CLAIRE VON GLÜMER

A NOBLE NAME; OR, DÖNNINGHAUSEN

Claire Glümer

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Glümer C.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
"ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE."

At the window of a luxuriously-furnished dressing-room a young girl was seated sewing, murmuring verses the while to herself with an absorbed air. All around her lay various stuffs, ribbons, and laces, while standing upon a footstool at a toilet-table immediately behind her a strikingly beautiful child, five or six years old, was twisting gay ribbons about her head and arms, finally throwing around her shoulders a blue satin sash and looking at herself in the glass with immense satisfaction.

"Lisbeth, what are you doing?" a sharp voice suddenly asked, and from between the curtains of the portière of the door of the adjoining sleeping-room came a fair, pretty woman in an evident ill humour.

"Mamma!" the child exclaimed, and jumping hastily down from the footstool, she entangled herself in her draperies and fell. Her mother hurried towards her with a scream, but the young girl had already flown to the little one's assistance.

"I haven't hurt myself," the child immediately declared, looking up beseechingly at her mother, who, nevertheless, seized her impatiently by the arm and tore off the sash from her shoulders. "All this beautiful ribbon crushed and spoiled!" she said, crossly. "If you can take no better care of Lisbeth, my dear Johanna, the child must stay with Lina. Go, go to the nursery, and don't disturb me again to-day," she added, turning to the little girl; and then, sitting down before the dressing-table, she began to arrange her abundant fair hair.

Lisbeth went to Johanna and seized her hand. "Don't be vexed with Lisbeth, mamma," the young girl entreated. "She is not to blame. I was not attending to her; I was going over my part."

"If you do not know it perfectly by this time you had better give it up," the other said, with a slight shrug of her shoulders. "Make up your mind to do so, and I will give it to Fräulein Dornbach. She can easily learn those few words before to-morrow evening."

"Oh, no! let me try," the young girl exclaimed. "I have just said them without stumbling. And my dress is nearly finished. I wanted to ask you – "

"Well?" the other asked, when Johanna hesitated.

"To let me go to the theatre to-night," she replied, without looking up.

"What! again? You went only a couple of days ago."

"Yes, but I should so like to see papa as Egmont, and – " She hesitated again and blushed. "And you as Clärchen," was what she meant to add, knowing that this addition would have secured her the desired enjoyment; but her innate integrity triumphed; her step-mother's acting was distasteful to her, and she suppressed the end of her sentence.

With a degree of artistic instinct the lady divined her step-daughter's thoughts. "You had better study your part," she said, rising. "And, besides, I want you to trim my lace overdress with fresh ribbons; you will have too much to do to-morrow to attend to it."

"There comes papa!" exclaimed Lisbeth, who had gone to the window and was looking out. "He is just crossing the street." And she was hurrying out of the room, when her mother called her back.

"Stay where you are!" she said. "You must not disturb papa now; we are just going to the theatre. My hat and wrap, Johanna, and my gloves; be quick, be quick!" And beginning to sing 'Joyous and

sorrowing,' with a languishing expression she took from her step-daughter the articles brought to her and left the room.

Johanna sat down and went on with her sewing. She heard her father's step in the anteroom, heard his sonorous voice. How many would be delighted, enthralled, inspired by that voice this evening! She alone, his most enthusiastic, rapt admirer, could not enjoy it. Tears rose to her eyes and dropped unheeded upon her busy hands.

"Tell me a story," Lisbeth begged, standing beside her sister at the window. "Oh, you are crying!" she added distressed as she looked round. "What is the matter?"

"Nothing, darling," Johanna replied, hastily wiping her eyes. "What shall I tell you? Cinderella, or Snowdrop and the Dwarfs?"

"No, no! nothing about bad step-mothers," the little girl exclaimed; and then, with her eyes opened to their widest extent, she went on: "Only think, Lina says that mamma is a step-mother, – so stupid of her, – my dear pretty mamma. Friedrich laughed at her, and told her it was not true; but then he is just as stupid himself, for he told her you were not my sister, only an adopted child, and I won't have it; you shall be my sister!"

She stamped her little foot. Johanna took her in her arms. "Hush, darling; I am really your sister," she said, stroking the little curly head.

"Then why were you not always with me?" Lisbeth went on, pettishly. "All the sisters I know are always together."

"I was far away from here, at boarding-school," Johanna replied. "Papa sent me there when my poor dear mother died, and he did not know what to do with me. He travelled about from one town to another; and then he married your mamma, and then you were born, and he has grown very famous. I think he had almost forgotten me – "

Here old Lina, Lisbeth's former nurse, entered.

"Fräulein, a gentleman wishes to see you," she said, handing Johanna a card.

"Dr. Ludwig Werner," the girl read, and started up with a joyous exclamation. "Uncle, dear uncle!" she cried, and hurried into the antechamber, where, however, instead of the old gentleman whom she had expected to see, she was met by a young man.

"Johanna!" he exclaimed, with evident emotion, and he would have clasped her in his arms, but she retreated and only gave him her hand. He laughed, half confusedly, half derisively.

"It is you!" she said, and her voice, too, trembled. "I thought it was your father. Pray come in."

She led the way to the drawing-room. Lina, who was standing holding Lisbeth by the hand at the dressing-room door, looked after her in surprise. How could Fräulein Johanna receive so familiarly a young man who paid visits in a shooting-jacket and shabby crush hat?

He himself became conscious of the contrast that he presented to his surroundings as soon as he entered the drawing-room. As he looked about him in the luxurious apartment, now lit up by the last rays of the September sun, all trace of tenderness vanished from his face, leaving there only the cynical expression which Johanna knew so well.

"And this is now your home," he said. "I begin to understand, – I have not been able to do so hitherto. And you yourself, – are you as changed as your surroundings?"

He had stepped out upon the balcony with her, and as he spoke looked at her fixedly. There was no change in the grave unembarrassed expression of the girl's large gray eyes as she returned his gaze.

"What have you been unable to understand?" she asked.

"How you could leave us and come hither – to this house – "

"To my father's house?" she interrupted him, and her eyes flashed. "Let me tell you how it happened," she went on more gently, "and you will easily comprehend."

They stood leaning against the balustrade of the balcony. The shady little garden beneath them, the golden light of evening streaming from the western sky awakened the same memory in each, but Johanna alone gave it utterance. "Do you remember," she asked, "how we stood at your garden wicket

the evening before you left Lindenbad and watched the setting sun? It was not quite two years ago, and yet how much has happened since then! you have made a home both in Paris and in London."

"A home!" he interrupted her; "no, Johanna, not for a moment. I worked hard in London and Paris, I studied day and night, looking neither to the right nor to the left, for I had but one aim, one desire, – to return to my home well skilled in my profession. I may have become a skilful physician, but my home is desolate, – my mother dead, – you here."

"Your dear mother!" Johanna whispered, and her eyes filled with tears. He did not see them.

"If I had been at home you should not have gone," he went on; "but my father has grown to be a weak old man, and my mother was enfeebled by illness before her death, or she would have kept her promise better."

"Do you mean the promise that she made to my dying mother?" Johanna asked. "She kept that perfectly."

"She let you come here to this step-mother!" Ludwig exclaimed, and his lips quivered, as they always did when he controlled his indignation.

"She could not but let me; I wanted to come, and my father wanted me again."

"So suddenly?" Ludwig interposed. "Since your mother's death he had not apparently given you a thought. My father's house was your home, your holidays were spent with us, you came to us when you left boarding-school; you belong to us, and to us only! Your father has his fame, his luxury, his wife, the woman who was your mother's death – "

"Ludwig!" Johanna interrupted him reprovingly.

He coloured. "It is the truth, and you are old enough to know it," he said, sullenly. "You do know it, but would not for worlds acknowledge it! Deceit – falsehood – hypocrisy everywhere. In your case I suppose it would be called filial piety."

He threw himself into the nearest chair and frowned darkly.

"Hard and unjust as ever," Johanna exclaimed, and her voice trembled.

"As ever?" he repeated. "You forget: formerly you trusted to my judgment, you saw with my eyes and followed willingly where I led."

"Possibly," said Johanna; "but since then I have learned to see with my own eyes, and to walk alone. It was high time: I am no longer a child."

She was right; Ludwig reflected that she must be nearly twenty years old, although she looked scarcely sixteen, so immature was her slender figure, so youthful the pale face that looked dreamily into the world from beneath a luxuriance of brown braids.

"Well, let bygones be bygones," he rejoined with bitterness. "I may surely be allowed to ask what snatched you from us so suddenly. You were going to tell me."

Johanna seated herself opposite him. "If I only knew how to tell you, how to convince you that I could not do otherwise," she said. "From the expressions you have let fall you seem to me to think that I was influenced by vanity, love of pleasure, and a desire for luxury. Your sister accused me of the same motives."

"Let that go; what is Mathilde to us? Go on!" Ludwig interposed, impatiently.

Johanna obeyed; the dictatorial tone to which she had submitted for so long exercised its old influence upon her.

"You went away in the autumn," she began; "the winter passed as peacefully as usual, and summer brought the usual throng of guests to the baths. Suddenly we heard that my father was starring in Weimar. One of our friends took me to the first performance. When we arrived it was too late to see my father before the play, and so I sat in the corner of our box in trembling expectation of beholding him after nearly eight years – "

"Eight years! – a tender parent!" Ludwig interrupted; she paid him no heed.

"But it was not my father whom I saw," she went on with increasing agitation: "it was Hamlet. I thought I knew the play, but what heights and depths were disclosed to me by this representation!

This was no acting, it was actual life: suffering – doubt – despair. I sat trembling as if from a fever-fit, and after the performance I hastened to him. I do not know what I said to him, but my enthusiasm touched and delighted him. He kept me with him at first only during his stay in Weimar, afterwards for always. He went with me to Lindenbad to demand me of my foster-parents, and they thought it but natural that he should do so."

"Yes, so my mother wrote me," said Ludwig, "in the last letter I had from her before she was taken ill."

"I had no idea how ill she was," the young girl whispered, "or I should not have left her."

He made no rejoinder; his expression, as he gazed moodily upon the ground, grew darker still.

After a pause, Johanna said, "I wrote to you then; why did you not answer me?"

"I could not," he replied. "Amid all your grief at my mother's death there was a tone of relief in your letter."

"There was," said Johanna. "It is not in vain that I am the child of a great artist. The revelations he makes to me of the world of art are like my native air to me. Unconsciously I missed them and longed for them before I ever knew them."

"The intoxication has lasted, then?" Ludwig asked, with his bitterest smile.

"Intoxication!" she repeated. "You may call it so; but it is something better and nobler. I cannot define it, but its effect upon me is the same, only intensified, if possible. Everything within me that is dim and confused becomes clear and distinct when my father interprets for me – "

"Johanna!" Ludwig exclaimed, "you would not – you cannot go upon the stage!"

"If I only could!" she cried, with sparkling eyes; "if I only could!"

"You must not!" he said angrily, and seized her hands. "Bethink yourself; a man can assert himself, isolate himself upon the stage as elsewhere, a woman never; she loses her identity, degrades herself – "

"There is no reason why she should do so," Johanna exclaimed, clasping tightly the hands which she had withdrawn from his grasp. "The inspiration which animates and strengthens a man can exalt a woman also above all petty, low considerations. I have been here more than a year, and have kept my eyes open. I have seen what has been mean and paltry, nay, disgusting, but never in my father, never! He is not only great in his art, he is a man great and complete as only an artist can be."

Ludwig changed colour. "Do you really mean this, Johanna?" he asked. "Is it only in an artist that you can find a 'complete' man? Think what you are saying."

"Yes, yes; I mean it!" she cried passionately, and her cheeks glowed. She seemed transformed.

"Then I have nothing more to say," said Ludwig, as he arose.

Then first Johanna was conscious of what she had done.

"Oh, do not go!" she cried, confronting him. "I cannot let you go so. You did not understand me; I only meant – "

"I not understand you, child?" said Ludwig, controlling himself. "I might deceive myself while I was absent from you; but now that we are together, I see into your heart just as I always did."

"No, no; you do not see clearly. You do not understand me. You are offended – "

"Hush, hush!" Ludwig interrupted her, leading her to her seat again. "Come, sit down, and listen to me. Why should I be offended? We all embody for ourselves an ideal of beauty and dignity. I have done the same. Shall I tell you how?"

She only nodded an assent. There was something in his manner that confused her.

"My ideal," he began, taking a seat opposite her, – "a woman, of course, – was a gay, simple-hearted creature, looking out upon life with clear, truthful eyes; not exacting much, but always ready to do her best, interested in all that was good, beautiful, and great, but with a keen sympathy for the poor and unfortunate, never neglectful of the daily tasks of life, but consecrating, as it were, the meanest among them by her performance of it, and surrounded as by a purer ether, diffusing harmony and content wherever she might be."

"Your mother!" Johanna said, when he paused.

"My mother," he repeated, with a sudden smile that wonderfully transfigured his set, determined face. And the earnest look that he turned upon Johanna was a strange mixture of gentleness, entreaty, and menace.

"My mother," he repeated. "Yes, and one other who was like her; one who I believed for years would exactly resemble her. It was an illusion; it is past."

Johanna looked down with a blush. She could not but perceive that he meant herself. But could this be love? Impossible! One does not so quickly and causelessly resign what one loves. What had she done? Left his father's house to go to her own father's house. And the thoughtless words she had just spoken? If he loved her he would know that they had been uttered too hastily. Anger and obstinacy conquered every gentler emotion, and after a short pause she rejoined coldly, without looking up, "It is not given to every one to achieve content as did your mother."

"Content!" Ludwig exclaimed; "she was a happy woman."

"Do you think so?" said Johanna, raising her eyes to his. "Had she hoped and longed for nothing more in life than the companionship of a good man, but one who wore himself out in the discharge of the duties of his profession? Do you imagine that the letting of lodgings to visitors to the baths was the true vocation for your mother's sensitive, refined nature? And could the society of two silly girls like your sister and myself indemnify her for the tedious solitude of the long winter?"

"And yet this life satisfied her," said Ludwig. "So spiritual a nature is always satisfied with love and a round of duties."

Johanna shook her head. "It is comfortable to suppose so," she said; "but let me recall one expression of your mother's which, child as I was, made a deep impression upon me. My mother was already ill; yours sat beside her bed, while I was busied with a book at the window. Mamma must have been speaking of her past life. I had been paying no attention, when suddenly I heard her say, 'Ah, dear Louise, you pity me!' Your mother dried her tears, and said, in a tone which I never can forget, 'No, Agnes, I envy you! It is sad to be driven forth from Paradise, but infinitely sadder never to have entered it.'"

Ludwig gazed gloomily into space. "There are various Paradises," he said, at last, "and they are found in various ways. My mother, I am convinced, found hers later. But you are right; hers was not for every one. You could hardly find it as she did."

"I should never seek it in that direction," she replied, quite conscious that she was paining him; it grieved her to do so, but she could not help it.

Ludwig arose once more; his face was pale and set. "I must take leave of you," he said; "I have an appointment with a couple of college friends."

"When shall I see you, – to-morrow? When will you come?" asked Johanna. "Of course I shall be at home for you all day long."

"I take the first train to-morrow for the north," he replied.

"Oh, you must not!" she exclaimed. "You must be here to-morrow evening. It is my father's birthday, and you must be present at its celebration."

"Impossible; I cannot postpone my departure," he made answer. "And even if I could, where could I find a place among your friends? I am – you remember how often my father said so – a faithful, cross, ugly dog. In a *tête-à-tête* the old playfellow is all very well, but he does not belong in the drawing-room."

Johanna took his hand. "I will not let you go," she said, "until you promise to come to-morrow evening. We have a little play, – I make my first histrionic essay. You must be present."

"No, my dear Johanna, I cannot see you act," he said, in a calm voice, but with lips that quivered in spite of himself. "And independently of that, I really must go. I must get to my work. I have just come from a six-weeks' tour through Switzerland and the Tyrol, and my holiday is over."

"But you have told me absolutely nothing of your work, of your plans. I do not know where to picture you in my thoughts!" she exclaimed.

"I will write to you," he said. "Good-by, and try to think kindly of me." He shook hands with her and left her.

"A faithful, cross, ugly dog," Johanna repeated to herself, as the door closed behind him and his step died away in the antechamber. Suddenly a rush of emotion overcame her; she sank into a chair and burst into tears.

CHAPTER II
DISAPPOINTED ASPIRATIONS

The festival was over. The last guests had taken their departure, and as they issued shivering into the cold air of the autumn night, criticism, and that not of a very genial kind, replaced the flattering expressions they had just used in characterizing to their hostess 'the delightful evening' they had passed.

"Wanton extravagance!" "It is worse than folly, and so out of taste for an actor to attempt to vie with a banker." "Everything borrowed, girls, – rely upon Frau Helena for that." "Yes, and she does understand how to dress herself. How beautiful she looked in that pale blue silk with the rich lace overskirt!" "And her pearl necklace and ear-rings, – where did she get those, do you think?" "'*Honi soit qui mal y pense*,' madame; a love-token from her husband, when he was another woman's husband." "Roderich always gives us excellent cigars, and the Johannisberg was delicious!" "Well, we needed it to carry down the play." "For heaven's sake, hush! Hofrath Leuchtenberg arranged the thing." "Oh, the thing itself was well enough, but the performance! Such nonsense to entertain us with an amateur performance!" "And that tall, pale, awkward girl was Roderich's daughter? 'Tis inconceivable that she should have no talent." "Roderich looked as if he were upon the rack when she stood so like a stick and 'spoke her piece.'" "But Frau Helena was all the more pleased; she could hardly conceal her exultation. Her step-daughter is a thorn in the flesh to her."

Such was the talk among young and old, men and women, as they walked along the silent streets, through which the north wind howled as in indignant scorn.

While her parents were bidding farewell to the last of their guests, Johanna slipped into the sleeping-room where Lisbeth's little bed stood beside her mother's. She noiselessly drew near it, and bent over the rosy little face dimly revealed with its closed eyelids in the light of the night-lamp. Suddenly two soft arms encircled her neck, and the blue childish eyes laughed into her own.

"Darling, did I wake you?" Johanna asked.

"Oh, no; I have not been asleep; I cannot go to sleep. Stay with me, and let us tell each other stories."

"Dear, you must go to sleep," her sister said, trying to disengage herself, but the child clung to her.

"No, no, you must stay with me; it frightens me to be alone," she cried in a peevish tone, which would hardly have prevailed with Johanna had it not been for the little one's burning cheeks and feverishly brilliant eyes.

"Well, I will stay if you will promise to be perfectly still," she said, seating herself at the head of the bed, and putting her arm beneath Lisbeth's fair curly head.

"That is delightful," said the child. "But I came near crying when I heard them all talking and laughing so. Ah, it was such a lovely evening, was it not, Hanna dear?"

"Yes, Lisbeth; but now shut your eyes. Perhaps you may dream of it."

"I do not need to do that; I remember all about it. How lovely it was when I said my little verse and gave papa the wreath, and everybody clapped their hands and cried Brava! Oh, I wish I were grown up and could act every evening, like mamma!"

She had raised herself in the bed; Johanna laid her back upon the pillow.

"Be quiet," she said, gravely.

"Yes, yes, I am quiet now," Lisbeth assured her. "But tell me," she went on, with eyes wide open, "why did no one call out 'Brava' and clap their hands for you?"

"Probably because I did not do as well as you did," Johanna answered, and the mortification with which she had been struggling brought a crimson blush to her face. "No, it was wretched, it was

miserable," she went on in a trembling voice. "My throat seemed closed; my limbs were heavy as lead; the eyes of all seemed to pierce me through and through. Oh, Lisbeth, I shall never be able to act!"

She laid her head upon the pillow beside the child, who pressed her flushed little face against her sister's cheek. "Oh, you will learn," Lisbeth whispered. "Papa says you are very clever, and you are so kind, and I love you so very much."

The words came more and more slowly; Johanna remained motionless, that she might not prevent the child from sleeping. After a while she heard the rustle of silk: her step-mother had entered the adjoining dressing-room. Directly afterwards her father also entered. "I should like to speak with you a moment, Helena," he said.

"I am listening," she made reply, without looking round, and continuing to take off her ornaments and her sash.

He began to pace the room to and fro. Johanna's heart beat fast; she knew how Helena irritated him by this assumption of indifference.

"You have placed me in a strange position," he began, after a pause, in a low, stern tone. "I certainly ought to be grateful to you for my birthday fête; but I must at the same time reiterate, and that most decidedly, that we cannot give such extravagant entertainments. We are so much in debt – "

"Dear Roderich," she interrupted him, "one benefit and it will all be paid."

"But, Helena, I cannot reckon upon the future," he rejoined. "You know I could not make any engagements last summer, – I am not yet well. It seems to me very undesirable to burden ourselves with unnecessary care."

"And it seems to me undesirable, sordid, degrading, to be always counting the cost," exclaimed Helena. "Without freedom of action the artist cannot exist."

"It is that very freedom which I wish to secure," Roderich said gravely. "At your urgent entreaty, and by Commerzienrath Schmidt's advice, I speculated with our entire fortune, as you know, and lost it. Therefore we must begin afresh, and economize. Therefore, dear Helena, no more of these costly entertainments."

She shrugged her shoulders impatiently. "Dear Roderich," she said, "to-night's festival is my affair; it is my birthday present to you – "

"Child, you cannot count the cost," he interrupted her; "your salary scarcely suffices to provide your wardrobe."

"'Tis little enough!" said Helena. "You might long ago have used your influence to procure me a better position. Instead of which, you always take sides with the Kronberg against me."

"No, I do not," he replied. "I wrote to the manager only yesterday that I would renew my present engagement with him only upon condition that the Kronberg were not allowed to usurp any of your parts."

Helena threw her arms around him. "Oh, you darling, did you really?" she cried in glee. "You do not know how you delight me. They wanted to persuade me that you cared for the Kronberg."

"Helena!" he said reproachfully. "Since I have known you there has been but one woman for me in the world."

His words hurt Johanna; she tried to release herself, that she might leave the room, but Lisbeth in her sleep held her fast.

Helena had taken her husband's arm and paced the room to and fro with him. She had doffed her lace overdress, and looked wonderfully lovely in the close-fitting blue silk with bare neck and arms. "Why do you always find fault with me, you bad fellow?" she said, looking up at him with an exultant smile. "I live only for you – to fulfil your wishes. I have economized; I have even dismissed my own maid, contenting myself with Johanna's services."

"She really seems fit for little else," he replied. "How miserably she acquitted herself in her small part! You ought not to have allowed her to take it."

"What could I do?" Helena asked. "She insisted upon making the attempt, and I as her step-mother – "

"Poor Johanna!" Roderich interrupted her; "as devoid of talent as her mother, and as ugly as myself!"

"Oh, Roderich, you! The most glorious Egmont, – the most enchanting Leicester!"

"But a very ugly man!" he said, with the brilliant smile that was all his own, and that really made his plain face handsome. "What you admire comes from within; there seems to be some kind of a flame there that flickers interestingly. But this is denied to poor Johanna. And then – you must see that the Graces have denied her their gifts; the greatest misfortune for a woman. You have managed that they should bestow them all upon your little daughter."

He kissed her hand. Johanna could endure it no longer; by a hasty effort she released herself from her sleeping sister's arm, and stepped noiselessly out of the room into the corridor, at the end of which was her own chamber.

She groped her way to the arm-chair beside the window, sank into it, and gazed into the darkness without. How gay and hopeful she had been while dressing in this room a few short hours before, and how forlorn and discouraged she had now returned to it! 'As devoid of talent as her mother, and as ugly as myself,' had been the words spoken by a voice whose utterances she believed implicitly; and then again, 'the Graces have denied her their gifts; the greatest misfortune for a woman.' Bitterness, such as she had never before known, possessed her. What had she done to be thus disinherited from the beginning, deprived of all claim to love and happiness?

Suddenly a joyous thrill drove the blood to her heart. It was not so, she was not disinherited. Little more than twenty-four hours had passed since the most truthful of men had said to her in effect, 'You were my ideal; ugly and awkward as you are, I saw in you the embodiment of all loveliness.' If he saw it in her no longer, it was because of a mistake, – a misunderstanding. She would prove to him that she had lost nothing of value, that she was still worthy the love of former days.

Why should she do this? She did not love Ludwig. No, no, she did not love him. Only in contrast with her father's cruel verdict did she find pleasure in his words of yesterday, and the impetuous throbbing of her heart was but the result of the various emotions that had besieged it during the past few hours.

If she only had not undergone that one experience! To stand there and not be mistress of her motions; to will to speak, and not be able to give to her words the meaning she desired; to be stared at by all those unsympathetic eyes, to be conscious of exciting contemptuous pity. 'Devoid of talent as her mother, and ugly as myself,' rang in her ears again.

She would rid herself of this torment. And she arose, lit a candle, and then first perceived a letter lying upon her table.

"From Ludwig," she thought; and she was right; his large clear handwriting stared at her from the envelope, and covered three sides of a sheet of paper which enclosed several others. Johanna seated herself at the table and read:

> "Dear Johanna, – The enclosed letter, which my mother found among the papers left her by your mother, was sent to me by the former in her last illness. She wrote to me telling me to do with it what seemed best to me; she had never been able to bring herself to disturb your happiness in your reunion with your father after so many years.
>
> "I might assert that the same consideration has hitherto prevented me from imparting to you the wishes of your dying mother, but I will be as frank with you as I am with myself. I withheld the letter because I hoped even without its aid to be able to withdraw you from surroundings unworthy of you. I thought that a word from me would suffice to restore you to the home that was your own so long. I hesitated –

made cowardly and selfish as we always are by the desires of our hearts – to erect any barrier between you, a grandchild of the Dönninghausens, and your old friends.

"But now I have convinced myself that the old friends are of no avail to counteract new and unworthy influences; therefore let a voice from the grave speak to you.

"If you should heed it, and have any need either of my pen or of my personal aid, pray command me. I shall be at my father's, where I have certain scientific work to do, throughout the coming winter.

"Twice to-day I have been to your door, but each time I turned away. What could it avail me to see you again where you are? Farewell, and let me hear from you soon.

"L. W."

To Johanna the tone of this letter seemed icy cold. Experience is needed to detect intensity of emotion beneath exterior and perhaps hardly-won composure. With a trembling hand she opened her mother's letter. What could she, gentle and loving as she had always been, require of her daughter so hard that her foster-mother had been unwilling to impart it to her? Johanna gazed at the delicate handwriting, its uncertain characters betraying the mortal weariness that had possessed the writer. The touching figure of her dying mother rose vividly in her memory, and with increasing emotion she read what follows, – in all of which she distinctly felt the quickened feverish throb of the poor invalid's heart.

"Lindenbad, August 19, 1864.

"My dear Louise, – A few hours ago you left me, and in a few hours you will come again, faithful friend that you are, to ask how I have passed the night. Ah, Louise! it begins so distressingly, with such throbbing pulses and wandering thoughts, that I would flee from myself to you as to some shrine of the Madonna.

"If I was at first inclined to regard as a piece of good luck the chance which brought me an old school-mate in the wife of the physician of this place, I soon learned to bless the Providence which conducted me hither. Dear, kind friend! How you have cheered and encouraged me through these weary days of sickness and suffering! They would have been cheerless without you.

"Cheerless in every respect, dear Louise; for I hardly need to tell you that my soul suffers more than my failing body, because it does not share the weary longing of the latter for death. My poor soul clings to life, thirsting for the love and happiness of former days, – vanished now forever.

"Would Roderich feel some pity if he knew how vital within me is still the memory of every word of his, – the very tone in which each word was uttered? Ah, Louise! those words, those tones, possessed the power to create thrones and altars, and transformed the fortunate creature for whom they were spoken into a queen, a goddess: *he* constituted her such.

"I was his from the first moment that I saw him. I was with my parents in Berlin, where he was playing. I saw him first in 'Torquato Tasso,' and then at a ball at the French ambassador's. He asked to be presented to me. I stood before him trembling, and when he held out his hand to me I was his slave for life. There was no longer any question of will or choice, nothing but a blessed necessity. I could not but resign everything for him, – home, parents, brothers, family, rank, and wealth. He was still only a beginner in his art. My enthusiasm, my devotion, flattered him; my intelligence fired his genius; my beauty intoxicated his senses. Yes, there were years when I made him happy, in which I filled his heart and his imagination.

'Though 'tis torture, yet that time
Can never be forgot.'

"In the first year of our marriage Johanna was born. I announced her birth to my parents, and hoped, from my mother at least, for a kind word. Instead of this I saw the notice of her death in the papers. Two years later God sent me a son, but he lived only a few hours, and my life was in danger for months, while I was confined for years to my room. That was the beginning of my unhappiness. Roderich was still so young, – he had married when only twenty-three. He needed change and excitement to counterbalance his close application to the duties of his profession. Often, when in the flush of some fresh triumph he would come to my room to make me a partaker in his delight, both doctor and nurse would caution him not to fatigue me. He was obliged to walk on tiptoe, to sit in semi-darkness, to speak in a whisper. All this he could not endure. He went, and I was left alone, – more and more alone, of course, as time passed on.

"August 22.

"I could not write more. This pain in my heart has debarred me from all exertion for the last few days, during which you, dear Louise, have been, as always, my stay and comfort. Let these lines thank you for your kindness when my lips can do so no longer.

"I know how near the end is now, and the consciousness fills me with a despair beyond words. To vanish – to be forgotten – to leave to others what was once my own —

"But I did not mean to speak of myself. My last thought and care are for my poor Johanna, who will so soon be orphaned. If it is possible, Louise, let my child stay with you. I will write to Roderich and entreat him to send the child to some school here in your neighbourhood. Then give her that home in your heart which she loses in mine. Her father hardly knows her, and will hardly miss her, as she on her part will scarcely miss him. On the other hand, she is warmly attached to you and to your children, and in your house she will find the pure domestic atmosphere which can never be hers in her father's. Hard though it be to say it, it must be said: the thought of leaving my child in the hands of the woman who has robbed me of Roderich's love poisons my last hours, and will leave me no rest in the grave. Johanna must not love that woman, must not owe her anything. I am sure you understand this feeling, even although you do not approve of it.

"Later.

"More bad days and nights, – how many I do not know; and through them all this terrible anxiety about Johanna's future. If you cannot grant my request and keep her yourself, then, I entreat you, see that she takes refuge with my people. They will receive her kindly. Three years ago, when Roderich's passion for this actress became notorious, my father wrote to me asking me to come to him with my child. His only condition was my legal separation from Roderich and the dropping of the name which he so hated. I could not bring myself to consent to this; but twice since then, when my two brothers died, I wrote to my father, now quite desolate, and each time he answered me and made me the same proposal. He will certainly receive my orphan child kindly.

"Understand me aright, dear Louise. I would rather know Johanna at home with you than anywhere else. In your home-circle her youth would be gayer and

simpler. Only if you cannot adopt her, send her to my father, to the Freiherr Johann von Dönninghausen, Dönninghausen on the Harz, or write to him and commend my child to her grandfather's heart.

"The morning dawns. Perhaps when the phantoms of the night flee I can sleep —

'To die – to sleep!
To sleep! perchance to dream, ay, there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come.'

"Did you ever hear Roderich utter those words? They ring in my ears now as if I had just heard him say them. I *must* hear him say them once more. No, no, – I cannot die."

Here the letter ended. Death had come suddenly and painlessly. Johanna remembered the peaceful smile upon her mother's beautiful face as she lay in her coffin. She kissed the last lines written by her dear hand, and her heart overflowed with tenderness.

The impression made upon her by the letter, however, was far other than Ludwig seemed to expect it would produce. Not for a moment did it alter Johanna's love for her father. On the contrary, its passionate pain seemed to justify her feeling for him. Weary unto death, and tortured with jealousy, her mother had turned to him in love and longing, and her last words were the utterance of a desire to see him once more.

"This is love," Johanna said to herself, – "the only true love, – that of which it stands written, 'beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth.' Whoever can merely say as Ludwig does, 'I loved you so long as you thought and felt thus and so,' has never really loved."

Even her mother's desire that she should go to her grandfather did not disturb Johanna. The letter said expressly, 'Her father hardly knows her, and will hardly miss her.' Now that he knew her and loved her, her mother would not, Johanna was convinced, wish her to leave him. Only if her father should come to consider her a burden, or if her lack of talent should estrange him from her, or if her step-mother's dislike of her should lead to misunderstandings, could it be her duty to leave her father's roof.

But it was useless to pursue such reflections as these. If her step-mother did not like her, her father's love and her little sister's devotion more than indemnified her. To attach to herself the lovely little creature who before her sister's arrival had spent all her time with the servants, to make good the deficiencies in the little girl's training, these were tasks after Johanna's own heart, and in them she could find abundant content; if she applied herself to these and restrained her thoughts and desires from wandering in other realms, she could surely be once more for Ludwig what she had been formerly.

She sat with clasped hands gazing into the flame of the candle. The little watering-place in the Thüringian forest, so long her home, rose vividly in her memory. There stood the vine-wreathed cottage of the resident physician, where Ludwig would dwell as his father's successor; the garden, with its dwarf fruit-trees, vegetable patch, and flower-beds; the hawthorn arbour by the hedge, with the vista of the chestnut avenue, along which the guests at the baths used to saunter; the little stream with its grassy banks; and, enclosing all, the wooded heights, a fitting frame for the lovely peaceful picture.

"But it would be no life for me," Johanna said to herself. "Why not? Why cannot I be content with what has satisfied thousands? Why am I possessed by this desire for – I know not what – for giving shape and expression to something? Is it not vanity, or ambition, or self-conceit?"

She was more than ever conscious of the loneliness in which she had lived since the death of her foster-mother, who had been her refuge in all doubt and distress, while her husband, Uncle Werner, as Johanna called him, had ministered only to the physical ailments of his family. She had found but little sympathy from Mathilde, Ludwig's sister, whose nature was cold and narrow; even Ludwig, sensitive as he was, had not understood her. But her father, – he must have known such times of doubt and uncertainty, – he might help her.

"I will pluck up courage and tell him everything to-morrow," she said to herself. Then, calmed and quieted by this resolve, she betook herself to bed and to sleep.

CHAPTER III
A CRISIS

Johanna could not carry her resolve into execution. The following morning she was busy until late in replacing by order the disarray produced by the birthday fête, and when her father, who had gone out meanwhile, returned, he hurried past her with so gloomy an expression that she did not venture to follow him to his room.

At dinner she learned the cause of his troubled mood. He had quarrelled with the manager because the latter would persist in giving various of Helena's youthful parts to her rival, Fräulein Kronberg.

"Of course I cannot withdraw my stipulations," Roderich added, "and therefore cannot renew my contract, favourable as its conditions were for me."

"You can get another anywhere else quite as favourable, and even more so," said Helena.

"But not the accessories which I have here," Roderich declared. "Not the intelligent public, nor the charming *mise-en-scène* which makes each separate performance a work of art."

"That is no affair of yours," said Helena. "Each for himself, and God for us all. And as for the public, I can't see that it is especially intelligent. Wherever else you go you receive more applause than you get here, and so do I."

"Applause!" he repeated, with an impatient shrug. "Dear Helena, there is a kind of applause that makes me blush with mortification; but from your point of view you can hardly understand this."

How gladly would Johanna have assured him that she understood him perfectly! But while she was struggling with her natural shyness, Helena exclaimed, "If you think so meanly of me, pray do not proclaim it before other people; it is more than I can bear."

Roderich changed colour. "To accuse me of unkindness just when I am sacrificing all my plans for your sake is rather hard!" he said. And, rising from table, he left the room suddenly, slamming the door noisily behind him.

Lisbeth, terrified, began to cry, the others were amazed. Never before had he allowed himself to be so carried away by temper.

"He must be ill," said Johanna.

"Nonsense! he is out of temper," said Helena, "and he shall not hear a kind word from me until he begs my pardon."

Johanna was right. In half an hour Friedrich announced that the Herr had one of his attacks of headache, and could see no one.

On such days there seemed to be a spell upon the entire household. Every voice was lowered, every footfall was as light as possible, and Friedrich muffled the bell upon the landing.

This time, Johanna learned from Friedrich, the pain was not so intense as usual, but it did not pass away at the end of twenty-four hours. When, in spite of it, Roderich went to rehearsal the next day, he returned more ill than ever. The third day fever set in, and the physician ordered him to bed.

Helena had not forgiven the scene at table.

"It surely is not very bad, doctor," she said, as she accompanied the physician from the room. "I am just ordering a magnificent costume for Desdemona. Othello comes out next week; you must have him well by that time."

"We will hope for the best," the old man said, as he took his leave. Johanna, who overheard his words, was startled. She knew from Dr. Werner what these words signified in a physician's mouth. Whilst Helena carelessly returned to her costume, Johanna waited with a throbbing heart at her father's door until the servant made his appearance.

"Pray ask papa, Friedrich, whether I may not come in," she said.

The sick man heard her. "Come!" he called. His voice, usually so full and sonorous, sounded muffled, and his face was still more changed: it was colourless, and looked pinched and wan upon the pillow.

Johanna went to his bedside, with difficulty suppressing all signs of emotion. "Papa," she entreated, "let me stay with you. You have Friedrich, it is true, but I know better than he how to nurse an invalid."

For a while he gazed at her as if he scarcely understood her words. "Yes, stay with me," he said; "I think I am really very ill, and you are more careful, quieter, stronger – "

He did not finish the sentence, but she understood what he meant.

"Ah, thank you!" she said, kissing his burning hand.

He drew his daughter closer to him. "My dear, good child!" he said, pressing his feverish lips to her forehead. She did not dream that it was a farewell caress.

The disease progressed rapidly, and was pronounced by the physician the next day to be a nervous fever. He was quite content with Johanna's calm, careful treatment of his patient, but he begged Helena, who could not control her agitation, to spare her own delicate health for the sake of her child, and to be as little as possible in the sick-room. She sighed and submitted.

But, indeed, neither she nor any one else could have disturbed the sick man after a few days had passed; he lay in a state of entire unconsciousness.

The whole city was interested in the artist's condition; the inquiries after his health were countless; the door was besieged by friends and acquaintances. He had always been a kind, ungrudging comrade to his fellow-actors, and now when he could no longer excite their envy, they remembered his own freedom from it, and did all in their power to testify their esteem and friendship for him.

For Helena it was a kind of consolation to receive their visits; her nature was of those for which distraction is possible. After she had with many tears given an account of the sick man's state, she would listen with interest to theatrical gossip, and forget for a while her own sorrow. It overcame her, indeed, with redoubled violence when she was once more alone. Often, when she had been laughing with a visitor at some jest, Johanna would find her in a state of most pitiable distress.

"He is going to die, I know he is; such happiness as ours was too great for this world of misery," she would declare, sobbing as if her heart would break; or she would cry out as if bereft of her senses, "O God, you cannot take him from me! He must be spared for me and for his art."

She was most helpless and hopeless in the sick-room, where she would throw herself on her knees by Roderich's bedside, cover his hand with kisses, and exhaust every passionate term of endearment, nearly fainting when there was no response from her unconscious husband. But if one of the physicians or a friend wished to speak to her, she would arise, and, with a look of anguish as she left the room, involuntarily adjust artistically the soft folds of her white cachemire peignoir.

Johanna was too young and unsophisticated to appreciate her step-mother. She did her injustice when she accused her of heartlessness, and she added to her own burden by a daily increasing dislike for Helena.

But she could not help it. The sleep of exhaustion, which now and then overcame her, was all the rest and forgetfulness that she had. If she forced herself to talk with little Lisbeth, she had to struggle continually with rising tears, and when she heard others speaking of the events of the day, she could hardly comprehend how the affairs of the world could pursue their usual course outside of the sick-room. That was her realm, and her father's death seemed to her the end of all things.

Week after week passed. The physician gave Johanna no hope. She had herself watched from day to day, and from hour to hour, the inexorable approach of the Destroyer, and when the last moment came, she had lived it over in thought a hundred times.

It was the gray dawn of a morning in November. She was sitting alone at her father's bedside. Helena was asleep upon a lounge in the next room, when Roderich once more opened his eyes, in which there was a last ray of consciousness; his lips moved, and when Johanna leaned over him, she

heard him whisper, 'Helena.' His features were convulsed for an instant, and when Helena rushed into the room in answer to her low cry, it was too late. Her husband had breathed his last. His heart had ceased to beat.

Johanna closed his eyes and took her usual place beside him. She seemed paralyzed; she could not weep, she could not even think. Helena's noisy grief distressed her, but it seemed to reach her ear from some great distance, and soon died away altogether. Only two images remained in her memory from this terrible time, – the ideal beauty of her beloved dead as he lay in the coffin crowned with laurel, and the dreary aspect of the funeral cortége as it moved endlessly along the streets in the pouring rain, while the wind tore away from the hearse and whirled in air some of the flowers and wreaths with which it was bedecked.

It was Lisbeth who at last aroused Johanna from her lethargy. To spare the imaginative child the sad impression of her father's dying moments, she had been intrusted to the care of an actress friend, returning to her home only when the funeral was over. Helena rushed to her, clasped her in her arms, loaded her with caresses, declaring that she was all that was left her in life, all that she had to live for, and then turned away to receive a couple of her friends who had called to see her. They were all soon absorbed in an animated discussion of mourning gowns and Helena's broken heart, the impossibility of recovering from Roderich's loss, his widow's plans for the future, the intrigues of the Kronberg, and the inconceivable partiality of the manager for one so utterly without talent. The child felt herself forgotten, and left the room to look for her sister.

Johanna was not in her usual place at the work-table in Helena's dressing-room, nor was she in her own sleeping apartment. But when Lisbeth timidly entered her father's study, she found Johanna, looking pale and white in her black gown, still sitting by the window whence she had seen the funeral procession disappear. She sat in an arm-chair, her head leaning back, her arms hanging idly down, gazing into space with such an expression of dull anguish that the little girl was frightened.

"Johanna, dear Johanna, please do not be ill, do not die!" she cried, throwing her arms around her sister's neck; and these first tender words, the nestling close to her of the little one, dissolved the spell that had bound the poor girl, and she burst into tears.

Afterwards, when longing for sympathy, she went to her step-mother, Helena said in her coldest tone, —

"Has it really occurred to you to remember my existence? I think it was high time. Everything comes upon me, – it will kill me."

Not a word was said of all that Johanna had done during the long weeks of illness, and the gulf between Helena and herself widened.

The next morning Johanna was handed the card of Lieutenant Otto von Dönninghausen. She would gladly have refused to see him, but written in pencil upon the card was 'Commissioned by our grandfather,' and she could not deny herself to one so accredited.

In the drawing-room she found a tall, fair man, about thirty years old, whose military carriage betrayed the soldier in spite of his civilian's dress.

"Cousin Johanna?" he said, advancing towards her, while his bright, resolute blue eyes scanned her keenly. Then he held out his hand. "Forgive me for intruding at such a time," he continued. "Let me plead the right of kinship, and believe in the sincerity of my sympathy."

Johanna's eyes filled with tears. She mutely returned the pressure of his hand, and motioned him to a seat.

"Our grandfather has requested me to put this letter into your own hands," he began again when both were seated. "The commission was a welcome one to me; I take a sad satisfaction in assuring you personally of my sympathy. I have had the pleasure of seeing your father repeatedly upon the stage, and I never can forget him."

"I thank you," said Johanna, and for an instant her pale face glowed with the same fire which had distinguished her father. Her cousin's simple cordiality of tone did her good, inspired her with confidence, and yet she felt a timidity in his presence quite foreign to her.

"It is the result of the distressing consciousness of knowing nothing of my nearest relatives," she thought.

"Grandpapa requests you to come to him," the young man said, handing Johanna a sealed letter. "Do not be led astray by his manner of expression, which is probably as blunt and cold in this letter as it is in daily personal intercourse. There is much kindliness beneath his rough exterior. Our grandfather is a nobleman in the full sense of the word, with all the prejudice and narrowness of his class. You will soon understand and value him, and I hope soon to see you in Dönninghausen."

"Are you going back there again?" asked Johanna, trying to find something to say.

"Not now," he replied. "My regiment is stationed on the Rhine, and I am returning to it after having assisted last week in the celebration of my grandfather's birthday, on which occasion we are all wont to assemble at Dönninghausen."

"Who are all?" asked Johanna. "I know little, almost nothing, of my mother's family; she had become estranged from her kindred."

"Unfortunately," her cousin interposed, "I have but a faint remembrance of my aunt Agnes. I am the eldest son of her second brother, who was attached to our embassy in London."

"Was he not called Waldemar?" asked Johanna.

"You are right," the young man replied. "Grandpapa's eldest son, Johann Georg, was already dead when Aunt Agnes left her home. He left only one child, a son, Johann Leopold, who has been brought up in Dönninghausen, and lives there now. He has pursued various studies, and is the heir. I have a younger brother, named for our father, Waldemar; he has entered upon a diplomatic career. My two sisters, Hedwig and Hildegard, are married to two distant cousins belonging to the Wildenhayn-Oderbuchs. Finally, grandpapa's youngest son, Major Karl Anton, also dead, left one child, a daughter, young and beautiful and a widow of two years' standing. Her name is Magelone; her husband, Lieutenant von der Aue, who lived only eighteen months after their marriage, contrived in that time to run through all her property, and she now lives at Dönninghausen, under the chaperonage of our grand-aunt Thekla, grandpapa's unmarried sister. Let me add that Magelone is as clever as she is beautiful, as accomplished as she is amiable, and that she is especially desirous of welcoming Cousin Johanna to Dönninghausen."

"Me?" Johanna asked, blushing. "I cannot understand – "

"I will read the riddle for you," Otto interposed. "Do you not remember meeting two years ago, among the guests at Lindenbad, a certain Frau von Werth? She visits at Dönninghausen, and has told wonderful tales of you. I will spare your modesty further details."

He bowed with a smile, and again his sparkling eyes scanned her. Johanna coloured: she felt cheered and comforted. None among her father's friends had ever accorded her any degree of attention.

"I should like to know something of my grandfather," she began, after a pause; but, before she could go on, the door opened and Lisbeth came in.

"Johanna!" she exclaimed, startled, and stood still; but Johanna held out her hand, and the child flew to her side.

"My sister," she said, tenderly stroking the little one's fair curls.

"Sister?" Otto repeated, in a tone of surprise. "Oh, yes, I remember. Come, my little beauty, give me your hand," he said, with his winning smile.

But the child held Johanna's arm tight and looked at him with a little air of defiance. "No, I do not know you, and I do not want to know you," she said in a wayward tone.

"Darling, don't be naughty," Johanna whispered.

"Never mind," said her cousin; "the child is shy, and, besides, I must go." And he glanced at the clock as he arose.

Johanna also arose. "I am sorry," she said; "I had so much to ask – "

"And I, too, seem to have a thousand things to say," the young man rejoined. "I thought I should have seen much more of you, but when I arrived yesterday I found that the funeral had not yet taken place, and the hours were wasted which I hoped to have spent with you. I wish that I could at least have followed to the grave the man whom I so admired, but I was detained by pressing business."

How cordial was the tone in which he spoke! Johanna's eyes filled; how could she know that his 'pressing business' was a breakfast with some gay companions? Much moved, she held out her hand to her cousin. Otto pressed it to his lips.

"*Au revoir* in Dönninghausen!" he said, and went.

"*Au revoir*," she rejoined, half involuntarily; and, as the door closed behind his tall figure, she all but asked herself whether the events of the last half-hour had not been a dream. How could she feel thus nearly related to a man of whose existence she had been so short a time before unconscious? 'Strange force of kinship!' she said to herself.

Meanwhile, Lisbeth had seized upon the large envelope lying upon the table, and was trying to spell out the address.

"What a funny letter! Is it to you? Why is there no 'Fräulein' on it?" she asked, handing the letter to her sister, who observed for the first time that the envelope was addressed 'To my grand-daughter Johanna.'

She now remembered that letters from Dönninghausen to her mother had always been sent in an enclosure, and the address only of the envelope within had been written by her grandfather, and had always been 'To my daughter Agnes.' The Freiherr could not bring himself to write the hated name of the actor.

With a sigh, Johanna broke the seal and read:

> "My dear Child, – Now that you are, as I learn, an orphan indeed, it seems to me a matter of course that you should come as soon as possible to your natural home, – that is, to my house. Write to me when you intend to start, that I may send you a suitable escort.
>
> "Your affectionate grandfather,
>
> "Johann Heinrich v. Dönninghausen."

Johanna's hands fell by her sides. Not one word of pity for her loss, of sympathy for the death of the famous artist, or of welcome for the unknown grandchild. No, she could never find a home in a house where her father's name was despised!

But then she recalled what her cousin Otto had said of her grandfather's noble nature, which his harsh exterior continually gainsaid. Perhaps it might be given to her to reconcile the old nobleman with her father's memory; and Magelone was there, witty and talented, and Cousin Otto made frequent visits to Dönninghausen. He would always pay to the dead the tribute of admiration which she coveted. Should she go? Her glance fell upon Lisbeth, sitting opposite her, her eyes fixed upon the ground, her little face sad with that look of misery which is so indescribably pathetic in a child. "No, I cannot leave my darling. What is Dönninghausen to me?" she said to herself, and clasped her sister in her arms.

Meanwhile, Otto had returned to his hotel, whence before leaving town he wrote to Magelone:

> "Gracious Sovereign, – Your commands are obeyed. When I delivered our grandfather's letter I exercised in your behalf all the power of observation with which I am gifted, and can state, so far as can be learned in the limits of a brief interview, that the reality coincides with excellent Frau Werth's description. Our cousin is rather plain than pretty, but looks clever and distinguished, has quiet, pleasing manners, – in a word, she seems to me entirely presentable, and eminently

adapted to indemnify you for the fatiguing society of your Knight of the Rueful Countenance.

"I seize this favourable opportunity for prostrating myself – only metaphorically, alas! – at the smallest feet in the world, and am, as ever, O fairest Magelone,

"Your cousin and slave,

"Otto."

CHAPTER IV
FUTURE PLANS DECIDED

Immediately after her father's death, Johanna had received an affectionate letter from Ludwig, and her grandfather's note was scarcely read before a second budget from Lindenbad brought her letters from each member of the Werner family.

Old Dr. Werner, after his own simple and cordial manner, begged Johanna to return to them. Mathilde assured her in choice phraseology that she should rejoice to welcome her dear foster-sister, who, she trusted, would not feel too deeply the change from the luxury and freedom from restraint which belonged to an artist's world, to a quiet, monotonous existence spent in devotion to duty. Ludwig, writing in his turn, feared lest he might have wounded her by his bluntness in their last interview, and offered, if for any reason she would avoid living beneath the same roof with him, to spend the winter in Weimar, where he could easily complete his work.

The advantage that the public library in Weimar would be to him would be an abundant motive to assign for this step, and he added: "What I shall do with myself afterwards I do not know. At all events, all idea of the Lindenbad idyl is relinquished. I pray you to acquaint me unreservedly with your wishes, and I assure you that you will delight us all by coming to us, and most of all your brother Ludwig."

"How good and kind he is!" Johanna said to herself. "It is a great pity that, with all his goodness and kindness, he should be so unattractive."

Otto's image rose in her memory in strong contrast, – the elegant ease of his bearing, his courtesy, which occasionally seemed more than mere courtesy, his fine figure and handsome face. Was her grandfather like him? And the beautiful Magelone, – did she really possess everything that he ascribed to her, – beauty, wit, talent, amiability? Perhaps he loved her.

"All are loved save myself," Johanna thought. "I have been here a whole year, and have won no single heart except that of my little sister, who would soon, after the fashion of a child, forget me were I to leave her. Ludwig's love I lost before I knew that I possessed it, and even the father whom I idolized had not a single thought for me in his last moments."

Her own sentiments, however, she vowed to herself, never should be influenced by this knowledge. As in a sanctuary, she would guard and cherish in her heart the memory of her father and of the lofty service he had rendered to art, and where could she better do this than here, where everything reminded her of him, where she inhaled, as it were, the aroma of his personality? The longer she reflected, the clearer was her conviction that she must stay where she was.

Nevertheless, she postponed answering her letter from day to day. She had but little time of her own. Since Helena was occupied from morning till night with friends of both sexes, Lisbeth was left to the care of her sister, whose busy hands were, moreover, occupied all day long in completing her step-mother's mourning wardrobe. In the evening, when the child had gone to bed and Helena's visitors had left her, it was Johanna's hard task to listen to the wailing and woe of this undisciplined, unregulated nature. After hours of such labour, she would go to her room thoroughly exhausted, and long after Helena was sleeping quietly the poor girl would toss to and fro in her bed, unable, from over-fatigue, to find any repose.

But one evening Helena made her appearance in her dressing-room with dry eyes and an air of important business. Johanna had just put Lisbeth to bed, and was again sitting at her sewing. Her step-mother went hither and thither, restlessly picked up this and that only to lay them down again, and said at last, with averted face, "Johanna, my friends say it is my duty – that is, that I owe it to you to speak seriously with you."

The young girl looked at her inquiringly.

"We – that is, I must arrange some plan for the future; and you – you told mo that your grandfather and Dr. Werner have both asked you to come to them. To which of them have you decided to go?"

Johanna's heart seemed to stand still. "Must I go away from here?" she gasped at last.

Helena turned sharply round towards her. "Dear Johanna, I had not supposed you could be so unreasonable," she said harshly. "Roderich left nothing but debts; and as for my supporting a step-daughter – "

"Not another word, please, mamma," Johanna interposed. "In my grief I have forgotten all else. The instant that I know that I am a burden to you my resolution is taken."

"How haughtily you speak!" Helena complained. "You must know how terribly hard it is for me to have to calculate thus. I had even deliberated whether, in view of your diligence and your care of Lisbeth, I might not as well keep you with me instead of paying Lina and a waiting-maid. But Hofrath Leuchtenberg said – and that decided me – that it would be of the greatest disadvantage to me in my career as an actress to be accompanied by a grown-up daughter."

She paused. Johanna replied by a mute inclination of her head.

"There might be a way found out of the difficulty," Helena continued. "If you would call me 'Helena,' Lisbeth could call you aunt, and the world would take you for Roderich's sister. You know I am only going to stay here where we are known until New Year. What do you think?"

"I thank you!" Johanna made answer. "We had all better be spared this farce; besides, you know I have no talent as an actress. The part of my father's sister and your waiting-maid would be too difficult for me to undertake."

With these words she arose and left the room. Helena cast a tearful look towards heaven. "Leuchtenberg is right," she thought; "Johanna is haughty, obstinate, and heartless. I shall be spared a thousand annoyances by her leaving me. I am only sorry for Lisbeth's sake. The dear little creature really loves her sister, and Johanna seemed to care for her. But it is plain now how much her affection was worth!"

Johanna passed a sleepless night, but when morning came her mind was made up; she arose and wrote immediately to Dönninghausen and to Lindenbad. Her last letter was to Ludwig, and was as follows:

> "I have just thanked your father and Mathilde for the help they offered me, and have told them that I cannot accept it. Little as my father seemed to care for me, he always provided for me with a lavish hand; but he has left nothing, and it seems very unjust to burden your father with my maintenance when my grandfather offers me a home beneath his roof.
>
> "This reason, however, excellent as it is, is not my only one. You offer to leave your father's house if I come to it. That alone would deter me. Finally, – you know I am given to selfishness – I dread living with Mathilde. No one knows better than I how excellent she is, how dutiful, self-sacrificing, and unpretending. But she is strict and literal to a degree that paralyzes and irritates me. Your mother, from whom Mathilde inherits all her good qualities, was, besides, kind and imaginative. Hers was the heart of a child so long as she lived. Your home without her – and, let me add, without you – could never be mine; and, since I resign it, I may as well go among entire strangers.
>
> "If you would lighten my task, my dear Ludwig, remain the connecting link between my past and present. Let me inform you as to my life, and let me hear from you of your work, your plans for the future. However dissatisfied you may be with what I am now, it cannot affect the past, – I mean our childhood. Do you not remember how I always from the first sought and found protection with you from Mathilde's tyranny? It must always be so; a kind of instinct will always lead me to

you whenever I need counsel and help, and I know that you will open to me when I knock.

"I have told my grandfather, who wrote to me a few days ago, that I am ready to go to him, and that I only wait for his directions with regard to my journey. To part from what is dear to me here – my father's grave and my little sister – will be hard; and, besides, I liked the atmosphere in which I lived. Not for the sake of society here; I knew no one intimately but my father and Lisbeth. But all this activity and effort in the interest of art, inartistic as its results sometimes might be, interested me, and gave me the sensation of being in my element.

"But no, – this is self-conceit, – it was not my element. The histrionic attempt to which I so confidently invited you proved that I do not belong to the elect. 'Devoid of talent as her mother' was my father's verdict with regard to me; and when I recall the terrible moment when I stood there, utterly incapable of giving expression to what I felt so vividly in my imagination, – oh, Ludwig, the anguish of that moment cannot be described in words!

"I would that this bitter, mortifying experience had really cured me; that is, had stifled my desire for the Paradise then closed upon me. But this is not so. During the long days and nights passed beside my dying father, I constantly struggled with the old longing.

"If I could make you comprehend all that this last year with my father has brought to me, you might, perhaps, understand me. In all his artistic performances I was beside him in spirit. The strongest chord that he struck, the gentlest harmony that he awakened, found an answering echo in my heart. When Desdemona, Ophelia, Klärchen seemed like puppets beside his Othello, Hamlet, Egmont, I knew just what they ought to be; every look, every motion of theirs as it should be, was as clear to my mind as was his own exquisite conception of his part.

"Was this an inborn gift of mine, inherited from my father? If so, diligent perseverance could have made my clumsy limbs and speech obedient to my will; but my father's expression, 'Devoid of talent as her mother,' paralyzes my courage, and filial affection bids me to try no further where he can no longer criticise my efforts. Perhaps the creative force which I thought I possessed was but the momentary impression of his genius. I might then have had some measure of success at his side, inspired by his spirit, – no great amount, it may be, – but we love the moon with its borrowed light, and my sun might have permitted me to reflect its brilliancy.

"But this career is ended, and there is nothing for me but to submit. Perhaps my new surroundings will lighten my task; perhaps I shall find at my grandfather's something to do which will give healthy occupation to my thoughts. And I shall be in the country again, in quiet seclusion. In a sketch-book of my mother's there is a pencil-drawing of Dönninghausen, which I used as a child to contemplate with secret longing. The castle, a huge, plain, two-storied pile, with a lofty roof and low bell-tower, stands half-way up the side of a mountain which is crowned with forests and overlooked by loftier ranges of mountains. Down in the valley is the village, with its little old church; a mountain stream winds through the meadows, and the road beside it ascends the mountain along its course and is lost in the forest. This road always bewitched me; it was the pathway to all kinds of adventures and wonders, – the entrance to a fairy world. So closely is this landscape interwoven with all my childish dreams, that I could go to Dönninghausen as to a home, if I could hope to learn to understand or to be understood by its inmates. Assuredly the best intentions, the most sincere effort, shall not be wanting on my part. I certainly do possess a

certain talent, my only one, for adapting myself to the habits and social life of those with whom I am thrown. May it now stand me in stead!

"Farewell for the present. I hope you will read between the lines of this long letter the earnest desire to be understood by you of

"Yours,

"J."

CHAPTER V
AT DÖNNINGHAUSEN

In the large three-windowed morning-room of Castle Dönninghausen the old Freiherr was walking to and fro, smoking his long pipe, as was his custom always after breakfast, his huge, tawny dog Leo following, as ever, close at his master's heels. The sister of the lord of the castle sat prim and stately in her usual place by the window, knitting, while at a small table near the chimney-place Magelone and Johann Leopold were playing chess. The fire crackled, the old tall clock ticked, the needles in Aunt Thekla's busy hands clicked, and the Freiherr's footsteps fell regularly upon the rug that covered the floor. The morning was precisely like every one of its predecessors.

Suddenly the old man went up to the middle one of the three tall windows and gazed out into the flurry of snow that veiled the distant landscape. Leo, amazed at this transgression of traditionary custom, stood still and pricked his ears.

"Ten," said the Freiherr, as the clock began to strike. "In half an hour Johanna may be here; at twelve, when I have returned from my ride, I wish to speak with her in my room. She shall receive all the consideration due to my grandchild, but there shall be no interruption of the rules of the house upon her account, nor" – his deep voice grew louder, and there was something in it like the mutter of a coming tempest – "nor shall her father's name be mentioned in my hearing."

With these words the Freiherr turned about and left the room, accompanied by Leo.

So soon as the door closed behind him, Johann Leopold arose. "Allow me, dear Magelone, to postpone the end of our game. I have a headache," he said, passing his hand wearily over his eyes.

"Just as you please, dear Johann Leopold," Magelone replied, with a gentle smile. He kissed her hand and left the room. She lifted her arms towards heaven. "Thank God, he has gone!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Aunt Thekla, Aunt Thekla, this life is intolerable!"

The old lady shook her head so that the gray curls beneath her lace cap trembled.

"My dear child, you ought not to speak so," she said, in a tone of gentle reproof; "you are going to marry him – "

"Because I choose to, or because I must?" Magelone interposed, going across the room to her great-aunt. "But never mind that; when we are married it will be better, – then I will not stay any longer in Dönninghausen."

"You will not leave your old grandfather alone!" said Aunt Thekla.

"I am nothing to grandpapa," Magelone answered, with a shrug of her shoulders; "and as for any entertainment that he gets from Johann Leopold – But don't be troubled about that; who knows what the new cousin may turn out? I am very curious. From all that I hear, she will be far too solemn for me, – all the better adapted, however, for our croaking household and for Dönninghausen."

With these words Magelone hurried to the other end of the room, seated herself at the grand piano, and began to play a polka; then suddenly ceasing, she ran back again to her aunt and sat down opposite her. "Can you possibly understand, Aunt Thekla," she asked, "why grandpapa has sent for this Johanna? Do not misunderstand me. I have no objection to her coming. We can yawn together, even if she is good for nothing else. But why grandpapa, who cannot endure the sound of her family name, did not rather board her somewhere – "

"I asked myself the same question," her aunt replied; "and the only answer I can find to it, knowing him as I do, is that he yearns to see his Agnes's child. Believe me, dear, he is not so hard-hearted as he chooses to appear."

"But he banished his daughter!" Magelone exclaimed.

"He did what he thought was his duty, and no one knew how he suffered in doing so," the old lady rejoined. "Agnes was his darling. How enraptured he was when, after his three boys, – the

youngest, your father, was eleven years old, – a daughter was born to him! Although he was thought a strict father, he could deny his Agnes nothing. Everybody in the house did as she pleased, and did it gladly, for she was a gentle, tender-hearted creature. But she grew too dreamy and imaginative in this solitude, and when my sister-in-law at last had her way and sent her for a year to boarding-school, where she had companions of her own age, it was too late. At her very first entrance into society she fell in love with that man, that actor, and there was no help for it."

"How inconceivable it is, this falling so desperately in love!" said Magelone.

Aunt Thekla dropped her knitting and gazed at her niece through her eye-glasses. "Are you in earnest?" she asked. "Can you really not understand it?"

Magelone's eyes sparkled strangely, reminding one of sunshine upon rippling water.

"Oh, Aunt Thekla, you think I mean it!" she exclaimed, and laughed like a child.

"No, not exactly," said the old lady; "but I cannot deny that I am sometimes anxious. 'Tis all the better for you if you are only flirting, but I pity the poor lad."

"The poor lad!" Magelone repeated. "Does that mean Otto? Aunt, you are perfectly heavenly; I must give you a kiss!" And she sprang up and threw her arms around Aunt Thekla's neck. "Let me assure you that it is a question which of us is flirting the most. When men attempt anything in that line their achievements are wonderful – Hark! there comes a carriage. It is Johanna!" she interrupted herself, and, beginning to sing, 'For her I sigh,' in a rather weak but melodious voice, she ran out of the room.

In the corridor she walked more deliberately. "Remember your dignity, Magelone," she said to herself, – "no farther than the head of the staircase." But when she reached the head of the staircase, and Johanna's pale face – shrouded in black crape, her large eyes dimmed with weeping – looked up at her, dignity was entirely forgotten. Holding out both hands, she hurried to meet the guest, exclaiming, "Johanna! Cousin Johanna! I am Magelone!" And she clasped her in her arms.

Johanna was mute with amazement. Otto's expressions had led her to imagine Magelone's beauty to be of a dazzling superb kind, instead of which here was a fairy-like creature, with child-like eyes and a winning grace of manner.

"Poor Johanna, how tired you look!" Magelone continued. "And how you shiver! you are chilled through and through – "

"Yes; I have been travelling all night," said Johanna. And her teeth chattered as she spoke.

"Poor child, I suppose I ought to take you directly to Aunt Thekla, but you must first rest and get warm. Here," – and Magelone opened the door of a spacious, well-warmed apartment, – "here is a quiet room; and now tell me what you would like. Shall I send you a maid, or will you have breakfast?"

"Thank you; I should like to sleep," was Johanna's reply.

Magelone helped her take off her hat and wraps. "Then lie down here," – and she led her to a huge lounge, – "and I will see that you are not disturbed until it is time to dress for dinner."

She turned to go. Johanna took both her hands. "Thanks!" she said, with emotion; "your reception of me has done me so much good – "

"But you have not yet called me Magelone!" was the laughing interruption. "But don't force yourself to it, – it will come of itself." With these words she kissed the young girl's forehead and left her alone.

"She is charming," thought Johanna, as her weary head sank back among the cushions. "If every one here is as kind, I have been very silly to have any dread of Dönninghausen." And she fell asleep with a lightened heart, the rumble and rush of the railroad train still buzzing in her ears.

Suddenly she started. "Ten minutes for refreshments!" had just rung through her dream. She awoke to find herself, to her surprise, in the spacious dim room. The door opened, and an old gentleman entered, with a large dog beside him.

"Grandfather!" she cried, and would have risen.

He approached her quickly. "Sit still! sit still!" he said, with a commanding gesture, as he took a seat beside her couch. "My old Christian tells me that you are exhausted with your journey, and therefore I came here to see you, and to release you, if you like, from coming to dinner to-day."

Whilst the Freiherr spoke, his cold blue eyes rested searchingly upon the girl. She bore the look bravely.

"Thank you, that is not necessary; my sleep has greatly refreshed me," she replied.

"So much the better," said the old man. "You still look pale and tired, but that will pass away. You do not look like your mother," he went on, after a pause, in a gentler tone, "but you have her low gentle voice, and there is something in your smile – "

He broke off and turned away his head. At this moment the dog, who had been sniffing about Johanna, reared himself and put his large forepaws upon her shoulders. "Down, Leo, down!" the Freiherr called. The animal obeyed, but Johanna stroked its huge head caressingly, and it fawned at her feet.

"Why, look! Leo, usually so slow to make acquaintance, has accepted you upon the spot," the old man said, with a gratified air. "That, too, you get from your mother, – all animals liked her. Now I will leave you alone. After dinner you shall be presented to your grand-aunt, my sister Thekla. Until then, my child, adieu."

He arose and held out his hand; suddenly he drew her to him and kissed her. "God bless your home-coming!" he murmured; then he walked towards the door, turning round, however, before he reached it, and saying, in his usual imperious way, "From this time, Johanna, you belong entirely to us. We shall all call you by your first name, and you will be one of the family, to the rules of which you must conform. Come to me if any occasion should arise for your wanting advice."

With these words he departed.

"I hope we shall be fond of each other," Johanna thought. "He is kinder than his letter led me to imagine him. And how handsome he is, with his white hair, his proud stern air, his bright eyes beneath their bushy eyebrows, and his erect martial figure! In his coarse shooting-jacket, leather breeches, and riding-boots, he is the most distinguished-looking man I have ever seen."

Grand-aunt Thekla, too, to whom Johanna was presented before dinner by Magelone, received her kindly, although after a prim fashion of her own, and Cousin Johann Leopold, upon his introduction to her in the dining-room, offered the tips of his cold fingers, and expressed a hope that she would be pleased with Dönninghausen.

Altogether, it had the effect upon Johanna of the scene of a fairy-tale: the spacious dining-hall, its wainscoting and ceiling of dark oak; a huge green porcelain stove at one end, at the other a buffet, whence shot mysterious gleams from glass and silver in the light of the chandelier; the assembled family, contrasting so strongly with one another, – Johann Leopold in evening dress; Aunt Thekla in gray satin and black lace; Magelone in a faultless toilette of rose-coloured silk, flounced and furbelowed; Johanna in her deep mourning, and the Freiherr in his riding-dress.

There was no conversation. Sometimes the Freiherr asked a question briefly and in a gruff voice, receiving as brief and satisfactory an answer as possible from whomsoever he addressed, and then for a space of time no sound would be audible save the rattle of knives and forks and the hushed footsteps of the two men-servants. Besides these last, old Christian, Johanna's escort, stood behind his master's chair, his only office, apparently, being to fill the Freiherr's glass and to pick up the napkin which the old gentleman continually let fall.

It was a protracted meal: the Freiherr had a good appetite and ate slowly. He grew more talkative at dessert, discussed affairs of the estate with Johann Leopold, asked Aunt Thekla about some sick people in the village, inquired of Johanna how long she had been in reaching Dönninghausen, and made a contemptuous remark about Magelone's 'ball-dress.'

At last he arose, and every one seemed to breathe more freely. He gave his arm to his sister: Johann Leopold offered his to Magelone.

"You must take us both," she said. "Come, Johanna."

"I should like to go to my room," the girl whispered. Magelone shook her head.

"You must not; we are all on duty now. Come," she said, in a low voice, as she followed the brother and sister into the drawing-room.

Here the lamps were lit, and the coffee-equipage was set out upon a table before a lounge. There was another table near the fireplace, provided with candles and newspapers, and so soon as the Freiherr had taken his arm-chair beside it old Christian made his appearance with a pipe and box of matches, followed by Leo, who pushed his head affectionately into his master's hand and then lay down at his feet. Aunt Thekla sat down opposite her brother with her knitting; Johann Leopold withdrew to a dark corner on the other side of the chimney-piece.

"Are you in pain again?" the Freiherr asked him, in a tone which expressed more irritation than sympathy.

"Yes, sir; I have another of my old headaches," Johann Leopold replied, and the ghastly pallor of his handsome but emaciated face, and the look of suffering in his eyes, were confirmation of his words.

The Freiherr picked up the paper with a growl, and pushed his chair nearer the light.

"Come," said Magelone, taking possession of Johanna, "I will initiate you into the mysteries of my coffee-brewing; you can relieve me sometimes in future." And while she was clattering among her cups and saucers she went on in an undertone, "This goes on every day the same. Now we shall all take coffee; if grandpapa finds anything interesting in the paper he reads it aloud; when Johann Leopold condescends to be well he reads the paper, after which grandpapa and Aunt Thekla play backgammon, and *I* give you a little music. Are you musical?" she asked in a louder tone.

"Unfortunately, no," Johanna replied.

"Perhaps you draw?" Magelone asked further.

"No, I do not. I have no talent at all," Johanna declared, with some mortification.

"None at all?" the Freiherr said, and his eyes gleamed brightly over his newspaper. "Actually none? So much the better, child, so much the better!"

Johanna understood the meaning of such words from her grandfather. This was the gulf that separated them.

CHAPTER VI
THE FREIHERR'S PRINCIPLES

When the next morning Johanna went to her window, she could not repress an exclamation of delight. Her room looked from a gable of the castle out into the park. In front of it an aged oak stretched its gnarled limbs above a little clearing; around it stood magnificent hemlocks, their boughs drooping to the ground beneath a weight of snow; while on the right the only vista through the trees afforded a view of the snowy roofs and the little church of the village in the valley, of a row of stunted willows, probably marking the course of a stream, and of the wooded mountain-sides crowned by curiously-jagged rocks.

It was a peaceful landscape, such as she loved, and had the added charm of the brilliant sunlight shining upon the glittering snow in the clear wintry atmosphere. It attracted her irresistibly to go out into the open air. The breakfast-hour was nine o'clock: she had half an hour to spare; and she wrapped herself up and hurried out into the park.

She soon found a pathway, but walking on the dry snow was hard work, and she had to return long before the limits of the park had been reached.

As she ascended the terrace steps in front of the castle, she saw her grandfather standing at a window of the lower story. She called up a 'good-morning!' to him; he acknowledged her greeting, but his look and air were so gloomy that she feared she had transgressed some rule of the house, and betook herself to the dining-room with a certain timidity.

Her fears were groundless, however. When the customary morning salutations had been exchanged and all had taken their seats at table, the Freiherr said, "I am glad to see, Johanna, that you are not one of these silly, new-fangled girls. Out in the open air before breakfast, – that's right, child! But 'tis hard walking over the soft snow. Can you ride?"

Johanna replied in the negative.

"Should you like to learn?" her grandfather asked, and when she said 'yes,' with sparkling eyes, he added, "Very well; be ready by half-past twelve, and we will make our first trial. Christian will give orders to have Elinor saddled for you; she's the gentlest creature in the world."

"She threw me," Magelone remarked.

"Your own fault!" the Freiherr exclaimed. "A horse is a noble creature; those who would control it must keep a tight rein upon themselves. It rebels against alternations between childish foolhardiness and childish timidity. By the way, Magelone, when do you wish to begin riding again?"

"Not at all, grandpapa," Magelone replied, with gentle decision.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the Freiherr. "A Dönninghausen and not ride on horseback! Why, your cousins Hildegard and Hedwig are perfect Amazons."

"You will have to reconcile yourself to leaving me out of the family in this respect as in several others," Magelone replied, as gently as before, but with a flash in her eyes that betrayed her irritation. "Probably you will find Johanna more truly of the race."

Aunt Thekla and Johann Leopold looked up startled; the Freiherr tossed his head, and his eyes darted fire at Magelone, but his glance fell upon Johanna, who, paler than usual, cast down her eyes, and he controlled his displeasure. Magelone went on eating as if nothing had occurred; the Freiherr turned with some question to Johann Leopold. The meal concluded as monosyllabically as usual, and the members of the household continued as silent after it was finished; and while the Freiherr smoked his morning pipe, Johann Leopold and Magelone played chess, and Aunt Thekla and Johanna busied themselves with some needlework.

Johanna was puzzled by Magelone; the more she reflected upon her words the more she was convinced that they could not have been thoughtlessly uttered, and yet was it possible that that careless air, that gentle smile, those clear eyes, could conceal petty spite?

Her ride with her grandfather put an end to her reflections. Martin, the groom, who, before her grandfather appeared, tried to initiate her somewhat into the rudiments of his art, declared with a grin that the "gracious Fräulein was sure to be a good rider." The Freiherr, when he saw her sitting gayly and confidently in her saddle, said, "Now hold yourself upright, and don't be afraid." And away they went in the clear winter morning, with Leo at their heels.

Johanna returned warmed and refreshed. Her grandfather had not talked much, but the little that he had said, the few questions he had put, had brought them nearer together.

Under the influence of this impression she sat down at her writing-table to tell Ludwig, as she had promised, of her arrival; but she had scarcely written two lines when there was a knock at her door, and Magelone entered. "I am disturbing you," she said, with her sunniest smile, "but I cannot help it. I must beg your pardon, – I said such a horrid thing at the breakfast-table."

She approached Johanna and offered her her hand.

"Never mind," Johanna replied, clasping the delicate hand in both her own. "I thought you spoke hastily."

Magelone shook her head. "No, it was not exactly that." And she seated herself at the writing-table. "You have no idea how childish I am. It vexed me to have grandpapa praise you at my expense, and I had to say that, —*c'était plus fort que moi*."

"'Confessions of a fair soul,'" said Johanna.

"You are laughing. Oh, you are good and kind!" Magelone declared. "I never will be cross to you again. I will love you so dearly. Believe me, Johanna, I have always wanted some one like you."

"You hardly know me," said Johanna.

"But I know that you have everything which I lack. The repose of your manner, – how I envy and admire you for it! You can sit perfectly quiet all the while grandpapa is reading the papers. It drives me about like a will-o'-the-wisp."

"That is your nature," Johanna rejoined. "There is always something about you, not like a will-o'-the-wisp, but like a rippling wave."

Magelone shook her head. "Far more like a will-o'-the-wisp. The wave has its goal, flows in a destined course; I go I know not whither."

"But you are gay and happy; what more would you have?" exclaimed Johanna.

Magelone replied, "Not always. Latterly I have been rather gloomy than gay. What do you think of Johann Leopold?" she added, after a pause.

"I cannot judge yet," Johanna replied. "I have hardly talked with him."

"He does not talk," Magelone interrupted her. "He is just what you have seen him day out and day in. It is the same with every one. Grandpapa is always dictatorial, Aunt Thekla always good and tiresome, Johann Leopold always odd. Doesn't he look like the marble guest?"

"He looks melancholy and ill."

"And yet he has no positive complaint that I know of," said Magelone. "His hobby is chemistry. Whenever he is not on duty with grandpapa he is shut up in his laboratory in the garden, with all sorts of sounds and smells. It is a perfect witch's kitchen there. Can you imagine an odder match than he and myself?"

"Magelone!" cried Johanna. "You do not mean to say – "

"Yes, yes; we wish – or rather we ought to marry," Magelone interposed. "Grandpapa devised the match, and of course it must be. I am a widow; Johann Leopold's betrothed died; I have lost my property; he is the heir. We are equals in rank; he is thirty years old, I am twenty-one. In short, the match is the most suitable that can be imagined."

"But you will not consent?"

"What am I to do?" Magelone asked, shrugging her shoulders. "I am spoiled. Poor Willfried ran through all my money to the last farthing. I have no chance of making conquests in this wilderness; and, besides, who would marry a widow with no money?"

"Whoever loved her."

"Do you believe in love?" asked Magelone. "I don't. All I have seen of what is called love was mere play. People flirt, and try to befool one another, to outdo a rival, but love, which might induce one to contract a disadvantageous marriage, never. Marriage is a business transaction."

"Yours does not seem to have been such," Johanna said.

"Do you suppose I was enamoured of my stout captain?" asked Magelone. "Not in the least! It suited me to marry before I was quite eighteen an officer of the Garde du Corps; it suited me to go to Berlin, and to court; but I never imagined for a moment that Willfried would forego his ballet-girls and his cards for longer than the honeymoon. My folly lay in never reflecting upon how quickly a fortune may be gambled away. My good father ought to have thought of that; but he was ill, and wanted to see me established, as they say, before his death, and so it all happened."

"Poor child!" said Johanna, taking her hand. "It was the fault of circumstances. You will learn to look upon life differently. Only have courage, and hope."

"If I could!" Magelone said, her melancholy smile contrasting oddly with her sparkling eyes. "Do you know I sometimes fancy that I have no heart? It has something to do with my name. The water-witch Magelone, after whom I am called, bequeathed to me her own uncanny nature."

"No, no; you will learn to love," Johanna interrupted. She thought of Otto, and of the way in which he had spoken of Magelone. "You are not actually betrothed yet?" she added.

"Not yet," Magelone replied. "Thus far grandpapa has only informed us both, Johann Leopold and myself, of his desire. He called us into his study and addressed us very solemnly."

"And you?" Johanna asked.

"Johann Leopold bowed, as he always does, like an automaton, —*cela n'engage à rien*, – and I suppose I smiled. But what does it matter what we say? You may be sure that if we employed all the eloquence in the world to combat grandpapa's arrangements it would avail nothing. At Christmas, when all the noble family are assembled here, the betrothal will take place, and at the hour that grandpapa shall appoint we shall stand before the altar and exchange rings whether we will or not."

"That I cannot understand," said Johanna.

"You will understand it when you have once seen how terrible grandpapa's anger is," Magelone rejoined, – "when he frowns, and his eyes flash from beneath his bushy white eyebrows, and his voice thunders and roars. It occurs but rarely, but the terror of it is in our very blood, or has been taught us from childhood, I cannot tell which."

"Did you ever see grandpapa so?" asked Johanna.

"Only once, when Otto, who is very hasty, had boxed the forester's ears. Grandpapa roared out that so to treat an honest man, who could not demand satisfaction for the insult, was the act of a blackguard; Otto was not worthy to bear the name of Dönninghausen. As I tell it it seems nothing, but when grandpapa flew out at the poor boy I really thought he would have felled him to the earth, and every one present – it happened during the charmingly social hour after breakfast – was petrified with horror."

"But grandpapa was right!" exclaimed Johanna. "Cousin Otto must have acknowledged that, for he speaks of him with the greatest reverence, and calls him a nobleman in the fullest sense of the word."

Magelone shrugged her shoulders. "My dear child, that is the Dönninghausen craze. They all imagine that because they bear this name they are superior to all other human beings; and since they are not so, – I mean the younger generation, – they fall down and worship the old gentleman, in whom the family craze has become flesh and blood. But what have we to do with that?" she went on, jumping up and throwing her arms around Johanna. "You are not weighted with the sacred name. I

have, for a while at least, thrown it aside, and I only wish we could really and truly enjoy life. There it goes again!" she added, with an expression of comic despair, – "that dreadful bell, for the second breakfast, and then four vacant hours before it rings again to call us to dinner. Poor Johanna! Day after day passes here, each the exact counterpart of these last twenty-four hours, year out, year in, and there is nothing for it but to lament with Heine's Proserpine, —

"Mid corpses pale,
While Lemurs wail,
To grieve away my youthful days.'"

Whilst Magelone was revealing this melancholy prospect to the new inmate of the castle, the Freiherr had gone to his sister in the morning-room, where, as he paced to and fro after his wonted fashion, with his hands clasped behind him, he said, "I am surprised and delighted to find how well Johanna suits us. Although she has been here so short a time, I seem nearer to her than to Magelone."

"Yes, because she has more soul," said the old lady.

The Freiherr shrugged his shoulders. "My dear Thekla, what is her soul to me? She is clever and – strange as it sounds, and much as the word irritated me, coming from Magelone – she has race. More than any other of my grandchildren is she flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone."

Aunt Thekla nodded assent, and the Freiherr went on:

"It makes me anxious, too. What is to become of the child? She does not belong in our circle. She is too good to be married to one of these new-fangled noblemen, who, in spite of their descent, are quite ready to throw themselves away upon any peasant's or tradesman's daughter provided she has money; and to allow her to fall back into a rank which would separate her from us entirely, – a great pity, a great pity!"

"But must she of necessity be married?" asked Aunt Thekla.

"Of course!" said the Freiherr.

"I have not been – " the old lady began.

Her brother interrupted her. "But you were betrothed to one your equal in rank. Since you vowed fidelity to your lover before his death, I respected your vow, much as it went against the grain with me."

"Dear Johann, will you not likewise respect the desire of Johann Leopold's heart?" asked Aunt Thekla.

The Freiherr turned short and stood before her. "Has the lad complained, – taken refuge behind a petticoat – ?"

"Not at all," his sister interposed. "He has not said a word; I heard it from Magelone. And I know Johann Leopold's heart; I know that he has not yet recovered Albertine's loss."

"Nonsense!" cried the Freiherr. "It is his duty, as the heir, to marry. He knows it perfectly, and when a suitable *partie* is offered him without his looking for her or courting her, I promise you he'll say yes and amen without a word."

Aunt Thekla shook her head dubiously.

"Do you call it a suitable *partie*?" she said. "I fear that Magelone, with her love of amusement and her superficiality, will make Johann Leopold unhappy, or that he will make her so."

"I do not think so," said the Freiherr. "On the contrary, she will spirit him up, and he will tone her down; a very good thing for both. The stronger will get the upper hand, I don't care which it is. My duty is to look out for the continuance of the family intrusted to my care."

"Dear Johann, do not take it amiss, but it strikes me that you look out for it rather too much," the old lady said, timidly.

"Too much!" the Freiherr repeated, pausing again before his sister, and his eyes flashed. "Do you really think that too much can be done in this age of indifference and degeneracy? I

can understand such a thought in the younger generation, which is for the most part senseless and objectless, and finds it easiest to swim with the current. But I – I hoped you knew this without needing my assertion – I have sworn to stand fast as long as I can, and to hold fast as much as I may. We have been taught, and we have believed, that, like everything else on earth, the differences of rank are instituted and decreed by the Almighty. Since when has this not been so?"

He paused, and seemed to expect a reply, but the increasing violence of his tone and manner had intimidated his sister. She sat mute, with downcast eyes; and after a pause he went on:

"I do not wish to find fault with those who think otherwise. 1848 thinned our ranks. But for those who believe as I do it is all the more an imperative duty to assert themselves. I have done so. I have made great sacrifices to my convictions, and I feel that I have thereby purchased the right, so long as my eyes are open to the light, to provide for Dönninghausen according to the dictates of my reason and my conscience. If you think I do too much – well, I must endure that reproach."

The old lady went up to her brother. "Dear Johann," she said, laying her hand upon his arm, "how can you suppose that any one of us would reproach you? We know that you always do what is best, and we thank you from our hearts."

"That I don't believe, neither is it necessary," the Freiherr interrupted her. "I do my confounded duty, fulfil my obligations, —*basta!* Has not the lad, Johann Leopold, had his own way hitherto in everything? He has studied what he chose, where he chose; he has travelled for years; has been betrothed to the girl whom he loved, and what is the result? He has come to be a mollycoddle and a bookworm. My successor, the Lord of Dönninghausen, must be none of that. At all events, an attempt must be made to spirit him up by a marriage with Magelone, and so the betrothal is fixed for Christmas, the marriage for Easter. But come, Thekla, the bell rang some time ago."

CHAPTER VII
JOHANNA TO LUDWIG

"Dönninghausen, Dec. 19, 1873.

"… I have been here just a fortnight to-day, and feel entirely at home. You cannot fancy how, after the sorrow and agitation through which I so lately passed, I am soothed and rested by the quiet life here, with its regular methodical occupations. I accompany my grandfather every morning in his rides to inspect his saw-mill, his wood-cutting, and his farms, and in the evening I read aloud to him the newspapers and magazines, an office silently transferred to me by Johann Leopold. In the course of the day I go with Aunt Thekla to see her poor people and the sick in the village, or we sew, or knit Christmas-presents for her protégées. Aunt Thekla is a gentle kindly soul. When Magelone awhile ago laughed at us for taking such pains to manufacture what could so easily be bought in any town, she said, 'You cannot imagine how I enjoy the thought that the work of my hands, which would else have nothing to do, may keep certain little feet warm as they run to school on some cold morning, or may help to make the winter less intolerable for the aged and bedridden.' Magelone could not understand this, or perhaps she did not choose to understand it. She is a puzzle to me; I cannot discover whether she is really superficial by nature, or whether she tries to become so. She wants to be entertained, amused, but every serious book tires her, all really fine music gives her the headache, although she is not frightened by technical difficulties, and in conversation she insists upon changing the subject if it turns upon anything save dress and society. Nevertheless, she is admirably endowed intellectually as well as physically, and the charm that she had for me when I first saw her has grown with time. There is something odd and striking about her that rivets one's interest. She is really short in stature, and yet her graceful lithe figure in her long trains seems that of a tall, slender woman; her hair is light brown or golden, according as the light falls on it; her eyes one would call blue, another gray, and a third green, and they would all be right; her smile is that of a child, but in an instant there will be something arch, mocking, even sneering, in it. One moment she will call me awkward, pedantic, the next I am her comfort, her stay, the friend for whom she has been longing. For a moment her whim will be enthusiasm, and on a sudden she will turn herself and everybody else into ridicule. Whether she enjoys doing this or not I cannot say; I suspect she hardly knows herself.

"Johann Leopold's seeming indifference to her is very extraordinary. Although she tells me that she thinks him 'awfully tiresome,' she sometimes makes a brilliant display of coquetry in his honour, on which occasions he gazes at her with lack-lustre eyes, not smiling at all, and even, if possible, making no reply to her sallies. And these two are to marry each other. Can you understand it?

"This morning I had a little adventure that gave me some insight into Johann Leopold's character; until then I really had not discovered in him one human emotion. Grandpapa had an attack of gout, consequently could not ride out, and was annoyed that his absence would delay some operations going on in the new clearing. I offered to ride thither with Martin; so I received my instructions and set forth.

"Beyond the village, in the valley, we met a labourer's wife, who told me with tears that she was obliged to run to the drug-shop, at least a mile and a half distant, for some medicine for her sick husband, who must thus be left alone with a little

girl only six years old. Of course I sent the woman back to her patient's bedside, despatching Martin upon her errand, and struck into my beloved forest-path up the mountain alone, or rather under Leo's protection.

"I had never ridden in this direction except in grandpapa's company, when I had enjoyed immensely the grand old beeches at the beginning of the way, the views of the village of Dönninghausen, and of the opposite hills, which open out as the path ascends the mountain-side, leading to the most magnificent hemlocks that I have ever seen. Of the realm of magic and enchantment of which I dreamed as I looked at my mother's sketch of Dönninghausen I found no trace.

"To-day, however, the forest-sprites seemed determined to lead me astray. Although, as far as I knew, I turned into the forest at the right point, the hemlocks would not appear. The path seemed uncommonly steep; on the left, crags which I did not recognize thrust themselves forth from the shrubbery, but yet I could not make up my mind to turn back. Perhaps this way also might lead to my destination. At all events, fresh footprints in the snow were evidence that both men and horses had preceded me shortly before; and I rode on and on, although forced to believe that my goal lay more to the right. The desire to explore had taken possession of me. I could not but go on! The air was exhilarating in its freshness, the sun shone, the snow glittered upon the trees and bushes; the rocks on my left grew more huge; gnarled roots twisted out from crevice and fissure; a flock of screaming crows flew overhead, making the only sound to be heard, save the rustling among the trees and the snorting of my horse.

"At last – I had been riding perhaps an hour – I reached a small plateau shaded by oaks; across my way ran a rude fence, the gate in which my clever Leo opened, and soon after a peaked roof, with a smoking chimney, appeared among some hemlocks. As I approached, the horns nailed above the door told that it was a forester's lodge, and I was greeted by the loud barking of five or six dogs, – the only living creatures to be seen.

"I alighted, fastened Elinor's bridle to a tree, and, opening the door, entered – followed by the noisy pack, which Leo haughtily disdained to notice – a hall, around which were several doors. I knocked at the right-hand one of these, – no answer; at the left, where I heard voices, and instantly the door was opened. An elderly woman, with an air of distress, appeared, and in the background of the long, dim apartment there stood, by a curtained bed, a figure which seemed familiar to me. 'Johann Leopold!' I exclaimed involuntarily; and I was not mistaken: he whom I addressed turned and came quickly towards me.

"'Johanna, what brings you here?' he cried, with a certain confusion of manner; and when I replied that I had lost my way, he begged the woman to take me to her sitting-room, promising to join me in a few moments.

"She conducted me to the opposite room; hurriedly offered me some refreshment; begged pardon for leaving me alone, since she must assist the gentleman with his patient, and vanished.

"I could not but see that my arrival here had been inopportune, and I was just pondering whether I had not better make good my retreat without waiting for Johann Leopold, when there arose a loud barking again, and a forester whom I had now and then met when with my grandfather passed the window.

"'Wife!' he called out, as he entered the house, and then I heard him ask what the deuce was the meaning of the Dönninghausen horse with the side-saddle, and whether the old lady had come. I could not hear the woman's reply, but the man

declared in a harsh tone that he had had enough of secrets; the fellow must leave the house to-day, for no one could expect him to risk his daily bread for the sake of such a good-for-nothing. He must leave immediately.

"'Fritz! Fritz! it may be his death, and he is my brother!' the woman wailed. The man cut short her words with an oath; but Johann Leopold's voice was now heard telling him to be quiet, and all three came into the room together, – the woman with her apron at her eyes, the man with gloomy looks, and Johann Leopold with an air of energy that surprised me.

"'Dear Johanna,' he said, as the forester bowed sullenly, 'chance has here made you acquainted with circumstances which must be withheld from our grandfather. You surely will promise me and these worthy people to say nothing of what you have seen, will you not?'

"'With all my heart,' I replied.

"The forester shrugged his shoulders. 'A young lady's promise – ' he began.

"'Kruger, remember to whom you are speaking,' Johann Leopold interrupted him authoritatively. 'My cousin's promise is as my own. I am going now to saddle my horse, and meanwhile you will explain the matter to her.'

"With these words he left the room, and the woman followed him. The forester gave him an angry look and then turned to me.

"'There's not much to explain,' he said, crossly. 'Red Jakob, my wife's brother, is a good-for-nothing fellow, a brawler and a poacher, whom our old master – Jakob used to be a servant at the castle – dismissed from his service. But he is always coming back here from Brunswick, where he had work in a saw-mill. Early last Sunday I caught him in the very act of aiming at a fine doe. I shouted to him. He made a leap over the rocks to get off; fell, his gun went off, and a bullet pierced his arm. What was I to do? I had to get him up here; but if the master should hear of it the fellow would be sent to jail, and I never could outlive the disgrace.'

"The man's blunt manner pleased me.

"'Grandpapa certainly shall not hear of it from me, forester,' I said, and offered him my hand. He looked at me in surprise, reddened, and took my hand, grasping it so tightly that I could hardly help crying out. 'Thanks, Fräulein,' he said, simply, and, as Johann Leopold now made his appearance with his horse, we left the lodge.

"While the forester helped me mount my horse, Johann Leopold addressed him again in an arrogant tone: 'Remember, Kruger, that I positively forbid the man to be moved. Until he is recovered he stays here as my patient. Everything that he needs is to be charged to me.'

"The forester's wife broke out into protestations of gratitude, her husband muttered some unintelligible words, and we rode off.

"When Johann Leopold learned my errand, he offered to guide me by a road over the mountain to the clearing, and we agreed to tell grandpapa that we had met, but to say nothing further. Johann Leopold told me that 'Red Jakob' had been his most cherished playmate when they were boys. No one could approach him in the knowledge of the woods and fields. He knew every plant, every stone, and every animal of the country; the habits of the game, the holes of the foxes, and the nests of the birds.

"'He was a born Nimrod,' he added, 'and would have made a far better lord of Dönninghausen than I shall ever be; but in the sphere of life to which he belongs his tastes and talents are a stumbling block to him.'

"I asked him whether he did not think that a place could be found in the world for every kind of talent. He shook his head. 'There may be a place,' he replied, 'but occupied by some one who does not feel himself authorized to resign it. Take me for an example. No one knows better than I how unfit I am to be the heir of Dönninghausen. My capabilities and my inclination lead me to the study, or to the bedside of the sick. Nevertheless I cannot decide to resign my position, and when an inferior opposes me, as the forester did awhile ago, my hot blood, or my acquired arrogance, asserts the mastery, and I should like to put the fellow in irons. And yet I am theoretically convinced of the equal rights of mankind.'

"This conversation gave me food for reflection. I wonder whether Johann Leopold acquiesces in a marriage with Magelone, from an idea of the requirements of his rank, or whether, under apparent indifference, he does not really feel an interest in the enchanting siren. As I have been mistaken with respect to his outward life, I may also be in appreciation of his mind and heart. For example, during our ride I learned that instead of leading the owlish existence which Magelone ascribes to him, he is the physician of the poor for miles around the country, providing them himself with all the needed medicaments. My grandfather must know nothing of this; he would call it all quackery, and would consider it an insult offered to worthy old Dr. Francke, who has been the physician at Dönninghausen for the last thirty years.

"As for myself, I get on very well with grandpapa. I was rather uncertain as to how he would receive the intelligence that I had sent off Martin and undertaken the forest ride alone, but he was pleased and praised me. 'That's right, child; never delay where help is needed, is my maxim.' Nevertheless, he is usually, as he says himself, apt to be cross. To be tied to his room and to his arm-chair by gout at Christmas-time, when all the family assemble here, is a hard trial for an impatient temperament. Aunt Thekla says we must look for stormy times."

"December 23.

"I have not been able to write for the last few days, but this letter must go to-day, that you may have it for a Christmas-greeting. Day before yesterday the cousins arrived with husbands and belongings, – Hildegard, with two children; Hedwig, with three, beside nurses and lady's-maids. Both mothers look like Aunt Thekla, – tall, slender, fair, and rather stately. They have rosy cheeks, abundant hair, and bright light-blue eyes, are vain of their looks, of their husbands and children, of their name and social position, and mutually endeavour to outshine each other in the splendour of their attire. With Magelone they wage a very amusing petty warfare. Their husbands, twin-brothers, are strikingly alike, – fair and stately like their wives, but better-natured, gayer, more at their ease. Eduard, Hedwig's husband, distinguished himself in the Schleswig-Holstein war, whence come his stiffened arm and several orders, – a *crève-cœur*, as Magelone maintains, for Hildegard, whose Karl has only won peaceful laurels as an orator at agricultural meetings. To-morrow afternoon the brothers of the sisters are coming. The festival takes place in the evening.

"Grandpapa is unfortunately still obliged to be pushed from one room to another in his wheeled chair. His great-grand-children must be with him as much as possible, and when the three boys, respectively six, five, and four years old, – the little girls are still in arms, – are romping about the spacious drawing-room, his face clears up. His grand-daughters do not seem very near to him, and it must pain him at these family gatherings that he has no children to link him with the younger generation.

"I had one distressing moment with him yesterday. Before the second breakfast he sends off the post-boy. Every inmate of the household brings or sends the letters, which grandpapa himself locks into the bag. I had a Christmas-gift to send to Lisbeth, and took the package to his room myself. How his eyes flashed at me as he read the address!

"'A Christmas-gift for my little sister,' I replied to their mute inquiry.

"'You have no sister, and no friendly correspondence with those people shall be carried on from my house!' grandpapa fairly roared. This was the voice of which Magelone had told me. But I took courage, and said, in a trembling voice indeed, and without looking up, 'Dear grandfather, I might have sent my package secretly – '

"He stared at me, and his brow cleared. 'Do you love the child?' he asked.

"'Yes, grandpapa!' I cried; 'and if you could see the dear little creature – '

"'Enough, enough!' he interrupted me; and, laying the package aside, he added, 'It shall go, Johanna, and you have done well.'

"Since then he has been kinder than ever to me, perhaps on account of my cousins, who tried to treat me coldly. The old man has so emphatic a way of saying 'My grand-daughter Johanna,' that they changed their tactics, and are now almost amiable to me. Nevertheless, I like Dönninghausen better without them, and am looking forward with pleasure to our quiet days when they shall have departed."

CHAPTER VIII
CHRISTMAS AT DÖNNINGHAUSEN

Christmas-eve had arrived. As was the custom, the festival for old and young at Dönninghausen took place in the late afternoon, before the principal meal of the day, and even with Johanna's help Aunt Thekla had much ado to be ready with the arrangement of the presents at the appointed time. The gifts for the members of the family were laid out on long tables to the right and left of the brilliantly-decorated fir-tree in the centre of the ball-room, while smaller Christmas-trees sparkled and shone upon tables ranged against the wall, where were the presents for the servants and the castle pensioners. When the bells of the village rang in the Holy Christmas-tide, Aunt Thekla's silver bell was also rung, the doors into the corridors were opened, and as the flood of light streamed out upon the expectant group outside, there arose, sung by old and young, the strains of the Freiherr's favorite hymn, —

"He comes, He comes, the Holy One,
Filled with His might divine."

Involuntarily, Johanna, standing beside Aunt Thekla beneath the Christmas-tree, folded her hands: memories of vanished years crowded upon her heart; but, as she turned aside to wipe away her starting tears, her look encountered her cousin Otto's eyes fixed upon her. He had arrived in the course of the afternoon. She had not seen him before, and he now nodded to her by way of greeting. She courtesied, and was aware of the same mingled sensation of timidity and confidence that had possessed her at their first interview.

Beside Otto stood Magelone, more elfin-like than ever, in a long, closely-fitting pale-green silk, with her sweet smile and strangely-gleaming eyes.

"Is it Otto's presence that makes her thus brilliantly beautiful? It is strange that grandpapa has never destined these two for each other," thought Johanna.

The hymn was ended, the Freiherr was wheeled into the room, the rest crowded in after him, and soon the delight of the children made itself heard, and the poor stammered their grateful acknowledgments, while Hildegard and Hedwig cast inquisitive, unfriendly glances away from their own rich gifts towards a morocco case which the Freiherr handed to Johanna.

"Open it, child!" he said. She obeyed. A rococo *parure* of rubies and diamonds lay gleaming upon the yellowish-white satin inside the case.

"Your grandmother's bridal jewels, your mother's inheritance," said the Freiherr.

The sisters exchanged looks of indignation. Johanna kissed her grandfather's hand.

"I thank you; the double memory makes it very precious," she said, and closed the case. As she did so, Otto approached her.

"At last, Fräulein Johanna," he said, and held out his hand. "How glad I am to see you again!"

"Fräulein!" cried the Freiherr. "Boy, what do you mean? You should call the daughter of your father's sister 'Johanna.'"

"Most gladly if I may. Will you allow it, dear Johanna?" said Otto, bestowing upon her a cousinly kiss. Blushing, she released herself from him, as he looked into her eyes with a glance of momentary triumph. "To our friendship," he said, gravely, and then the children came rushing up and separated them.

A telegram was handed to the Freiherr; he read it with a lowering brow.

"How unfortunate!" he cried. "Waldemar tells me that important business will not allow of his being with us before New Year's day. This Christmas it vexes me particularly."

"I am delighted," Magelone whispered to Johanna. "It is a respite, at least for me. The betrothal of the future head of the family cannot possibly be announced unless all its august members are present."

Johanna looked at her and shook her head. "That betrothal will never take place," she said; "Otto will not allow it."

"Otto! What do you mean?" asked Magelone. "You have hardly seen us together."

"Long enough to see how he adores you."

"Mere gallantry, child; nothing more," said Magelone. "Remember, pray, he has debts, I have nothing, and we are sensible people."

And she fluttered away to her presents, where the next instant Otto joined her. "May I take you in to dinner?" he asked.

"That is at present Johann Leopold's privilege, or task. As which do you think he regards it?"

"Can you ask?" said Otto. "He is pursuing you with the glare of a veritable Othello!"

"How romantic! I see only his usually melancholy sheep's-eyes," said Magelone. "He stares at me, but it is a question whether he sees me. Others, on the contrary, see too much; discover that we, that is, you and I, are flirting with each other."

"Flirting!" he interrupted her. "How can my serious devotion – "

"Oh, hush!" she cried. "You know grandpapa's plans. Johann Leopold's future betrothed must listen to nothing of that kind. You ought to court Johanna."

"It pleases my sovereign to jest," said Otto, bending over her with a smile.

"Not at all," she rejoined. "I am rather laying my commands upon my slave to turn his talent to account."

He bowed again. "The command shall be obeyed," he said. "Moreover, obedience will not be difficult. Cousin Johanna has improved wonderfully in appearance."

Magelone glanced hastily towards Johanna. "You are right: she has gained life and colour;" and she added, mentally, "Is he trying to make me jealous? He shall not succeed."

In spite of this resolution, she could not away with a slightly disagreeable sensation when, sitting beside Johann Leopold at table, she noticed the assiduity with which Otto, who was Johanna's neighbour, obeyed her command, and how Johanna's eyes sparkled as she talked with her cousin. If Magelone could only have revenged herself upon him! But words, looks, and smiles were lavished in vain upon Johann Leopold, who was as monosyllabic as ever.

After dinner, in the drawing-room, Otto came to Magelone just as she was going to join Aunt Thekla and her cousins around the fire. "Not there," he entreated; "come to the piano; it is so long since I heard you play."

"Lost pains," was her laughing reply, as she followed him to the other end of the room. "You never will convince me that you care for music. Did you ever really know what I was playing?"

"And if I did not, it was your fault. How can I think of aught else but your beauty, which has so bewitched me, you enchanting siren?"

"Ah, you're wrong. Sirens enchant chiefly by their song," she rejoined in a teasing tone, as she sat down at the piano and struck a few chords. "Well, Sir Enthusiast for music, what will you have?"

"Play anything; never mind what."

"Last autumn you had a passion for Chopin, – have you forgotten? Do you no longer recognize your favourite?"

She began to play. Otto sat beside her and turned over the leaves of her music when she signed to him to do so. As often as he leaned forward she felt, with a thrill, his breath upon her neck, and sometimes he whispered, so low as to be almost inaudible, a word or two in jest in which there seemed a tone of suppressed passion.

"Does he conduct himself thus towards Johanna?" she asked herself. "Impossible!" her vanity made reply, and the *berceuse* which she was playing assumed the character of a triumphal march.

The moods of the group around the fire were less harmonious. The Freiherr had retired immediately after dinner; the brothers Wildenhayn and Johann Leopold, engaged in a political discussion, had withdrawn to such a distance that they could not overhear the ladies' conversation, and Hildegard soothed her injured feelings by animadverting upon Johanna's position in the family.

It was certainly a matter of course that grandpapa should take charge of the destitute orphan, since in a certain sense she was one of the family; but was there any need to treat her as an equal? It was not only an insult to the other members of the family, it was an injury to Johanna herself. It would end in her forgetting her true position; she would learn to form expectations which could not be fulfilled hereafter, and she would lose by her arrogance the regard of the relatives upon whom, after grandpapa's death, she must needs be dependent.

"I do not think you are right there," Aunt Thekla at last interposed, having long tried in vain to oppose her gentle remonstrances to the torrent of Hildegard's speech. "My brother is sure to provide for Johanna."

"I think so too," cried Hedwig; "and I wonder, Hildegard, that you do not see it yourself. After grandpapa's giving her that valuable *parure*– "

"Yes, that *parure*!" Hildegard interposed. "With all your prejudice in the girl's favour, you must admit, dear aunt, that grandmamma's bridal *parure* does not belong of right to her. She can do nothing with it; she never can wear it. She does not belong in society; even grandpapa could hardly succeed in introducing an actor's daughter."

Hildegard spoke these last words in a voice intentionally raised; for Johanna, who had been preparing the coffee as usual at the table before the sofa, was just passing with the first cup for Aunt Thekla. The trembling of her hand betrayed that she had heard the malicious remark, and Hildegard looked after her exultantly as she returned to the coffee-table.

But Johann Leopold had also heard and seen, and he came to Johanna's assistance.

"Dear Magelone," he said, going to the piano, – the *berceuse* was just ended, and Otto was expressing his admiration for the music and for the performer, – "dear Magelone, will you preside at the coffee-table to-day? Johanna has exhausted herself with Christmas-eve preparations; she looks terribly pale and weary."

Magelone was ready on the instant to comply. "Johann Leopold jealous, – charming!" she said to herself; adding aloud, "Indeed, Johanna dear, you do look wretched. Sit there in the corner of the sofa, and I will pour out coffee for you."

"I would rather go to bed," Johanna replied. And, bidding good-night to Magelone and to Johann Leopold, whose kindness she had perfectly understood, she slipped out of the room, unperceived, she thought, by its other inmates. But in the corridor Otto joined her. "Dear Johanna," he said, "here is a little Christmas-token that had no place in the joyous confusion of the evening. Do not look at it until you are in your own room; but, before you go, tell me how you really are." And he gazed into her eyes with the expression that always confused her.

"It is nothing; I shall be quite well to-morrow," she stammered, mechanically, taking the little packet he handed her, and then hastening up-stairs to her apartment, while he returned to the drawing-room.

Why should her heart beat so fast? Her trembling hands could scarcely steady themselves sufficiently to light her candle; but when they had done so, and she had unwrapped Otto's Christmas-gift, she said to herself that it was the suspicion of what it was that had so moved her. Otto had given her a small miniature of her father, taken from a well-known life-size bust. She gazed at it lost in thought. What would she not have given to be able to pour out her gratitude to Otto on the instant, to speak with him of the departed one whom he had known and revered! Otto had been the first at the close of her old life to bid her welcome on the threshold of the new existence, and he was the only one in all this new existence who appreciated her love and veneration for her father.

When she met him the next morning at breakfast, he learned from her eyes and voice even more than from her words how great had been the pleasure his little gift had given her.

"I knew you would like it," he said, simply, as he conducted her to the breakfast-table; and, although no further allusion could be made then to the picture, their intercourse seemed more cordial than ever before.

Hildegard contemplated the pair with an unfriendly mien. They did not appear to notice it, and therefore the careful sister judged it best at last to signify to Otto that he was bestowing his attentions upon a most unsuitable object. The Freiherr's question as to whether the clear winter's day might not be made available for a sleigh-ride afforded her an opportunity to carry out her intention.

"Yes, dear grandpapa, a sleigh-ride would be glorious," she said; "I would merely propose that we should also pay a visit. Do you not think," she went on, looking around the circle at the table, "that it would be well to call at Klausenburg? When church is over the sleighs can take us there, and we can be back in time for the second breakfast."

"Will there be room for all of us?" asked Hedwig.

"Certainly," Hildegard replied. "Magelone and Johann Leopold can go in the small sleigh, and Eduard can drive, and the large sleigh will easily hold Aunt Thekla, us two, and Otto, with Karl to drive us."

"I will resign my place to Johanna," said Aunt Thekla.

Johanna was about to declare that she would rather stay at home, but Hildegard gave her no time. "Johanna at Klausenburg?" she exclaimed. "That will never do. I, at least, have not the courage to take her there."

"Make your mind easy; that is my affair," the Freiherr interposed, and his eyes flashed at the speaker. "On New Year's day we give our customary dinner, at which I shall present my granddaughter to the neighbourhood, and I promise you that she will meet with the reception I desire her to have. Christian, take me to my room."

The servant wheeled the old man away, and every one rose from table. Johann Leopold began to converse with Johanna upon indifferent subjects, and involuntarily she became interested. Hedwig whispered to her discomfited sister, "Rather awkward of you, my dear." Otto asked his brother-in-law, Karl, how he could allow Hildegard to display such want of tact, and was answered by a shrug of the shoulders, whilst Aunt Thekla tried to dispel every one's embarrassment by reminding them that it was time to make ready for church.

"Come, let us go together!" said Magelone, putting her arm through Johanna's and leaving the room with her. "Let me entreat you not to look so grieved," she went on. "Don't let that stupid woman vex you; you know how the others love you."

Johanna pressed Magelone's arm, and went up-stairs with her in silence. At the door of her room she said, "You must go to church without me to-day; I cannot feel devotional after what has happened."

"Oh, Johanna, we ought not to bear malice! Be kind, and come," Magelone entreated; but with a decided "I cannot!" Johanna left her and shut herself up in her own room. She could not say to Magelone that she was far less annoyed by Hildegard's hostility than by the prospect of being thrust into a society where she was not welcome.

"If I could but get away!" she thought, as she looked from the window out over the wintry landscape. "Yes, away, away, if but for an hour!" she said, aloud. And putting on her wraps, and accompanied by Leo, barking joyously, she hurried out into the park, and thence to the path that led up the mountain from the village into the forest.

Her heart grew lighter in the fresh winter air. She walked on quickly, upwards beneath the snow-laden boughs, upon which the sunlight played in thousands of prisms, and from which the glittering dust came powdering down upon her. At length the sight of the forester's lodge, its windows sparkling in the sunshine, warned her to return.

Since she had come thus far, she would inquire after Johann Leopold's protégé. Greeted and accompanied by the barking dogs, she was going towards the door, when close by the house a girl, very poorly clad, with a shawl about her head and shoulders, came out of the thicket. The slender figure stooped low as it passed the windows, softly lifted the latch of the house-door, and went in.

Johanna followed her. She turned to the door of the room opposite the sitting-room, and laid a little, blue, half-frozen hand upon the latch. "Jakob!" she whispered, as she tried to open it gently. But on the instant the door of the sitting room opened, and the forester's wife in a black gown and a cap with white ribbons made her appearance, the hymn-book in which she had been reading in her hand.

"Christine!" she exclaimed, angrily, in an undertone, and without noticing Johanna she rushed at the girl. "Christine, how dare you? Go away this moment!" And she tried to push the girl away from the door, but her hand held fast the latch. "For God's sake," a poor little pleading voice cried, "let me only say one word to Jakob!"

"Not one," Frau Kruger interposed. "Go this instant, I tell you!" And she raised the book as if to strike the girl.

"Frau Kruger!" Johanna exclaimed, approaching the pair. They turned. The girl's shawl had fallen back from her head, and a pale youthful face, the large dark eyes swollen with weeping, met Johanna's look, while the violence of the forester's wife was instantly replaced by extreme courtesy.

"Oh, Fräulein!" she said, with a curtsey, "do not take it amiss. I never like to harm a living creature, but Christine is a shameless girl, who will persist in worrying Jakob."

"I worry him?" the girl said, quickly. "Why, since his accident I have never even been allowed to see him. Have pity; let me bid him good-by. I am going to Oberroda to-day, but I cannot go so." And she burst into tears.

"Frau Kruger, be persuaded," Johanna entreated. "The poor girl – "

"Oh, Fräulein, do not waste your compassion," the forester's wife interrupted her, with an angry glance at the girl. "Christine has always been a bad, wilful creature. She has had a child, and wants to force Jakob to marry her, but he will have nothing to do with her."

"Jakob have nothing to do with me? That is not true," cried the girl. "He will not forsake me, and I will not forsake him. And he loved the little child dearly, and now he does not even know that it is dead. I must tell him." She hid her face and sobbed aloud.

"How can you be so hard-hearted?" said Johanna. "You must let the girl speak with the sick man."

"That she may make him worse with her whining," said Frau Kruger. "If she loves him as much as she says she does, she might spare him her blubbering. And what of it? It is lucky that the Lord took the brat from her."

"Frau Kruger!" Johanna exclaimed, indignantly; and Christine, who had grown deadly pale, drew the shawl over her head and silently left the house.

"Oh, Fräulein, if you but knew! Have the kindness to come in here and let me tell you," the forester's wife begged, all smiles and servility again; but Johanna left her and followed Christine.

The girl ran down the forest-path like a hunted creature. Suddenly her strength seemed to fail her, and she leaned against a tree.

Johanna hurried to her. "Where is your home? I will take you there," she said kindly.

"Home? I have none!" the girl replied, with a wild look. "My brother has turned me out of doors, and they will not let me go to Jakob. His sister says I am too bad for Jakob; my brother says Jakob is too bad for me. Ah, good heavens! if we are both such wretches, we are well suited to each other."

The depth of bitterness in her words contrasted so oddly with her gentle child-like face that Johanna's sympathy was still more strongly enlisted. She put her arm round her to support the slender, trembling figure, and walked with her slowly down the mountain. After a while Christine said, "You are so kind, Fräulein. Herr Forester Kruger told me about you. He is far kinder to me than his wife."

"What is Frau Kruger's grudge against you?" asked Johanna.

"At first it could only have been that I am poor and low-born," the girl replied. "My father was only a cowherd, it is true, and Jakob is a farmer's son. But for all that, he wanted to marry me, and if the others had consented all would have been different with me now."

"Who are the others?" Johanna asked again.

"The forester's wife opposed it most. She worked upon my guardian and my brother, and they forbade me to go with Jakob. So we had to see each other in secret, for he would not give me up, nor would I him. And then that happened that ought not to have been."

She was silent. For a while they walked along without speaking, and then Christine said, timidly, "Please, kind Fräulein, do not think hardly of us. Ah, how hard Jakob tried to have us married! and when the child came he loved it so dearly, – so dearly! And now it has been lying under the snow for a week, and Jakob is up there with his cruel sister, and I must go away. I have taken service at Oberroda, and oh, it is too, too hard to go without seeing Jakob, or letting him know anything about me and my trouble!"

Johanna spoke soothingly to her, promised to give her news of Jakob, – she depended upon Johann Leopold's help, – and when they reached the cross-road leading to the village, the girl took leave of her with a lighter heart and grateful words. Johanna looked thoughtfully after her. The sound of the Christmas bells struck clearly upon her ear in the crisp, frosty air. Where was the "Peace on earth" that it should have heralded to mankind?

CHAPTER IX
NEW YEAR'S EVE

The sleighing-party did not return to the second breakfast. The dinner-hour first assembled the various members of the family.

"Was grandpapa angry?" Magelone whispered to Johanna. Just then the Freiherr was wheeled into the room, and his frowning brow answered her question only too clearly.

Hildegard was not to be intimidated.

"Do not be angry, dear grandpapa," she said, with an air of arrogant ease quite her own. "It was my fault that we stayed so long; I had not seen the Klausenburgs for an age, and they begged us so to stay that it was impossible to say no."

"But you found it quite possible to keep us waiting here," the Freiherr rejoined. "Another time please to remember that such want of consideration has never been the rule of my household, and never shall be. Be seated!"

"I told you so," Karl Wildenhayn whispered to his wife as she passed him.

"You are all cowards!" she rejoined, and then seated herself with head erect and knitted brows on the left of the Freiherr, for whom she seemed no longer to have any existence.

The meal was very monosyllabic. Now and then Otto would whisper something to Johanna, and she would listen with a smile. Then Johann Leopold, who looked paler and more weary than usual, would look up from his plate, gaze at her, and then sink again into his usual apathy, from which Magelone to-day did not try to rouse him.

When they went to the drawing-room she left Johann Leopold, and, approaching Otto, said, "Pray suggest some folly to me, – I am dying of ennui."

"'Ah! fly with me, and be my love,'"

he began to sing in an undertone, and his eyes expressed the passion which was suppressed in his half-teasing voice. Magelone shrugged her shoulders.

"Nonsense! even the poet himself called that tragedy," she replied. "I want something merry to do. But you are afflicted with the Dönninghausen stupidity."

"How unjust!" cried Otto. "Was it not a merry thing to whisk you away from Klausenburg – right from under Johann Leopold's long nose – into the sleigh with me, and drive off with you?"

Magelone laughed. Otto continued passionately: "I should have liked to carry you off to the end of the world. The thought of seeing you in Johann Leopold's arms makes me frantic. Why do you look at me so disdainfully, and what does that smile mean?"

"Perhaps it means what did you whisper to Johanna at table with just the same look you wear at present?"

"I thought I was to obey orders and pay court to her," said Otto. "Do you command the contrary?"

"Indeed I do not."

"It really would be better to continue the farce," Otto went on in a graver tone. "Johann Leopold's jealousy is evident; it would be better to lead him upon a false scent – "

"And beguile two female hearts at the same time," Magelone interposed, laughing. "Oh, Don Juan, Don Juan!"

"Play the 'Don Giovanni' overture," Otto begged her. "You play it magnificently."

"Not to-day. There must be nothing but chorales to-day," she said. And with a coquettish glance she turned away towards the fire, where were her cousins and Aunt Thekla.

During this conversation Johann Leopold had approached Johanna at her coffee-table.

"How do you like your new cousin?" he asked; "but I need hardly ask, for you seem to have become excellent friends with him since last evening."

"Not quite since last evening," Johanna replied, blushing slightly. "He came to see me just after my father's death, and was so kind – "

"I can easily imagine it," Johann Leopold interrupted her. "He knows how to strike the right chord everywhere, modern Piper of Hamelin that he is. Have a care of him."

She looked up at him inquiringly, but the telltale blush would return; involuntarily she turned away to conceal it, and suddenly, she did not know why, she remembered the lovers whom she had promised to befriend. "I have a favour to ask of you," she said, gravely. "It concerns Red Jakob."

"What is it?" he asked, taking a chair by her side; and, encouraged by his sympathy, she told him of the scene in the forest lodge and of poor Christine's sorrows. Johann Leopold readily promised his help to the girl, and together they discussed what should be done.

"Let me beg you, Magelone, to look towards the coffee-table," said Hildegard, after she had watched the pair for a while. "They have been engaged in that interesting conversation for a quarter of an hour. Are you not jealous?"

Magelone laughed. "Jealous of Johanna? Oh, no," she declared, confidently.

"Don't be so sure, my dear child," was Hildegard's sneering reply. "In spite of your irresistible charms, you have never succeeded since I have been here in making Johann Leopold talk as he is now talking to Johanna."

"Yes, he actually seems transformed," said Hedwig. "He certainly is talking and listening now, while beside you he sits like a wooden doll."

"Of course, "tis love, 'tis love that makes men mute,'" Magelone said, with a smile; but her eyes gleamed, and a sensation of mistrust of Johanna stirred in her heart, – faint and fleeting, it is true, but it was the beginning, nevertheless, of a change in the relations between the cousins.

The next morning Johann Leopold rode to the forest lodge. When he returned, meeting Johanna in the corridor, he told her that the rough fellow had wept bitterly when told of the death of his child, and had entreated that he might see Christine.

"It would be best for you to go up to the lodge with her to-morrow morning early," he added; "it would lighten the weary way for her, and I will be there to take her to the invalid."

"I will certainly have her there," Johanna replied, "punctually at eleven o'clock. Oh, Johann Leopold, how kind you are!"

They had just reached the drawing-room door. Magelone, gliding noiselessly down-stairs, heard Johanna's last words.

"What has he been doing that is so kind?" she asked. "Tell me, that I may admire it too."

Johanna was embarrassed. Her cousin came to her assistance. "Never mind, my dear Magelone," he said, in his usual cold, deliberate tone. "You would consider it the mere dilettantism of philanthropy, upon which you but lately expended your ridicule."

As he spoke he opened the drawing-room door. Magelone passed him with an angry blush. How silly to take her words so seriously! Of course Johanna never said such things. The girl was growing positively disagreeable.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.