wanda's account. I cannot ask my brother to remain much longer separated from his darling. He consented to leave her with me for a short time after his own departure only on condition of my taking her home in person, and the time allotted for her stay is nearly expired."

"His estate lies quite near Villica—does it not?" asked Waldemar, eagerly.

"It is only an hour's drive from there; about half as far as Altenhof is from here."

The young man's face lighted up for a moment; then he gazed uneasily out of the window,—the strand had powerful attractions for him to-day.

"Since we happen to be speaking of Villica," the princess said, with seeming indifference, "may I ask when you think of going there? As you have reached your majority, you will, no doubt, soon assume the management of your estates."

"Arrangements had been made for me to go next spring," Waldemar replied, absently, and still gazing out of the window. "I intended to remain one more winter with my uncle, but that will be impossible, as I am to enter the university."

The mother nodded approvingly. "This is a resolve which has my entire approval," she said. "I have never denied that I consider the education you have received from your guardian far too practical and one-sided. A position like yours demands more thorough culture."

"But I should like to see Villica once more," said Waldemar. "I have not been there since my childhood, and—and you doubtless will remain for some time?"

"I do not know. For the present I certainly shall accept the asylum my brother offers me and my son. It remains to be seen if we are to rely permanently upon his generosity."

Young Nordeck started in amazement. "Asylum—generosity; what does this mean, mother?"

The mother's lips quivered nervously—and this was the sole indication she gave of the inward struggle the step she was taking cost her; otherwise she appeared perfectly unmoved, as she answered,—

"Hitherto I have concealed our family affairs from the world, and I shall continue to do so. I will, however, make no secret of them to you. Yes, I am compelled to seek an asylum with my brother. You are familiar with the public events that occurred during my second marriage. I stood by my husband's side when the storms of the revolution broke around him. I followed him into banishment, and shared with him nearly ten years of exile. Our property was sacrificed to our country's cause; these last years have proved the utter inadequacy of our present means to the requirements of our position. An investigation into our affairs soon after my husband's death showed me that I must abandon the struggle,—our resources are at an end."

Waldemar attempted to speak, but was interrupted by his mother.

"You know what it costs me to make these disclosures, and that I never would have done so if I had been the only one concerned; but as a mother I have to maintain the interests of my son, and here every other consideration sinks into insignificance. Leo is now at the threshold of active life. I care little for the deprivations of poverty, but I greatly fear its humiliations for him; I know that he cannot bear them. Fortune has favored you with wealth, of which hereafter you have full control. Waldemar, I commit your brother's future to your magnanimity."

—To any other woman it would have been a terrible humiliation to plead for help from the son of the man she had deserted with hatred and contempt, but this woman bore the humiliation in a manner that robbed it of all abasement, and which did not in the least compromise her pride. Her attitude was not that of a suppliant; she did not appeal to a filial affection which she knew had no existence. The mother and her rights made no assertion; she appealed to the elder brother's sense of justice in asking him to assist the younger, and the result proved her perfect understanding of Waldemar.

"And do you tell me this for the first time to-day!" he exclaimed, impetuously. "Why did I not know it before?"

The princess met her son's gaze firmly. "What would you have answered me if I had made this disclosure at our first meeting?" she asked, half reproachfully.

Waldemar cast down his eyes. He well recalled the offensive manner in which he had then asked his mother what she wanted of him. "You misunderstood me," he said. "I would never permit you and Leo to seek assistance from any one but me. Could I, the master of Villica, allow my mother and brother to live upon the charity of others? You judge me wrongly, mother; indeed, I have not merited such distrust."

"I did not blame you, my son; I blamed only the influences which had hitherto surrounded you, and which may still in a measure control you. I do not even know whether you will be *allowed* to offer us an asylum."

This was the dart which never failed to take effect, and which the princess always launched at the proper moment.

"I believe I have already proved to you that I know how to assert my independence," cried Waldemar, defiantly. "Now tell me what I am to do; I am ready for anything."

The princess knew that she was running a great risk; still she went firmly and deliberately to her goal. "There is only one form in which we can accept your aid that would be no humiliation to us: you are master of Villica; would it not be a very natural thing for you to receive your mother and brother there as guests?"

Waldemar was startled; at mention of Villica, the old suspicion and animosity broke out afresh. All the warnings of his foster-father as to his mother's plans recurred to him. The princess saw the impending danger, and knew how to ward it off.

"I only desire to reside there in order to be near my brother," she said, "and to still supply in some measure a mother's place to Wanda."

This decided all. The young man replied with beaming eyes and glowing cheeks, "Arrange matters to suit yourself, and I shall be satisfied. I shall not go to Villica to remain long, but I will accompany you thither, and every year I shall pass my vacations with you."

The princess extended her hand. "I thank you, Waldemar, in Leo's name and my own," she said.

There was no warmth, either in the proffered thanks or in Waldemar's answer: "No thanks, mother, I implore; none are needed. The matter is settled. Can I now go to the beach?"

He seemed anxious to avoid further conversation, and his mother did not attempt to detain him. She well knew to whom she owed this victory. She stood at the window and gazed after the young man hurrying through the garden and to the strand. She then resumed her seat at the escritoire, to finish a letter she had begun to her brother.

The letter was finished, and the princess was about to seal it, when Leo entered the room. He appeared flushed and excited, and approached his mother with frowning brow and compressed lips.

"What is the matter, Leo?" she asked, in astonishment. "Why do you come alone? Has Waldemar not joined you and Wanda?"

"O, yes; he came half an hour ago."

"And where is he now?"

"He is taking a sail with Wanda."

"Alone?"

"Yes; entirely alone."

"You know that I trust Wanda alone with no one but you, who have grown up with her as her brother. The sail was arranged for all three; why did you not remain?"

"Because I will not play the rôle of a superfluous third person; because I take no pleasure in seeing Waldemar all the time gazing at Wanda as if she were the only being on earth."

"I have told you my opinion of this petty jealousy," said the princess as she sealed her letter.

"Mamma," cried Leo, with flaming eyes, "do you not, or will you not see that Waldemar loves your niece—that he adores her?"

"And what is that to you, even if it were true? But you only imagine it. Would you have me treat these boyish fancies seriously? You and Waldemar are just at that age when you must have some ideal, and thus far Wanda is the only young girl you have known intimately. She fortunately is enough a child to treat your apparent infatuation as a jest; if this were not so, I should not allow you to be together. If she should ever become in earnest, I should feel in duty bound to interfere, and prescribe limits to your intercourse. But this will never occur. Wanda is only trifling with both of you; so dream about her as much as you like. As to your brother, this practice in gallantry cannot harm him. Unfortunately, he needs it only too much."

The smile that accompanied these words, and also his mother's allusion to his sentiment for Wanda as a boyish passion, offended him. "I wish you would talk to Waldemar about his 'boyish fancies'; he would not bear it as calmly as I do," said Leo.

"I would as soon tell him as you that I consider this infatuation a mere juvenile folly; if you or Waldemar, four or five years hence, tell me of your love for Wanda, I will pay due respect to your feelings; but for the present you may both play the cavalier to your cousin, and no disputes need arise between you."

"I have just had a dispute with Waldemar, and given up the sail of my own accord. I will not allow him to monopolize Wanda's company and conversation, and I will not any longer put up with his domineering manner; I shall let him understand that."

"You will do no such thing," returned the mother. "A good understanding between you is more needful than ever, for we shall accompany Waldemar to Villica."

"To Villica! And must I be his guest there, his subordinate? Never! no, never! I will be under no obligations to him; even though my whole future is at stake, I will accept nothing from his hands."

The princess remained calm, but her voice was proud and stern, as she said, "Even if you are foolish enough to imperil your whole future for a mere whim, I am at your side, and I shall not permit it. You know that I shall never ask anything humiliating of you, but I am not at all inclined to allow my plans to be frustrated by your jealousy. I am accustomed to have my wishes treated with respect. Other considerations higher than merely personal ones, urge me to make Villica my home. We are going there, and you will treat your brother with the same respect I show him. I demand obedience from you, Leo."

Leo understood this tone, and knew that when his mother assumed it, she would carry out her plans at any sacrifice; but an influence mightier than he had ever known before spurred him on to resistance. He ventured no reply, but rebellion was written in his face.

"I shall take care that no such disputes arise between you and your brother in the future," said the princess. "We leave within a week, and when Wanda is at her father's house, you will see her less frequently. To-day's solitary sail with Waldemar will be her last."

She rang the bell for Paul, and sent him to post her letter. It announced to Count Morynski the speedy return of Wanda under the Princess Zulieski's protection, and also informed him that the princess and her son would not require his kindly proffered hospitality; that the former mistress of Villica would soon be reinstated in her old position.

CHAPTER VIII. THE OLD "WONDER-CITY."

The boat which bore the two young pleasure-seekers sped along under full sail. The sea was rough; the waves broke into foam, scattering showers of spray around them; but Waldemar held the helm with a steady hand, and Wanda, who sat opposite him, evidently took delight even in the danger and discomfort of the passage.

"Leo will complain of us to his mother," she said, gazing toward the shore, which was already receding in the distance. "He was very angry when he left us; you were not courteous to him, Waldemar."

"I do not like to have another steer when I am in the boat," replied Waldemar, imperiously.

"And what if *I* wanted to steer?"

His only reply was to rise hastily, and offer the young girl the helm. She burst out laughing. "O, no, thank you. I only asked the question to see how you would answer it. I should not enjoy the sail if I had to give my whole attention to steering the boat."

Without a word Waldemar again took the rudder which had occasioned the dispute between himself and Leo, although its real cause had been a very different matter, which neither would own.

"Where shall we sail?" asked Wanda, after a brief silence.

"Shall we not go to the beech-holm, as we intended?"

"Is it not too far?"

"With this favorable breeze we shall be there in half an hour. You wanted to see the sunset from that spot."

Wanda offered no opposition, although a restless, anxious feeling came over her. Hitherto Leo had been her constant companion in all out-door excursions; to-day, for the first time, she found herself alone with another. Young as she was, her womanly penetration taught her the reason of Waldemar's timidity and embarrassment at his first visit. He was incapable of dissimulation, and although he had not betrayed himself by a single word, his eyes spoke only too plain a language; he was less demonstrative towards her than towards others, but yet she was fully conscious of her power over him and knew how to use it. She certainly, at times, misused this power, for the whole affair was only a jest to her. She was pleased with the idea of controlling this obstinate, ungovernable nature by a word or a glance. Her vanity was flattered at this mute and strange yet passionate adoration, and it amused her prodigiously to see Leo so jealous of Waldemar. She did not intend to give the preference to the elder brother; his exterior repelled her, while his uncouthness horrified and his conversation bored her. Love made him no more agreeable. He never showed that gallantry and politeness of which Leo, although so young, was already master. He seemed to yield reluctantly to the spell the young girl threw around him, to resign himself to a passion from which he could not break away—a passion that had made him its unwilling slave.

The beech-holm might once have been a small island; it was now a densely wooded peninsula connected with the mainland by an isthmus, across which it could be easily reached on foot. Beautiful as it was, the place was seldom visited; it was too solitary and remote for the pleasure-seekers at C—, whose favorite excursions were to the neighboring villages lying along the coast. To-day, there was no one at the holm when the boat landed. Waldemar stepped out, and Wanda, without waiting for his help, sprang lightly upon the white sand and hurried up the hill.

The beech-holm was rightly named. Primeval beeches spread their mighty branches far and wide, casting their sombre shadows over the verdant turf and weather-beaten boulders which lay scattered here and there, marking, so tradition said, the site of an old pagan place of sacrifice. On both sides of the landing-place the trees receded, forming a sort of frame to the open sea, which

a deep, blue, unmeasurable expanse stretched out into the distance. No shore, no island bounded the vision; no sail appeared on the horizon's verge; there was nothing but the sea in its vastness and beauty and grandeur; and the beech-holm lay there as lonely and forsaken as if it were a small island in mid-ocean.

Wanda removed her straw hat, whose only trimming was a simple band of black ribbon, and sat down on one of the moss-covered stones. She still wore light mourning for her aunt's husband. Her white dress was trimmed with black, and a black sash with long ends encircled her waist. This white and black apparel gave a sombreness to the young girl's appearance which did not properly belong to her. She sat there radiant in youth, health, and beauty, with beaming eyes and clasped hands, gazing out upon the water.

Waldemar, who had seated himself on the trunk of a beech, was lost in admiration of the beautiful young girl. No other object, far or near, possessed the slightest interest for him, and he started as if from a dream when Wanda jestingly asked, pointing to her seat,—

"Is this one of your old Runic stones?"

Waldemar shrugged his shoulders. "You must ask my tutor, Doctor Fabian, about that. He is more at home in the first centuries of our era than in the present. He would give you a very learned and exhaustive lecture upon ancient graves, Runic stones, and all that sort of thing; and nothing would afford him greater pleasure."

"Spare me that, for heaven's sake! But if Doctor Fabian has such an enthusiasm for past ages, I wonder he has not instilled a similar taste into you. You seem very indifferent to the past."

"What do I care for all this old-time nonsense? The fields and forests of to-day interest me only on account of the game they offer."

"How prosaic! Then here upon this beautiful beech-holm you were doubtless thinking only of the deer and rabbits possibly lurking in the thickets."

"No," replied Waldemar, emphatically, "not *here*."

"Such thoughts would be unpardonable amid this scenery," said Wanda. "Just look at that sunset illumination! The waves give forth rays just as dazzling as those of the sky above them."

Waldemar gazed indifferently. "Ah, yes!" he said; "Vineta must have sunken right there."

"What must have sunken there?" Wanda asked, eagerly.

"Have you never heard about Vineta? It is one of our sea-shore traditions. I thought everybody knew it."

"I do not; tell me all about it."

"I am a poor story-teller. Ask any old sailor along the coast to relate it to you; he can do it far better than I."

"But I will hear it from your lips; so tell it."

Waldemar's brow grew dark. The young lady was too imperious.

"You *will*!" he returned, rather sharply.

"Yes, I *will*," she repeated, with the same obstinacy as before. She evidently knew her power, and meant to use it.

The frown on the young man's brow deepened. He felt like rebelling against the spell that fettered him, but when he met the dark eyes whose glance seemed to change from command to entreaty, his defiance vanished, his brow cleared, and he smiled.

"Well, then, I must tell the story in my own abrupt, *prosaic* way," he said, emphasizing the last adjective. "According to the legend, Vineta was an old, fortified city by the sea, the metropolis of a people who ruled land and water far and near, who surpassed all the world in pomp and grandeur, and into whose lap the wealth and treasure of all lands were poured. But the inhabitants of Vineta became so haughty, so overbearing, and so wicked, that their pride and sin called down the vengeance of Heaven upon their city, and it was swallowed up by the waves. Our sailors swear that yonder, where the shore recedes, the great city rests to-day in all its olden splendor. They declare that they

frequently catch glimpses of its towers and domes glistening fathoms deep below the waters; that occasionally the city in its olden magnificence rises from the sea, and that certain favored ones are allowed to behold the enchanting sight. Indeed, there are mirages enough along this coast, and we have here in the North a sort of *fata morgana* whose cause I cannot explain, although my tutor has told me all about it—"

"Never mind the explanation," interrupted Wanda. "Who cares for that, if the legend is only beautiful? And it is delightful—don't you think so?"

"Well, really, I have never given its beauty a thought," replied Waldemar.

"Have you, then, no feeling for the poetic? That is deplorable."

"Do you really think so?" he asked, in surprise.

"Indeed I do."

"No one has ever taught me to know or to appreciate what you call the poetic," the young man said, in a tone of apology. "The poetic plays no part in my uncle's house, and my tutors have given me only dry lessons in practical things. I now begin to comprehend for the first time that there is such a thing as poetry."

As Waldemar said this, his face had an unusually dreamy expression. He threw back the hair which usually hung low over his forehead, and leaned his head against the trunk of the tree. Wanda now for the first time made the discovery that a remarkably high and finely shaped forehead lay concealed under that mass of blonde hair. It was a forehead that dignified and ennobled the plain, irregular features. Over the left temple ran a peculiarly marked blue vein, clearly and sharply defined even in calm, untroubled moments. Wanda had often ridiculed that "tawny lion's mane," little dreaming of the clear, high brow that lay beneath.

"Do you know, Waldemar, that I have just made a discovery?" she said.

"Ah! what is it?" he answered, abstractedly.

"That singular blue vein on your forehead; my aunt has one just like it, only not so strongly defined."

"Indeed! Then this is the only point of resemblance between my mother and me."

"That is true; you resemble her only in this one respect; but Leo is her exact image."

"Leo!" echoed Waldemar, with a peculiar intonation. "Ah, yes! that is very natural."

"And why ought the younger brother to have the advantage of the elder?"

"Why not in all else, since he has the first place in his mother's love?"

"But, Waldemar—"

"Is this news to you?" interrupted the young man, almost sadly. "I thought my relations toward my mother were known to every one. She forces herself to treat me kindly and courteously, and effort enough it costs her. But she cannot overcome her inward aversion—neither can I; so we stand on the same footing."

Wanda made no reply. The turn the conversation had taken surprised her greatly. Waldemar did not seem to notice her astonishment; he went on in a tone of great bitterness. "The Princess Zulieski is a stranger to me and must remain so. I do not belong to her or to her son; I have no part in their life. I feel this more and more at every meeting. You have no idea, Wanda, what it costs me to cross their threshold. It is a torture I have imposed upon myself, and I would never have believed I could endure it so patiently."

"Why do you endure it? No one forces you to come," exclaimed Wanda, thoughtlessly.

He gazed at her intently, and his whole soul was in that gaze. The answer beamed so plainly from his eyes that the young girl blushed deeply. That ardent, reproachful look spoke only too plainly.

"You do my aunt injustice," she said, excitedly, trying to conceal her embarrassment. "She must surely love her own son."

"O, most assuredly!" returned Waldemar, impetuously. "I have no doubt that she loves Leo very much, although she treats him harshly; but why should she love me or I her? I was only a year

old when I lost both my father and my mother. I was torn from my home to grow up in a stranger's house. When I learned to reflect and to ask questions, I was told that the marriage of my parents had been unfortunate for both, and that they had parted in bitter hatred. I have since experienced the disastrous effects of this hatred upon my own life. I was early taught that my mother was solely to blame, but I heard such hints thrown out in regard to my father's character that I could not hold him guiltless. And so I grew up to dislike and suspect my parents—those two beings a child should hold in the highest love and reverence. I cannot now rid myself of these early impressions. My uncle—I call him uncle, although he is only a distant relative of my father—has been very good to me, but he could offer me nothing different from the life he himself led. You doubtless know what that life has been; my mother's family are all well informed on that point. And yet, knowing all this, Wanda, do you demand from me a knowledge of æsthetics and of poetry?"

These last words had a tone of indignant reproach, but beneath them lurked a melancholy regret. Wanda gazed with wide-open eyes at her companion whom she did not at all understand to-day. This was her first serious conversation with him; he had never before broken his silent reserve toward her. The peculiarly distant relations between this mother and son had not escaped her notice, but she had not believed Waldemar at all sensitive upon this point. Hitherto not a syllable on the subject had fallen from his lips, and now all at once he showed a depth of feeling which was almost passionate lamentation. At this moment, for the first time, the young girl realized how lonely, and empty, and neglected Waldemar's childhood must have been, and how forsaken and friendless was this young heir of whose wealth she had heard so much.

"You wished to see the sunset," Waldemar said, abruptly, and with an entire change of voice and manner. "I think it will be one of uncommon splendor to-night."

The layer of clouds which skirted the horizon was all aflame with warmth and glow, and the sea, flooded with light and reflecting from its clear depths all the splendor of the illuminated sky, gave back the farewell greeting of the departing day. From both sky and land streamed a flood of radiance, diffusing itself far and near. But above the spot where the wondrous city Vineta rested upon the ocean's floor, the waves burned with a scarlet glow, and rose and fell in undulations of liquid gold, while thousands of fiery sparks danced upon the waters.

There is in old traditions something that outlives superstition, and however versed we may be in modern lore, there come moments when these tales and legends loom up before our minds, and receive at least a transient recognition. The everlasting riddles of these old legends, like their eternal truths, even to-day lie deep in the human heart. True, this mysterious fairy kingdom is now accessible only to favored mortals, to poets and to those who live close to the great heart of nature; but these two on the beech-holm must have belonged to the favored ones, for they plainly felt the magical influence which gently but irresistibly drew them within its circle, and neither had heart or courage to flee from it.

Over their heads the tree-tops swayed to and fro in the wind, while the sea surged ever more loudly at their feet. Wave upon wave came rolling to the shore, each bearing a white crest upon its forehead, leaping up in its giant strength for a moment, only to be dashed in pieces on the strand. It was the grand, old melody of the ocean, a melody made up of the whistling wind and the roaring waves, that grand, eternal diapason which awes, yet entralls the heart. It sings of dreamy, sun-kissed ocean calms, of raging storms bearing terror and destruction in their path, of restless, tumultuous billows; and from every wave comes a tone, from every breeze an accord.

Waldemar and the young girl at his side must have understood this language well, for they listened to it in breathless silence; and these were not the only strains they heard. Up from the water's depths, from the turrets of the sunken city, came a sound as of silver bells; they listened, and their hearts felt an aching and a yearning, and at last the premonition of a great and enduring happiness. From the gold and purple waves rose a gleaming apparition. It hovered over the sea, bathed in the evening sunlight; it stood in mid-air, with its roofs, and spires, and battlements lighted up by gold

and opal and sapphire hues; the phantom-apparition, the theme of so many a song and story—the old "wonder-city"—Vineta!

The descending sun now touched the gleaming waters with its radiant disc, and sinking lower and lower, soon passed from sight. But the dissolving hues gathered new brightness; once again the western horizon was illuminated as by fire; then the light slowly paled, and the fairy vision vanished.

Wanda sighed half audibly, and passed her hand over her forehead. Then she said, softly, "The sun has set; it is time for us to think of returning."

"Of *returning*?" echoed Waldemar, as in a dream. "Why so soon?"

The young girl rose quickly as if to flee from some painful emotion. "We must reach home before dusk," she said, "or my aunt will never forgive me for this excursion."

"I will be responsible to my mother; still, if you wish to return immediately—"

"O, yes; please let us go!"

The young man started for the boat, and then paused suddenly:—

"Wanda, you intend to leave in a few days, do you not?"

He asked this question in a strangely excited tone, and Wanda's voice lacked its usual composure, as she replied,—

"I must go to my father, we have been so long separated."

"My mother and Leo are going to Villica—" Here Waldemar hesitated and gasped for breath. "There is some talk of my accompanying them. *May* I?"

"Why do you ask me?" replied Wanda, with an embarrassment very unusual to her. "It is for you to decide whether you will visit your estates."

The young man paid no heed to her reply. He bent over her, his voice trembled, he was deeply moved.

"But I ask *you*, Wanda, you alone. May I come to Villica?"

"*Yes*," replied Wanda, involuntarily; but she was startled when Waldemar seized her hand with a violent gesture, and held it clasped tightly as if he would never let it go. She now felt what he understood by this *yes*, and the idea terrified her. She flushed deeply like one in a burning fever. Waldemar perceived her emotion.

"Am I too violent with you?" he asked, gently. "You must not be angry with me, Wanda, at least not to-day. I could not bear the thought of your departure. But now that I am sure of seeing you again, I will wait patiently until we reach Villica."

Wanda made no reply. They walked in silence to the boat. Waldemar set the sails, and grasped the oars. A few powerful strokes sent the tiny bark far out upon the water. The waves were still tinged with roseate reflections as the boat shot over them. Neither spoke during the passage; but the sea rose and fell with a hollow murmur, while the last flush in the sky faded away, and the first evening shadows settled down upon the beech-holm, receding farther and farther into the distance. The sunset vision had ended; but the ancient legend declares that the mortal who has once seen the submerged Vineta, who has once listened to the chiming of its bells, can never more know peace until the magical city again rises to greet him, or draws him downward to its depths.

CHAPTER IX.

DOCTOR FABIAN'S DIPLOMATIC MISSION

The diplomatic mission about to be intrusted to Doctor Fabian did not seem half so difficult to Herr Witold in its execution as in its preliminary arrangements. In order to gain reliable information of what was going on at C–, the doctor must have access to the house of the Princess Zulieski, and this could be obtained only through Waldemar. But how could the old man broach this matter to his foster-son without receiving a decided refusal? Chance came very unexpectedly to his aid. At Waldemar's last visit the princess had expressed a desire to become personally acquainted with her son's tutor. Herr Witold admitted, for the first time in his life, that the princess had expressed a very proper and reasonable wish. The doctor had indulged a secret hope that the proposed mission would be thwarted by the obstinacy of his pupil, but he found himself held inexorably to his promise, and was obliged to accompany Waldemar to C–.

Waldemar went on horseback; riding was a passion with him, and he disliked slow driving over the stony road, when he could ride at full gallop. It did not occur to him that he ought to take a seat in the carriage with his tutor; but Doctor Fabian was accustomed to such slights, and being naturally timid and yielding, he neither had the courage to resent uncourteous treatment, nor to resign his position. Besides, he possessed no fortune, and a situation was a vital question with him. Life at Altenhof did not please him, and he took little part in it: he appeared in the family circle only at meals and when he passed an occasional hour with Herr Witold. His pupil engrossed none too much of his attention; Waldemar was always glad when study hours were over, and his tutor was still more so. The rest of the time was at the tutor's disposal, and he could freely devote himself to his hobby—ancient German history. Thanks to this favorite study, Doctor Fabian had not followed the example of his six predecessors, and run away. Knowing that Altenhof offered him ample opportunities and abundant leisure for historical research, he patiently endured all the discomforts of his lot. He did not think of complaining to-day when Waldemar galloped on ahead of him, promising to await him at the entrance of the town, where he would arrive toward noon.

Upon their arrival they found Wanda alone in the drawing-room. Doctor Fabian, although very much embarrassed, went through the introduction passably well; but, unfortunately, his evident and somewhat comical anxiety to please provoked the young girl to set about teasing him at once.

"And so you are my cousin Waldemar's tutor?" she said; "I offer you my sincere condolence, and pity you with all my heart."

Fabian was alarmed and astonished. He gazed, now at the ceiling, and now at his pupil, who seemed not to have heard the mocking words, for his manner did not betray the slightest indication of anger.

"I—I do not quite understand you, countess," stammered the doctor.

"I mean that, in educating Waldemar Nordeck, you have no enviable task," replied Wanda, saucily, and evidently very much amused at the tutor's embarrassment.

Doctor Fabian, knowing the extreme sensitiveness of his pupil, gazed at him in alarm. Often enough far less offensive words from Herr Witold had roused him to fury; but now, for some unaccountable reason, there was not the slightest token of a storm. The young man leaned calmly against Wanda's chair, and even smiled as, bending over her, he asked,—

"Do you really think me so bad?"

"Of course I do. Didn't I see you in a rage day before yesterday about a rudder?"

"But I was not angry with you," said Waldemar.

The doctor dropped the hat which he had thus far held in both hands. What sort of a tone was this, and what meant the glance that accompanied it? The conversation went on in the same strain.

Wanda, inclined to mischief as usual, teased Waldemar most unmercifully; but he submitted with inexhaustible patience. It seemed that nothing from this source could irritate or offend him. He smiled at all the young girl's sallies; he seemed completely transformed when in her presence.

"Doctor Fabian is listening to us with the greatest interest," she said, laughing. "He is, no doubt, delighted with our good-humor."

Poor Doctor Fabian! He was not at all delighted, he was only bewildered. Small as was his experience in love affairs, the truth, little by little, dawned upon him; he began to see what was going on. This explained Waldemar's sudden reconciliation, his eagerness to ride to C— in sun and storm, his complete transformation. It would be a terrible blow to Herr Witold, who cherished such a deeply-rooted hatred of the whole "Polish party." The diplomatic mission was even at the outset an entire success, but its result so surprised the ambassador that he would have very likely forgotten his instructions and betrayed his amazement, if the princess had not appeared at that moment.

The princess had more than one reason for desiring a personal acquaintance with her son's tutor, who would also accompany his pupil to the university. Now that she and Waldemar had become reconciled, his immediate surroundings could not be a matter of indifference to her. A ten minutes' acquaintance with Fabian convinced her that no opposition need be feared from him; that, on the contrary, he would be a passive instrument in her hands. From this constant companion much could be learned in the future which could not be obtained from the inaccessible Waldemar. She did Fabian the honor to regard him as a suitable instrument for her plans; she lavished the most condescending attentions upon him, and the humility with which he received her condescensions pleased her greatly. She forgave his timidity and embarrassment; or rather, she thought them quite proper in her presence, and she was graciously pleased to enter into a prolonged conversation with him.

Upon his mother's entrance into the room Waldemar became reserved as usual. He took little part in the conversation, but he finally said a few words to the princess in an undertone. She rose and walked with him to the balcony.

"Do you wish to speak with me alone?" she asked.

"Only a moment. I merely wished to say that it will be impossible for me to accompany you and Leo to Villica, as we had proposed."

"Why?" asked the mother, anxiously. "Have difficulties been placed in your way?"

"Yes; there are certain formalities to be complied with on my arriving at my majority,—certain legal transactions at which I must be present. My father's will has specifications in this respect of which neither I nor my uncle Witold dreamed; and just now, when I wish to go away, the notice comes. For the present I must remain at Altenhof."

"Well, then, we too shall postpone our departure, and I must send Wanda alone to her father."

"By no means," returned Waldemar, vehemently. "I have written to Villica that you will arrive there in a few days, and have ordered the preparations necessary for your reception. I shall follow you as soon as I am at liberty to do so; in any event, I shall pass a few weeks with you before I leave for the university."

"Does your guardian know of this, Waldemar?"

"No; I have only spoken to him of my intention to visit Villica."

"Then you will have to explain our sojourn there to him?"

"I shall do so; for the rest, I have directed the superintendent of the estate to place himself at your disposal until I come myself. You have only to give your orders; they will be obeyed."

The princess would fain have expressed her thanks, but the words died on her lips. She well knew that this generosity was not for her sake, and the peculiarly cold manner in which it was tendered compelled her to accept it just as coldly, if she would not humiliate herself.

"We shall certainly expect you. As for Leo—"

"Leo is still sulking over our quarrel of day before yesterday. On my arrival, he went down to the strand to avoid meeting me."

The mother frowned. Leo had received an especial command to meet his brother kindly, and this defiance came at a most inopportune moment.

"Leo is often hasty and indiscreet; I will see that he asks your pardon."

"O, no; don't give yourself that trouble," said Waldemar, indifferently; "we will arrange matters ourselves."

They re-entered the drawing-room, where Wanda had been amusing herself by throwing Doctor Fabian from one embarrassment into another. The princess now came to his relief: she wished to speak with him privately about her son's course of study, and begged him to accompany her into the next room.

"Poor doctor," remarked Wanda, gazing after him. "It seems to me, Waldemar, that you and your tutor have changed rôles; you have not the least respect for him, but he is mortally afraid of you."

Waldemar did not contradict this assertion, which was only too true. He merely replied, "Do you consider Doctor Fabian a person calculated to inspire respect?"

"O, no, not at all; but he seems very good-tempered and forbearing."

"That maybe; but these are qualities I do not at all appreciate," replied Waldemar, contemptuously.

"Must one tyrannize over you in order to gain your respect?" asked Wanda, archly.

Waldemar drew up his chair, and sat down near her. "That depends upon who the tyrant is," he said. "I should not advise any one at Altenhof to try this game, and here I allow it to only one individual."

"I should not dare attempt such a thing," said Wanda, in a low tone.

He made no reply; his thoughts seemed to flow in another channel.

"Did you not think it very beautiful at the beech-holm day before yesterday?" he asked, abruptly.

The young countess blushed, but assuming a contradictory tone, she answered, "The place seemed dismal in spite of its beauty, and as for those sea legends of yours, I shall not listen to them at sunset again. Ere long I might come to believe in the old traditions."

"Yes, that is true. You reproached me for not being able to comprehend the poetry of the legend; what should *I* know about poetry?"

Wanda was silent; that strange embarrassment she every now and then felt in the presence of this young man, again came over her. She had attempted to banish it by laughing and jesting, and in the presence of others she succeeded; but as soon as they were alone, the feeling returned with new power, and she could not assume her usual unconstrained manner. That eventful sojourn at the beech-holm had given a peculiar gravity to an affair which ought to be a jest and nothing more.

Waldemar waited in vain for an answer, and felt hurt at not receiving it. "I have informed my mother that I cannot go to Villica just now," he said; "I shall come in three or four weeks."

"Well, that is a very short time," Wanda observed.

"A short time! It is an eternity! You have no idea of what it costs me to remain here and allow you to depart alone."

"Say no more, I entreat you," interrupted Wanda, with perceptible emotion. But Waldemar went on in the same impassioned strain:—

"I promised you to wait until we were in Villica, but then I hoped to accompany you. Now a month perhaps will pass ere we meet again, and I cannot remain silent all this time. I cannot endure the thought of your being with Leo so long, and not knowing that you are mine, and mine only."

The declaration came so suddenly, so impetuously, that Wanda had no time to avert it; and if time had been given her, the effort would have been fruitless. He had again seized her hand, and held it firmly as at the beech-holm.

"Do not shrink from me, Wanda; you must long have known what chains me here. I could not conceal it; you have allowed me to come; you have not repelled me, and so I have been encouraged to

speak. I know that I am not like others, that I am deficient in much, perhaps in everything that would please you; but I can and will learn. It is solely for your sake that I impose upon myself these years of study at the university. What do I care for learning or for society? They have no charm for me; but because I lack these advantages, I have seen you shrink from me and make sport of me. The time will come when you cannot do this. Let me only know that you will one day be mine, that I may come back to claim you, and I will shrink from no effort that would make me worthy of you. Wanda, I have been lonely and forsaken from my infancy. If I appear, rough and uncultivated, you must remember that I have had no mother's care, no mother's love. Do not wonder that I am not like Leo, who has enjoyed all of which I have been deprived. But my nature is more intense than his; I can love more warmly and deeply than he. You are the only being I have ever loved, and a single word from you will atone for all the past. Speak this word to me, Wanda; or at least give me the hope that I may one day hear it from you. But do not say *No*, for I will not bear it."

He had literally fallen on his knees before her; but Wanda had no thought of exultation in the triumph she in her girlish arrogance had sought. A dim premonition had now and then come over her that the sport might have a more serious ending than she had anticipated, that its *finale* would not be a mere joke: but she had banished the apprehension with all the levity of her sixteen years. Now the decisive moment had come, and she must speak. She must face an ardent proposal, which inexorably demanded acceptance or refusal. True, this was no chivalrous, attractive wooing; it had nothing of that romance and tenderness a young girl craves. Even in the declaration of his love, Waldemar's rude, impetuous nature was apparent, but every word expressed violent and long pent-up emotion, and was full of the ardor of intense passion. For the first time Wanda comprehended the deep earnestness of Waldemar's love for her, and her conscience uttered this burning reproach: "What hast thou done?" Her voice trembled with anguish as she said,—

"Rise, Waldemar, I entreat you!"

"When I hear Yes from your lips, and not until then."

"I cannot answer you—not now; rise, I beg you!"

He would not listen. He still remained on his knees, when the door unexpectedly opened, and Leo entered. For a moment he stood in the middle of the room like one petrified. Then an exclamation of anger passed his lips,—

"*You have won, after all!*"

Waldemar sprang to his feet, his eyes flashing with rage.

"What do you want here?" he cried.

Leo had been white with passion, but the tone of his brother's question sent the blood mounting to his forehead. In an instant he stood before Waldemar.

"You think my presence superfluous and intrusive, and yet I could give you the best possible explanation of the scene that just met my eyes."

"Silence, Leo!" exclaimed Wanda, half entreatingly, half imperiously; but jealousy made Leo forget all discretion and forbearance.

"I will not be silent; my promise extended only to the decision of the wager, and I have now seen with my own eyes how it is decided. I have often entreated you to stop this sport. You knew that it vexed me—that it drove me to despair; and yet you pushed it to the last extremity. And shall I now humbly submit to be shown the door as an intruder by Waldemar, who exults in his supposed triumph? Shall I bear all this in silence,—I, who have heard you boast that you would bring him as suitor to your feet? You have accomplished your purpose, but he shall at least know the truth."

Waldemar, thunderstruck at that word *wager*, stood motionless, his right hand clutching the back of his chair, while his eyes were fixed upon Wanda with a bewildered, inquiring expression.

"What does this mean?" he asked, in a scarce audible voice.

Wanda hung her head in conscious guilt. Anger against Leo struggled in her breast with her own sense of shame. Leo did not reply to his brother's question; the sudden change in Waldemar's

face silenced him. Moreover, he began to realize the critical position in which he had placed Wanda, and he dared not seek to rescue her.

"What does this mean?" Waldemar repeated, starting from his momentary stupor, and confronting Wanda. "Leo speaks of a wager, of a game of which I am the victim. Answer me, Wanda; I can believe you, and you only. Tell me that it is false—"

"And so you think me a liar!" broke out Leo. But his brother did not hear him. Wanda's silence told him enough; he required no further confirmation. As the truth was laid bare to him, the whole ferocity of his nature broke forth; the spell that had held him so long was broken, and passion carried him beyond all bounds.

"I *will* have an answer," he said. "Have I been a mere plaything for you, nothing but an object of ridicule? Have you been laughing at me and deriding me, while I— Wanda, you shall answer me on the spot, or—"

He did not end the menace, but his look and tone were so threatening that Leo stepped before Wanda to protect her. She, too, stood erect and defiant; the half-uttered threat had exasperated her and restored her self-control.

"I will not be called to account in this way!" she began, excitedly; then her eye met Waldemar's, and she stopped short. Although his features were livid with rage, his eyes betrayed the unspeakable torture of the man who sees his love betrayed and mocked, and his adored idol ruthlessly torn from him. Wanda's voice seemed to have brought him back to his senses; the clenched hands relaxed, but the lips closed firmly as if no sound must escape them. The chest rose and fell in a violent struggle to repress its pent-up fury; but the effort was too great, the young man staggered and sank into a chair.

"What is the matter, Waldemar?" Leo asked, becoming alarmed, and repenting of his inconsiderate action. "If I had known that you would take the affair so seriously, I should have remained silent."

Waldemar rose with blanched face and trembling limbs, and, with a defiant gesture at his brother, turned to go without uttering a word.

At this juncture the princess appeared, accompanied by Doctor Fabian. The loud talking had penetrated her apartment, and she knew that something unusual was going on in the drawing-room. She entered softly, and remained for a moment unobserved. Wanda still stood in her place, oscillating between fear and defiance; but fear at length gained the mastery, and in the tone of an offending child begging pardon, she called the young man back.

"*Waldemar!*"

He paused. "Do you wish to speak with me, Countess Morynski?"

The young girl trembled. It was the first time such an icy, cutting, contemptuous tone had met her ear, and the deep glow that suddenly overspread her face showed how intensely she felt it. The princess now confronted her son.

"What has happened? Where are you going, Waldemar?"

"Away from *here!*" he replied, morosely, without meeting her gaze.

"But tell me the reason—"

"I can not— Let me go. I will not remain;" and pressing past her, he hurried away.

"Explain this strange scene to me," said the princess, imperiously, turning to Wanda and Leo. "Remain, doctor," she added, as Doctor Fabian, who had stood nervously in the doorway, made a movement to follow his pupil. "In any event here is some misunderstanding, and I wish you to bear an explanation of it to my son Waldemar. I cannot do this, his abrupt departure has rendered it impossible. What has happened? I must and will know."

Wanda, instead of answering, threw herself upon the sofa, and began to sob violently; but Leo followed his mother to a remote part of the room, and told her the whole affair. At every word the lady's brow grew darker; it evidently cost her an effort to maintain her composure, but she at length turned to the doctor, and said, with apparent calmness,—

"It is just as I supposed; a misunderstanding—nothing more. A foolish wager between my niece and younger son has given Waldemar cause for offence; I beg of you to tell him that I sincerely regret this occurrence, but I hope he will attach as little importance to the folly of these presumptuous children as it deserves."

"I had perhaps best seek my pupil immediately."

"Yes, certainly," replied the lady, glad to have the innocent yet unwelcome witness of this family quarrel take his departure. "*Au revoir*, doctor. I depend upon your speedy return in Waldemar's company."

She spoke these words very graciously, and answered the tutor's farewell greeting with a smile.

But as soon as the door closed behind him, she turned to Wanda and Leo with a face and gestures that indicated, before she had spoken a word, the violent storm that was raging in her breast.

Meanwhile Doctor Fabian learned from Paul that Waldemar had ridden away. No alternative was left him but to follow immediately to Altenhof, and he started at once. Upon his arrival he learned that Waldemar had not been there, and he could not help feeling alarmed at an absence which ordinarily he would not have noticed. The conclusion of the excited scene he had witnessed allowed him to divine the truth; he felt sure that something more weighty than a mere jest or a slight misunderstanding had caused Waldemar's fit of passion and abrupt departure. The young man who had just before borne so patiently Wanda's whims and caprices, would not have allowed a slight matter to move him so deeply. That whole afternoon the doctor awaited Waldemar's return to Altenhof, but he did not appear. Herr Witold had gone to the city and was not expected home until evening, and so the doctor was not harassed by questions from the guardian, which he could not have answered.

Hour after hour glided away; the evening shadows began to fall, but Waldemar was neither seen nor heard of by any one connected with the household. Anxiety drove the doctor out of doors. He walked along the carriage road leading to the estate, over which every visitor must pass. A short distance from the highway lay a very wide and deep ditch, usually full of water, but now the summer's heat rendered it perfectly dry, and the huge stones at its bottom were exposed to view. The bridge crossing it afforded a splendid view of the surrounding landscape. It was still broad day in the open fields, but twilight already enveloped the forest. As the doctor stood on the bridge considering whether he had better go on or turn back, the figure of a horseman advancing on the gallop appeared in the distance. The doctor heaved a sigh of relief. He had not really known what to fear, but he now felt that his anxiety had been groundless, and full of delight he hastened along the edge of the ditch to meet the rider.

"Thank God, you have come, Waldemar! I have been so anxious on your account."

Upon seeing his tutor, Waldemar reined up his horse. "Why have you been anxious?" he asked. "Am I a child who cannot be trusted out of your sight?"

In spite of this forced composure there was a strange ring in the young man's voice, which again aroused the doctor's misgivings. He now for the first time noticed that the horse was panting with fatigue, that his nostrils were covered with foam and his breast heaved violently. The animal had no doubt been mercilessly ridden, but the rider showed no signs of fatigue. He sat erect in the saddle, holding the reins with an iron grip, and instead of turning aside in the direction of the fields, it was his evident intention to leap the ditch.

"For heaven's sake, stop!" cried Fabian. "You will not be guilty of such rashness! You know that Norman has never leaped this ditch."

"But he will now!" replied Waldemar, plunging his spurs into the horse's flanks. Norman sprang forward, but bolted at the margin and refused to take the leap.

"Listen to me!" cried the doctor, imploringly, as he approached the frantic beast. "You require an impossibility; the leap cannot be made, and you will be dashed in pieces on the rocks below."

Without deigning a reply, Waldemar again urged Norman on. "Get out of my way," he cried; "I shall make the leap. Get out of the way, I tell you!"

That wild, anguished tone showed the tutor the mental condition of his pupil, who really would as soon have been dashed in pieces as to make the leap in safety. In his intense fear of impending calamity, the doctor conquered his usual timidity and seized the bridle, determined to dissuade the young man from his foolhardy attempt. But Waldemar gave a terrific stroke of the whip to the refractory animal, which reared and beat wildly with his fore-feet in the air, but refused to take the leap. At this moment a faint cry of distress reached the rider's ear. He was startled, paused, and, quick as lightning, reined back his horse; but it was too late! As Waldemar, the next instant, sprang to the ground, he saw his tutor lying before him motionless and bleeding.

CHAPTER X. LEO'S VISIT TO ALTENHOF

A week of anxiety and sorrow passed over Altenhof. Upon Herr Witold's return on that ill-fated evening, he found the whole house in commotion. Doctor Fabian lay senseless and bleeding in his room, while Waldemar, with a face that startled his foster-father quite as much as that of the tutor, was endeavoring to stanch the wound. Nothing could be drawn from him excepting that he alone was to blame for the accident, and his uncle was, consequently, obliged to seek an explanation from the servants. He learned from them that young Nordeck had come home at twilight bearing the wounded man in his arms, and had at once dispatched a messenger for the nearest physician. A quarter of an hour afterward, the horse had appeared panting and exhausted. On finding himself deserted by his master, Norman had followed the well-known road home. The servants knew nothing more.

The physician, who soon arrived and saw the state of the wounded man, looked grave and anxious. The wound in the head, evidently caused by a blow from the horse's hoof, seemed a serious one, while the tutor's frail constitution and the great loss of blood rendered his case very critical. The sufferer for a long time hovered between life and death. Herr Witold, whose own health like that of his ward was perfect, and who had never known what pain and illness really were, after these mournful days were over, often declared that he would not pass through them again for all the world. To-day, for the first time, the old gentleman's face assumed its usual placid and unconcerned expression, as he sat down by the sick man's bed.

"The worst is over," he said; "and now, Doctor Fabian, have the goodness to set Waldemar's head right again. I have not the slightest influence over him, but you can do anything you like with him, so bring the lad back to reason, or this unfortunate affair will prove his ruin."

Waldemar stood at a window pressing his forehead against the panes, and gazing vacantly out into the yard. Doctor Fabian, who still wore a broad white bandage around his head, looked pale and exhausted. He, however, sat upright, supported by pillows, and although his voice was weak, it had no tremor of illness as he asked,—

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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