

**AUERBACH
BERTHOLD**

ON THE
HEIGHTS: A
NOVEL

Berthold Auerbach
On the Heights: A Novel

«Public Domain»

Auerbach B.

On the Heights: A Novel / B. Auerbach — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

BOOK I	5
CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	10
CHAPTER III	13
CHAPTER IV	16
CHAPTER V	19
CHAPTER VI	22
CHAPTER VII	26
CHAPTER VIII	29
CHAPTER IX	32
CHAPTER X	37
CHAPTER XI	40
CHAPTER XII	45
CHAPTER XIII	49
CHAPTER XIV	54
CHAPTER XV	56
CHAPTER XVI	58
CHAPTER XVII	61
CHAPTER XVIII	65
BOOK II	70
CHAPTER I	70
CHAPTER II	75
CHAPTER III	80
CHAPTER IV	83
CHAPTER V	86
CHAPTER VI	89
CHAPTER VII	94
CHAPTER VIII	97
CHAPTER IX	101
CHAPTER X	107
CHAPTER XI	113
CHAPTER XII	120
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	121

On the Heights: A Novel

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

Early mass was being celebrated in the chapel attached to the royal summer palace.

The palace stood on a slight eminence in the center of the park. The eastern slope of the hill had been planted with vineyards, and its crest was covered with mighty, towering beeches. The park abounded with maples, plane-trees and elms, with their rich foliage, and firs of various kinds, while the thick clusters of needles on the fir-leaved mountain pine showed that it had become acclimated. On grassy lawns there were solitary tall pines of perfect growth. A charming variety of flowers and leaf plants lent grace to the picture which, in all its details, showed evidence of artistic design and exquisite taste.

The paths were neatly kept. The flowers were sparkling with the dews of morning; birds were singing and the air was laden with the fragrant perfume of the new-mown grass. Swans, and rare varieties of ducks from foreign lands, were swimming in the large lake, on the banks of which the bright-hued flamingo might also have been seen. The fountain in the center of the lake sent its waters to such a height that they were lost in spray.

A clear mountain brook, running between alders and weeping-willows, and under many a rustic bridge, emptied into the lake, flowing thence through the valley until it reached the river, bright glimpses of which might here and there be caught through openings in the shrubbery.

Tables, chairs and benches of graceful form had been placed under the trees and at various points that commanded a fine prospect.

Seated near the chapel there was a man of impressive appearance. His dress betokened scrupulous care. His thick hair was as white as his cravat. His eyes were blue and sparkling, and full of youthful fire. He looked out upon the broad landscape, the valley crowded with fruit-trees, the near-lying hills, and the mountain beyond, whose lines stood out in bold relief against the blue sky above. He had a book in his hand, but now laid it aside and drank in the peaceful influences of the scene before him.

The great door of the chapel was open: the mighty sounds of the organ were heard; a soft cloud of incense floated out on the morning air and then vanished into space.

This impressive-looking man was the king's physician, Doctor Gunther, who, being a Protestant, had not attended mass.

Just then, a beautiful woman, carrying an open sunshade, stepped out from the veranda which was almost concealed by trellised vines. She wore a full, white robe, and her headdress was a simple morning cap with blue ribbons. Her bright, rosy face beamed with youth and beauty; her hair was of a golden hue and she seemed the very incarnation of glorious day.

The doctor, hearing the rustling of her dress, had at once advanced and made his obeisance.

"Good-morning, doctor!" said the lady, whose two female companions had kept a few steps to the rear. Her voice was not clear and bright, but suggestive of the soulful violoncello-tone which is more properly the vehicle of intense and fervent feeling, than of loud-voiced joy.

"What a charming day!" continued the lady; "and yet, for that very reason, doubly sad to those who are obliged to pass it in a sick-room. How is our dear Countess Brinkenstein?"

"The countess, may it please Your Majesty, may safely take the air for an hour to-day."

"I'm delighted to hear you say so. Sadness and sickness should indeed both be unknown in this lovely spot."

"The countess must regard herself as doubly fortunate, now that she is able to perform the interesting duties that await her."

"Speak softly," suddenly said the queen, for the sounds of the organ had ceased; the time of the consecration had arrived. "Ah, dear doctor, I should like to confide a secret to you."

The other ladies stepped aside, while the queen and the doctor walked up and down on the open space in front of the chapel.

"From one's physician, nothing should be kept concealed," said the doctor; "Your Majesty credited me, not long since, with the possession of a stethoscope by means of which I could note the movements of the soul itself."

"Yes," replied the queen, her face mantled with blushes, "I've already thought of applying to you for ghostly advice, but that were impracticable; such matters I must settle for myself. But I've a request to make of you as the physician."

"Your Majesty has but to command-"

"No, that can't be done in this instance. What I meant was-"

At that moment, the bell began to toll, and the king came out of the chapel. He wore the simple dress of a citizen and was without decorations of any kind. He was followed by the gentlemen and ladies of the court, the former of whom were also in citizen's dress, and, for the greater part, wore the picturesque costume of the mountaineers of that region.

The king was a man of stately appearance and erect bearing. He bowed to the queen from afar, and hastened forward to meet her. The ladies and gentlemen composing his train remained in the background exchanging kindly greetings. The king addressed a few words to the queen, whereat she smiled; he, too, seemed happy, and, offering her his arm, led her toward the pavilion. The ladies and gentlemen followed, indulging in cheerful and unconstrained conversation by the way.

A young lady, leaving the rest of the party, joined the doctor and grasped his hand most cordially. She was of a tall and graceful figure; her hair and eyes were brown. She wore a simple, light-colored summer dress and a loose jacket which was open and revealed the full chemisette. A leather girdle studded with steel buttons encircled her waist. Her movements were easy and graceful; her expression, half earnest, half mischievous. "Might I ask," said she, addressing the doctor, "the name of the book you've found worth reading on this lovely morning?"

"It was well worth reading, although, to tell the truth, I've not opened it," replied the doctor, while he handed the little book to her. It was Horace.

"Oh, it's Latin!" said the lady. Her voice was as clear and bold as that of a chaffinch. "And this, I suppose, is your mass."

The doctor briefly alluded to the success with which the ancient writers had compressed so many weighty and enduring thoughts into so small a volume.

The party entered the saloon, seating themselves as best pleased them, for the order of rank or precedence was not insisted on at breakfast. They were in the country and, with their uniforms, had laid aside many of the vexatious requirements of etiquette.

There is nothing more cheerful than a gay and unconstrained party at breakfast. All are still full of the new strength that refreshing sleep has lent them; society succeeds to solitude; and the spirits of all seem affected by the soft, dewy morn.

There were no servants at breakfast. The ladies waited on the company, which was almost as free and unconstrained as a family party. The doctor drank nothing but tea which he himself prepared. The lady with the brown hair invited herself to a seat next to him and poured out the tea for him. At her left, sat Colonel Von Bronnen, the king's adjutant-general, and the only one, in fact, who did not seem to miss his uniform.

The party seemed in undress, mentally as well as physically, and there was much loud and confused talking.

"Dear me! It's Sunday!" said the young lady with the brown hair.

Uproarious laughter greeted her remark; and when the queen inquired as to the cause of so much merriment, the doctor informed her of the startling discovery which had just been made by Countess Irma von Wildenort. The queen smiled.

"I had thought," said the king, addressing the countess and at the same time lighting his cigar- he was the only one who smoked in the saloon-"that with you every day was Sunday."

"Yes, Your Majesty, but only since I've had the honor of being here. At the convent, Sunday was the only day on which we had cake, whilst here we have cake every day; and so I am obliged to use some other means to find out which is Sunday."

Von Schnabelsdorf, who had recently visited Spain on service of a diplomatic nature and was now awaiting orders, was sitting opposite the doctor. Addressing his conversation to the latter, he remarked that a friend of his who lived in Madrid had written a highly interesting work, to which he, also, had contributed a few ideas. It was soon to appear, and its subject was "Sunday," or rather "The Sabbath."

The king had overheard his remarks and inquired as to what these ideas were. Schnabelsdorf replied that as seven corresponded with the quarter of the lunar month, it was a natural division, and that the institution of the Sabbath was older than all positive religions. He had apt quotations to support every statement and did not forget to lug in the names of his distinguished friends.

Von Schnabelsdorf's learned discourse failed to make a deep impression on the company, which continued in its cheerful vein until the queen rose, beckoning the doctor to follow. The king offered her his arm and conducted her to a lovely seat under a weeping ash, on the slope of the lawn.

It was delightful to behold this royal pair, so tall and stately; and the queen was doubly beautiful, for another life was budding within her own.

The queen seated herself and the king sat down beside her. Without waiting for orders, the doctor drew up his chair and joined them.

"Yes," said the queen, "I must speak to you about it; I must tell you of a pain-"

"Perhaps I had better withdraw," said the king.

"No, you must remain. Once more, I ask you; if God grants me health, may I not nurse the child that is to be mine?"

An almost imperceptible glance from the king informed the doctor what answer he was to make to the queen.

"I have already had the honor of acquainting Your Majesty with my opinion of the superstitious belief that the mere performance of maternal duties preserves the mother's beauty. Your wish is inspired by a feeling which, in itself, is beautiful. But, both for your own sake and that of the child, it were impossible to accede to it. The duties of a queen, the demands of etiquette, the need of your presence at court and the various emotions which these employments must necessarily occasion, render it out of the question. A high state of development has effects upon the nervous system, which effects, being transmitted to the child, must cling to it for life."

"I beg you, dear Mathilde," added the king, "to avoid distressing yourself. Consider the prince's welfare."

"Don't always talk of a prince. Promise me that you will be just as happy, if it be a princess-"

"Just as happy! No, that were impossible. I can't control my feelings to that extent. But this I can promise you-if you and the child are well, I shall be happy for all."

"Well, then, let a nurse be brought: – even now, I envy her the child's affectionate glances and hearty caresses!"

"And what is the sorrow you were complaining of?"

"The thought of depriving another child of its mother troubles my conscience. Even if thousands have done the same thing time and time again, he who commits a wrong, sins for himself and as deeply as if it were the first time the sin were ever committed. Yet, I submit. But I shall insist on one thing: the foster-mother of my child must be an honest married woman and must belong to a respectable family. I could never silence my conscience if I were to deprive a child, already wretched enough, of its all-its mother! In this I am perfectly indifferent to worldly regulations and prescribed forms. Is the poor, forlorn child, born into a hostile world, to be robbed of the only source of love yet left it? And even if we take an honest married woman, we will be depriving a child of its mother and inflicting an injury upon a being that we do not even know. Ah! how hard it is! In spite of our knowing better, we are yet forced to commit wrong. However, I shall submit to necessity. But the child that we take from its mother will be cared for by her family, has a father and, perhaps, even a kind grandmother and affectionate brothers and sisters. A hospitable roof will shelter its infant head-

"Your Majesty," exclaimed the doctor, with an outburst of enthusiasm, "at this very moment prayers are being offered up for you in thousands of churches, and myriad voices are saying: 'Amen!'"

"Great God, what duties are thus imposed! One had needs be more than human to bear the charge-it crushes me to the earth."

"It should elevate instead of depressing you. At this very moment the breath issuing from millions of lips forms a cloud that supports you. True humanity is best shown when those who are prosperous and happy and therefore need no assistance from others, protect the suffering instead of putting them away from them. The effect of such a mood upon the child whose heart throbs beneath that of its mother is one of nature's mysteries. This child must needs become a noble, beautiful being, for its mother has instilled purest philanthropy into it before its birth."

The king, who had taken the queen's hand in his, now said:

"And so you really know nothing of the law. It isn't merely a family law that the princes and princesses of our house must be born in the royal palace-and for which reason, we shall return to the city to-morrow-but it is also a law of the court that the nurse of a prince must be a married woman."

"Great Heavens! And how I've been tormenting myself. In the future I shall think better of the customs of the Court, since I find there are such beautiful ones among them."

"From the depths of your soul. Your Majesty has given new life to this law," interposed the doctor, "a law is neither free nor sacred until it has become a living truth to us."

"Very pretty, and true besides," said the King. He dropped his cigar, and after looking for it for a little while, said: "Excuse me, doctor, but wouldn't you be kind enough to have cigars brought for us?"

The doctor went into the house and, after he had left, the King said:

"Pray tell me, Mathilde, was that all that troubled you? I have, for some time past, observed that there's something on your mind-

"Yes, there is something on my mind, but I can't speak of it, until it becomes an actual truth. It's nothing but love for you; pray don't ask me more at present. You'll soon know all."

When the doctor returned, he found the king alone, and sitting under the ash. The queen had withdrawn.

"Was the compliment you've just paid the Queen prompted by professional considerations?" asked the king, with lowering eye.

"No, Your Majesty. I spoke sincerely and from conviction."

The king remained silent for a long time, his eyes resting on the ground. At last he arose and, moving his hand as if putting something far away from him, said:

"Well, the queen wishes the nurse to be a young woman from the Highlands and of a respectable family. Is there time enough left for you to journey there and select one? Are you not a native of the Highlands? That were-but no, you must not go now. Send Doctor Sixtus; give him precise instructions, and let him go from village to village. He can propose several and you can select the best of them;

the others can be sent home with a gratuity, and-but act on your own judgment; only, don't fail to send the doctor off this very day."

"Your Majesty's wishes shall be obeyed."

CHAPTER II

"How radiant you look!" said Countess Irma, as she met the doctor.

"Perhaps I do," he replied, "for I've just beheld that divine sight, – a heart overflowing with pure love of its fellow-beings; – but excuse me for a moment!" he said, interrupting himself and leaving the countess, while he went into an adjoining apartment and dispatched a telegram to Doctor Sixtus, instructing him to prepare himself for an eight days' journey, and to come to the summer palace forthwith. He then returned to the countess, to whom he gave an account of what had happened.

"Shall I tell you what I think?" asked the countess.

"You know very well that none dare say you 'nay'."

"Well, then, I can't help thinking that it was far better in olden times; for then royal children were born in some lonely, out-of-the-way palace, as quietly as if it were to be kept a secret-"

The doctor interrupted her: "You are indeed a true child of your father. For, although my dear friend Eberhard was full of strange fancies during his younger years, he would at times manifest sudden and surprising diffidence."

"Ah, do tell me of my father! I know so little about him."

"I've known nothing of him for many years. Of course you know that he has broken with me, because I am at court; but, in the olden times, in our youthful, enthusiastic days-"

"Then you, too, were once enthusiastic!"

"I was; but not to so great a degree as your father. When I see you, it seems as if his ideal had become realized. In those days, when I was a young army surgeon, and he a still younger officer, we would indulge in fantasy pictures of the future, and what it might have in store for us. He never thought of a beloved one, or a wife, but would at one bound, as it were, clear all that lay between, and indulge himself with brain pictures of a child; a daughter, fresh, tender and lovely beyond comparison. And now, when I behold you, I look upon his ideal."

"And so my father's only ideal was a child?" asked Irma with pensive air, and looking earnestly into the doctor's eyes, "and yet for all that, he left his children to grow up among strangers, and all that I know of him I am obliged to learn from the lips of others. But I don't care to speak of myself at present, dear doctor. I have a presentiment of the queen's secret. I think I know what makes her so quiet and reserved."

"My dear child," said the doctor, "if you really have a presentiment, – and that, moreover, in regard to a secret of their majesties-take my advice: Don't impart it to any one, not even to the pillow on which you lay your head at night."

"But if your knowing would be of service to the queen? You ought to be her guide."

"We can only lead those who desire to be led."

"All I ask of you is to have an eye on certain signs. Did the queen say nothing when she was before the church a little while ago and heard the mass? Wasn't she startled by a certain tone? Didn't you observe a certain inclination-"

By a motion of his hand, the doctor signified that Irma had better stop, and added:

"My child, if you desire to live comfortably at court, you had better not try to solve riddles which those to whom they belong don't care to solve for you. But, above all, let no one know-"

"Discretion, discretion; the same old text," said Irma, roguishly, her beautifully curved lips quivering with emotion.

"You are of a creative temperament, and are therefore out of place at court," said the doctor. "You desire to assert your individuality, instead of giving way to prescribed forms; but it can't be done. Just observe Councilor Schnabelsdorf, who will be used up much sooner than he imagines. He is constantly offering or preparing something new-cooking, roasting, or stewing all sorts of interesting information for his masters-and his memory is an everlasting 'table, table, cover thyself.' Take my

word for it, before a year goes round, they'll all be tired of him. He who wishes to remain a favorite must not thrust himself forward."

Irma assented to this opinion, but saw through his attempt to change the direction of the conversation, and at once returned to what she had intended to say.

"Pray tell me," said she roguishly, "when one takes a false step, and, at the same time, injures himself, is it not called a misstep?"

"Certainly."

"Well, then, let me tell you that the queen is in danger of making a misstep, which may be fraught with irreparable injury to her—"

"I'd prefer—" interrupted the doctor.

"Ah! you'd prefer. Whenever you say that, you've something to find fault with."

"You've guessed it. I'd prefer your leaving the queen to divulge her secrets at her own pleasure. I thought you were a friend of hers—"

"And so I am."

"Well, and since I am your morning preacher to-day, let me give you another warning. You are in danger of becoming one of those ladies who have no friends of their own sex."

"Is that really so dreadful?"

"Most assuredly. You must have a female friend, or there is some fault in your disposition. Isolation, such as yours, warps one's character, and, consciously or otherwise, results in vanity. If, from among all the ladies here, you can't make even one your friend, the fault must lie in yourself."

"But there's no harm in my having a male friend, a friend like yourself."

"I couldn't wish you a truer one."

Irma walked beside the doctor in silence.

When they again reached the lawn in front of the palace, Irma said:

"Do you know that this lawn is dressed up every Saturday with false hay?"

"Less wit and more clearness, if you please."

"Pshaw, how officinal!" said Irma, laughing. "Then allow me to tell you that the queen once said that she was very fond of the odor of new-mown hay; and, ever since then, the intendant of the gardens has had the lawn mowed at least once a week. But as stubborn nature won't furnish hay quickly enough, they bring some from one of the outlying meadows and spread it about during the night. And yet they persist in saying that, in our age, princes are not deceived."

"I can find nothing wrong or laughable in the matter. The intendant is one of those who regard themselves as the pleasure-purveying providence of their masters and—"

"Pleasure-purveying providence!—that's excellent. What a happy thought! I shall hold fast to that. How can you say you've no wit? Why, you're brimful of delicious sarcasm. Oh dear, 'pleasure-purveying providence!'" said Irma, laughing heartily; and while laughing, more lovely than ever.

The doctor found it no easy matter to lead the conversation back to the point at which it had been interrupted. Whenever he attempted a serious remark, she would look at him with a roguish expression and give way to laughter so hearty that he could not help joining in it. But when he at last said that he had heretofore given her credit for something more than mere occasional flashes of wit, and that he had, until now, supposed her capable of carrying on an argument, she quickly became the docile scholar, willing to be led by her master. And so skillfully did the doctor use his arguments that she soon reflected his thoughts as if they were her own.

A tall and handsome page, with an aquiline nose and raven hair, approached the countess.

"My lady," said he, "her majesty the queen awaits you in the music-room."

Irma excused herself to the doctor, whose eyes followed her with a thoughtful gaze. In a little while the rich and metallic notes of Countess Irma's voice were heard.

"Eberhard used to sing delightfully," said the doctor, directing his steps toward the palace. When he approached the music-room, and saw that the canon, who had read the mass that morning, was about to enter, he hesitated.

The morning was soft and balmy; nature seemed wrapped in bliss. Every plant, every flower, thrives best in its native soil. Man alone is constantly creating new torments for himself. Could it be possible that the mischievous countess was right, after all? But why should the queen wish to forsake the faith of her ancestors?

The doctor retired to an arbor and read his Horace.

Doctor Sixtus presented himself before the dinner hour, and, while the company were seating themselves at table, rode off in the direction of the mountains.

That evening-it was mild and starlight-the court drove to the capital; for the corner-stone of the new arsenal was to be laid on the following day, with great pomp and military display.

CHAPTER III

The bells were ringing merrily. Their sounds were re-echoed by the rugged mountains, and then floated out over the lake, the smooth, green, glassy surface of which mirrored the forest-clad shores, the rocky crags, and the skies above.

Crowds were issuing from the church, the only building at the upper end of the lake. The men, donning their green hats with the black cock plumes, took their pipes from their pockets and struck a light; the women busied themselves with their dress, adjusted the pointed, green hats, smoothed their aprons, and tied the broad streaming ends of their silk kerchiefs anew. Following after the old women, who are always the last to leave the church, there was a handsome young couple. The wife was tall and stout, the husband slender and hardy as a pine. His appearance showed the effects of the week's hard work. His pointed, green hat, on which there was no hunter's badge, was worn aslant; he took off his jacket and laid it over his shoulder, and then, with a smile which seemed somewhat out of keeping with his weather-beaten face, said:

"Don't you see? This is much better. Now there's no danger of your getting squeezed in the crowd."

The young wife nodded assent.

A group of women and girls seemed to have been waiting for her. One of the older members of the party said:

"Walpurga, you shouldn't have done such a thing as walk all the way to church. You don't know how near you are to your time, and sometimes there's too much of a good thing."

"It won't do me any harm," replied the young wife.

"And I've prayed for you this morning," said a young, saucy maid, who wore a bunch of fresh flowers in her bosom. "When the priest prayed for the queen and asked God to help her in the hour of trial, I asked myself: What's the use of my worrying about the queen? There are enough praying for her without me: and so I thought of you and said, Amen, Walpurga!"

"Stasi, I'm sure you meant well," said Walpurga deprecatingly, "but I want no share in it. You never ought to do such a thing. It's wrong to change a prayer in that way."

"She's right," said the old woman. "Why, that 'ud be just the same as taking a false oath."

"Let it go for nothing, then," said the girl.

"It must be fine to be a queen," said the old woman, folding her hands. "At this very hour, in all the churches, millions are praying for her. If such a king and queen aren't good after all that, they must be awful wicked."

The old woman, who was the midwife of the neighborhood, was always listened to with great attention. She accompanied husband and wife for a part of the way, and gave them precise information as to where she might be found at any hour during the next few days. Then, taking the mountain path which led to her dwelling, she left them, the rest of the church-goers dropping off in various directions as they reached the lanes and by-paths leading to their farms. The children always kept in front, their parents following after them.

A party of girls, who were walking along hand in hand, had much to say to one another. But at last they, too, separated and joined their parents.

The young couple were alone on the road. The glaring rays of the noonday sun were reflected from the lake.

It was almost a full hour's walk to their house, and they had scarcely gone a few hundred steps, when the wife said:

"Hansei, I oughtn't to have let Annamirl go."

"Ill run after her as fast as I can, I can catch up with her yet," said the husband.

"For God's sake, don't!" said his wife, holding him fast. "I'd be all alone here on the highway. Stay here! It'll soon be all right again."

"Wait a second! Hold fast to the tree! That's it."

The husband rushed into the meadow, gathered up an armful of hay, placed it on the pile of stones by the wayside, and seated his wife upon it.

"I feel better, already," said the wife.

"Don't talk now, rest yourself! Oh! dear me; if only a wagon were to come along; but there's neither man nor beast in sight. Just take a good rest, and then I'll carry you home. You're not too heavy for me. I've carried heavier loads many a time."

"Do you mean to carry me, in broad daylight?" said the wife, laughing so heartily that she was obliged to rest her hand on the stones, to support herself. "You dear, good fellow! Much obliged, but there's no need of it. I'm all right now, and can walk." She got up briskly, and Hansei's face was radiant with joy.

"Thank God! Here comes the doctor, in the very nick of time."

The doctor, who lived in the neighboring town, was just turning the corner. Hansei raised his hat and requested him to take his wife into the carriage. He gladly consented, but Walpurga seemed loth to get in.

"I never rode in a carriage in all my life," said she, repeatedly.

"Everything must be tried, you know," said the doctor, laughing, as he assisted her into the carriage. He told the husband that he might get up on the box, but he declined.

"I'll drive slowly," said the doctor.

Hansei walked along by the side of the carriage, constantly casting happy glances at his wife.

"Now we're two thousand paces from home; now we're a thousand," said he, talking to himself, while his glances showed his gratitude to the doctor, to the carriage that was kind enough to allow his wife to sit in it; and even to the horse from which he brushed the troublesome flies.

"Hansei is doing the horse a kindness," said the doctor to the young wife. She did not answer, and the doctor looked pleased with the husband, whom he had known for a long while as a wood-cutter in the royal forest. Hansei carried his hat in his hand and would now and then with his sleeve wipe the perspiration from his brow. His face was sunburnt and void of expression, and, as he had not been a soldier, he wore no mustache. A shaggy beard, extending from his temples, encircled his long face; his forehead was, for the greater part, covered with thick, light hair; his short leather breeches displayed his great knees; the clocked, knitted leggins must surely have been a gift from his wife; the heavy hobnailed shoes had been used in many a mountain walk. Hansei walked along, beside the coach, with steady step, and at last exclaimed: "We're home!"

The little cottage by the lake stood in the midst of a small garden; an old woman was at the gate, and called out: "So you ride home in the bargain."

"Yes, mother," answered the wife, who, with profuse thanks, took leave of the doctor, while Hansei gratefully patted the horse that had safely brought her home.

"I'm going right off for Annamirl," said he; "keep some dinner for me."

"No, let's eat together; I'm hungry, too," exclaimed the wife, while she laid her hymn-book aside, and removed her hat and jacket. She was good-looking, had a full, round, cheerful face, and large plaits of light hair encircled her brow. She forced herself to remain at the table and join in the meal with her husband and mother, but as soon as the last morsel had passed his lips, Hansei started on his errand.

It was high time for Annamirl to come. Before the chickens had gone to roost, the Sunday child, a screaming, fair-haired girl baby, had come.

Hansei was quite beside himself with joy, and did not know what to do. He had not had a comfortable dinner, and it seemed a great while since he had eaten anything. It was ever so long ago, for he had become a father since then; and it seemed as if years, instead of hours, had passed in the

mean while. He cut off a large slice from the loaf, but when he got out of doors, where the birds were chirping so merrily and the starlings were so tame, he cried out: "Here! You shall have some too; I want you to know that I'm a father, and of a Sunday child at that!" He threw the soft bread-crumbs to them, and the crust into the sea, saying: "Here, ye fish who feed us; to-day I'll feed you!" He was overflowing with goodwill to the whole world, but there was no one left on whom he could exercise it. He knew not where he should betake himself to. Suddenly he spied the ladder leaning against the cherry-tree; he mounted it, plucked the cherries, and kept on eating until he quite forgot himself, and felt as if it were not he who was eating, but as if he were giving them to some one else. He no longer knew where or who he was, and at last began to fear that he was bewitched and would never be able to get down again. The telegraph wire ran by the house and almost touched the cherry-tree. Hansei looked at it as if to say: "Go, tell the whole world that I'm a father." He was delighted to see swallows and starlings sitting on the wire, and nodded to them, saying: "Don't disturb yourselves, I'll not harm ye." And so he went on plucking cherries, and looking straight before him for ever so long.

Then the grandmother put her head out of the window and called to him: "Hansei, your wife wants you."

He hurried down from the tree, and when he entered the room his wife laughed at him heartily, for his lips were black and his face was streaked with the juice of cherries.

"So you've been pilfering. Do leave a few cherries for me!"

"I'll bring the ladder into your room, so that I shant be able to go up into the tree again," said he, and there was merry laughter in the little cottage by the lake until the moon and stars looked down on it. The lamp in the little chamber was kept burning all night. The mother soon fell into a peaceful and happy slumber, and the Sunday child would whimper at times, but was easily quieted.

The grandmother was the only one awake-she had merely feigned sleep-and now sat on a footstool by the cradle of the new-born babe.

A bright star was shining overhead. It flickered and sparkled, and, within the cottage, the face of the mother was resplendent with joy as indescribable as the radiance of the star above. A child of man had become mother of a child of man, and she who watched over them was the one from whom both these lives had sprung. The soft air seemed laden with song and the sounds of heavenly music, and the room itself, as if thronged with fluttering, smiling cherubs.

The old grandmother sat there, resting her chin on her hand and gazing at the star above, whose rays fell upon her face. She sat there with bated breath, feeling as if transported into another world. The glory of the Highest had descended upon the cottage, and, like a halo, now encircled the head of the grandmother, Walpurga, and the infant.

"Mother! How brightly the stars are shining!" said Walpurga, awaking.

"Never fear, they'll keep on shining, even if you shut your eyes. Do go to sleep again!" answered the grandmother.

And, until the day broke, all lay hushed in slumber.

CHAPTER IV

Seated in an open carriage, Doctor Sixtus journeyed toward the Highlands.

The doctor was a man of easy and winning address. While the present king was yet the crown prince, he had accompanied him on his travels and, in the society of nobles, had improved on the light and graceful manner which he had acquired during a three years' stay in Paris. Just as princes treat their inferiors and regard their service as a right, so, in turn, do courtiers abuse those who are under them. The court doctor had chosen for his lackey, one of the readiest, and most skillful at command.

"Give me a light, Baum!" said he; and the lackey, who was sitting beside the driver on the box, handed him a lighted match. With gentle condescension, Sixtus offered his cigar-case to the lackey, who gratefully helped himself to a cigar. He well knew that it would prove too strong for him, and that, if he attempted to smoke it, it would in all likelihood throw him into a cold sweat; but he knew also that it is a safe rule never to refuse a proffered favor.

The road was good and the ride a pleasant one. At the next station, the royal horses were sent back to the king's stables and a relay of fleet post-horses was taken. Doctor Sixtus had no need to trouble himself about such matters-Baum knew what was needed and attended to it.

"Baum, where were you born?" asked the court doctor.

Although Baum was startled by the question, he acted as if he had not heard it. He found it necessary to collect himself before he could reply. His features were agitated for a moment, but he quickly assumed a modest and innocent expression.

The doctor repeated his question: "Baum, where were you born?"

With a face expressive of willingness to serve him in any way, Baum turned toward the doctor and said:

"I come from the Highlands; far over there near the border; but I've never felt at home there."

Sixtus, whose question had been a casual one, had no desire to inquire further into Baum's history.

He was quite affable toward Baum, who was the favorite lackey at court, since he possessed the art of showing by his demeanor how highly he esteemed the exalted personages whom he served.

"Keep as near the telegraph as possible," had been the instructions given to Doctor Sixtus. "Report every morning and evening where a dispatch will reach you, so that you may be recalled at any moment."

Doctor Sixtus looked out at the telegraph wires, running through the valleys and climbing over the hills, and smiled to himself. "I, too, am nothing more than an electric spark, with this difference however: the master who has sent me does not know where I am going to. No, I am like the spirit in the fairy-tale; I bring money and luxury to an invisible cottage, for I cannot find a rich peasant woman. Where art thou, O noble foster-mother?"

He looked out at the landscape with a self-complacent smile, while, in his day-dreams, various images appeared and vanished like the smoke clouds of his cigar.

It was after dark when they drew near to a little watering-place in the Highlands.

While they ascended the mountain, the lackey walked on beside the postilion. Sixtus had entrusted him with the secret reason for their journey. They had already, in distant lands, shared in adventures of quite a different nature. Baum engaged the postilion in conversation about the life and ways of the neighborhood and adroitly managed to inquire about young lying-in women. He had found the right party. The postilion was the son of a midwife, whose only fault was that she had died some time ago.

Sixtus was much gratified by the hint which he had just received of how his mission might be fulfilled. He would seek information from the midwives of every village, and, in order to avoid being overrun, would take good care not to let them know for whom the foster-mother was wanted.

When Baum was about to return to his seat, Sixtus quietly called him and said: "During the whole of this journey, you're to address me simply as 'Herr Doctor.'"

The lackey did not ask why, for that was no part of his business; nor did he conjecture as to the reason; he was a lackey and obeyed orders. "He who does more than he's ordered to do is good for nothing," were the words that Baroness Steigeneck's chamberlain had often impressed upon him, and whatever the chamberlain said was as a sacred law to Baum.

The little watering-place was full of life. The company had just left the table. Some were talking of the day's excursion; others, about that projected for the morrow. A young officer in civil dress, and a stout gentleman, appeared to be the wags of the assembly. There were jokes and laughter, and, in the background, a party were singing to the accompaniment of a piano that was out of tune. All seemed more or less excited. They had repaired to the Highlands to escape from *ennui*, and, having arrived there, found themselves bored in earnest; for there are but few to whom the beauties of nature afford constant and all-sufficient entertainment.

Luckily for Sixtus, no one recognized him, and Baum, who was without his livery, allowed no information to escape him. The doctor looked upon the doings of the gentry about him with a certain aristocratic sense of superiority. As the neighborhood abounded with goitres, he concluded to leave without making further inquiries. On the following morning, they reached a small mountain village. Doctor Sixtus addressed himself to the village doctor, rode about the country with him for several days and, at last, left without having accomplished his mission. He, however, made a note of the names of several of the parties they had seen.

His knightly pride had well-nigh left him. He had looked into the dwellings of want and had beheld so much that told of toil and misery, that the careless indifference with which beings of the same flesh and blood could live in palaces, seemed like a dream. In this outer world, existence is mere toil and care, nothing more than a painful effort to sustain life, with no other outlook than that of renewed toil and care on the morrow.

"A truce to sentiment," said the doctor to himself. "Things happen thus in this fine world. Men and beasts are alike. The stag in the forest doesn't ask what becomes of the bird, and the bird, unless it be a stork, doesn't care what becomes of the frogs! Away with sentimentality and dreams of universal happiness!"

The doctor traveled to and fro among the Highlands, always careful to keep near the telegraph stations, and, as instructed, reporting twice a day. He despaired of accomplishing his mission, and wrote to his chief that, although he could not find married women, there were lots of excellent unmarried ones. He therefore suggested that, as it would not do to deceive a queen, it would be well to have the most acceptable one married to her lover at once.

While awaiting a reply, he remained at a village near the lake, the resident physician of which had been a fellow-student of his.

The scarred face of the portly village doctor was refulgent with traces of the student cheer which in former days they had enjoyed in common. He was still provided with a never-failing thirst and ready for all sorts of fun. His manners had become rustic, and it was with a self-complacent feeling Sixtus thought of the difference in their positions.

Doctor Kumpan-this was a nickname he had received while at the university-looked upon his friend's excursion in search of a nurse as if it were one of their old student escapades. He rode with him over hill and dale, never loth to make a slight detour, if, by that means, they might gain an inn, where he could gratify his hunger with a good meal, and his thirst with a drop of good wine-the more drops the better.

"So many of our customs," said Sixtus, one day, "are, at bottom, immoral. For instance, nurse-hunting."

Doctor Kumpan roared with laughter and said:

"And you too, Schniepel," – the college nickname of Sixtus-"so you, also, are one of the new-fashioned friends of the people. You gentlemen, whose gloves are ever buttoned, treat the people far too gingerly. We, who live among them, know them far better. They're a pack of rogues and blockheads, just like their superiors; the only difference's that they're more honest about it. The only effect your care for them can have will be to make matters worse. How lucky it is that the trees in the forest grow without artificial irrigation!"

During these excursions, Doctor Kumpan gave free vent to his rough humor, and was so delighted with his wit that he could live three days on the recollection of one of his own wretched jokes.

Sixtus found himself ill at ease in the company of the village doctor, with whom it was necessary to keep on the same friendly footing as of yore; and, therefore, made an effort to hasten his departure.

He was about to take his leave-it was on the morning of the second Sunday following-when Doctor Kumpan said:

"I'm disgusted with myself for having been so stupid. I've got it! Mother nature herself, unconditioned and absolute-just as old Professor Genitivius, the son of his celebrated father, used to say, while he brought his fist down on his desk-Come along with me!"

They drove off in the direction of the lake.

CHAPTER V

Sunday morning had come again, and, with it, stirring times in the cottage by the lake. Godfather and godmother were there, and, at the first tolling of the church bell, whose sounds floated on the air like so many invisible yet audible waves, a procession moved from the house. The grandmother carried the child upon a soft, downy pillow, over which a white cover had been spread; following after her, proudly walked the father, with a nosegay in his button-hole. Beside him, was the godfather, mine host of the Chamois, followed by tailor Schneck's wife and other females. A light-haired boy about five years old, and bearing a two-pronged twig of hazel in his hand, had also joined in the procession.

"What are you after, Waldl?" asked Hansei.

The boy did not answer. Mistress Schneck took his hand in hers and said: "Come along, Waldl!" and then turning to Hansei, she continued: "Don't drive the child away! It's a good sign when a young boy goes along to the christening; the child will get a husband so much the sooner, and who knows but-" Hansei laughed to find that they were already thinking of a mate for his daughter.

While moving along in silent procession, they beheld another good omen. A swallow flew directly over the heads of the grandmother and the child, whereupon the former opened her great red umbrella and held it over herself and the babe.

Walpurga, unable to accompany them on their long walk to church, was obliged to remain at home. Her friend Stasi, who, on the previous Sunday, had altered the prayer for the queen in Walpurga's favor, remained to bear her company. Walpurga, seated in grandmother's arm-chair, looked out of the latticed window, at the violets, the buttercups, and the rosemary, the peaceful lake and the blue skies, while she listened to the sound of the church bell.

"This is the first time my babe goes out into the wide, wide world, and I'm not with it," said she; "and some day I shall go into the other world and never be with it again. And still I feel as if it was with me all the same."

"I don't know what makes you so downhearted today," said her companion; "if that comes o' getting married, I'll never have a husband."

"Nonsense!" curtly replied Walpurga; her meaning was plain enough. Soon afterward, she added in a voice tremulous with emotion: "I'm not downhearted. It's only this. I just feel as if the baby and I had been both born over again. I don't know how it is, but I feel as if I were another person. Just think of it! In all my life, I've never lain abed so quietly and peacefully as I've been doing these many days. And to be lying there perfectly well, and with nothing to do but think and sleep, and awake again, and nurse the baby, while kind folks are forever bringing whatever heart can wish for-I tell you, if I'd been a hermit in the woods for seven years, I couldn't have done more thinking. It would keep me busy day and night to tell you all. But what's that?" said she, suddenly interrupting herself; "just then it seemed as if the whole house were shaking."

"I didn't notice anything. But your face is enough to give one the blues. Let's sing something. Just try whether you're still our best singer."

Her companion insisting, Walpurga at last began to sing, but soon stopped. Stasi essayed another song, but Walpurga did not care for it; indeed, none of them were to her liking that day.

"Let's be quiet," said she at last. "Don't worry me through all those songs; I don't feel like doing anything to-day."

The bells were tolling for the third time. The two friends were sitting together in silence.

At last Stasi said: "How kind it is of the innkeeper to let them ride home from church in his wagon."

"Listen! I hear wheels. They can't be coming already."

"No, that's the rattle of the doctor's carriage. There he is, up there by the willows; and there's another gentleman with him."

"Don't talk to me now, Stasi," said the young mother; "let the whole world drive by; it's all the same to me."

She sat there silently, resting her head against the back of the chair and looking out into the golden sunlight that seemed to infuse all nature with new life. The grass was of a lovelier green than ever before; the lake glittered with the soft sheen of the ever-changing light; the waves were splashing against the shore; a gentle breeze wafted the odors of the violets and rosemary from the window-shelf into the room.

A carriage stopped before the cottage. First, the loud cracking of a whip was heard; then, approaching footsteps, and at last, the jolly doctor calling out: "Hansei! Is there no one at home?"

"No," answered Stasi, "there's nobody but Walpurga and me," whereupon there was great laughter out of doors.

Doctor Kumpan entered the room, followed by the stranger, who started as if amazed. Moved with admiration by the sight he beheld, he bowed involuntarily; but, checking himself, he was more erect than before.

"Where's Hansei, the Sunday child's father?" inquired Doctor Kumpan.

The wife arose and said that he had gone to church with the child and its sponsors, but that he would soon return.

"Keep your seat!" said the doctor. "I mean to be an unbidden guest at your christening dinner, and my friend here, who is also a man-killer like myself, will join us."

"What do you want of my husband? Mayn't I know?"

"The husband cuts the loaf and then helps his wife to some of it. You know that's the custom of the country, Walpurga. We want to talk to your husband about a matter of great importance. Don't get frightened, it isn't a law affair. All I have to say to you is, you've a Sunday child. Perhaps you're one yourself?"

"I am, indeed."

"So much the better; you're doubly fortunate."

"It seems to me," said Doctor Sixtus, "we might as well speak to the wife at once. She appears to be a sensible woman and will be glad to make her husband and child happy."

Walpurga looked about her as if imploring help.

"Well then," said Doctor Kumpan, taking a seat, "you may as well let me tell it. Now, pay attention, Walpurga. Just keep your seat and let me tell you a story: Once upon a time, there was a king and a queen. The king was good and brave, and the queen was lovely, and a son was born to them who inherited the father's virtues and the mother's beauty; it might have been a daughter, but they would rather have it a son. Now when the son was born, they summoned a spirit who lived in the palace, and was called Doctor Puck; and they said to him: Puck, dear Puck, pack up your things, and pack yourself off to the mountains as fast as you can; for there, by the border of the lake, is a pretty little cottage in which there sits a mother who's tidy, strong, and good, and who's to be the foster-mother of the little prince, who is as good as his father, and as lovely as his mother. And the foster-mother shall have whatever her heart wishes for, and shall make her husband and child happy; and the king and the queen and the prince, and-but look up, Walpurga! look at this gentleman. He's the kind spirit named Doctor Puck, and he comes from the king and the queen. Do you understand me, Walpurga?"

The young mother rested her head upon the back of the chair and closed her eyes. She drew a long breath and uttered not a word. At that moment Hansei returned with the sponsor and the babe. The mother hurried to her child and taking it in her arms, rushed out into the garden with it, Stasi running after her.

"What's the matter?" asked Hansei, casting angry glances at the doctor and the stranger.

"Sit down, my worthy Hansei, and I'll tell you all about it. And it's well that you're here, too, my good friend of the Chamois: remain with us. The rest of you may all leave the room."

Suiting the action to the words, Doctor Kumpan hurried out the villagers, who had been drawn there by curiosity. Then, accepting a pinch of snuff from the innkeeper, he said: "Hansei, make a bow; you must know that this gentleman is the court physician. He's sent here by the king, who wants you to lend him your wife for a year."

The doctor's overbearing manner so enraged Hansei, that he almost felt like putting him and the court doctor out of the room, and was already squaring his shoulders for the attack.

Motioning Kumpan to be silent, Sixtus told Hansei that, by the king's orders, he had sought information in regard to him, and that it had seemed as if the people did not know whom to praise the most—Hansei or Walpurga. Hansei grinned self-complacently, and now Sixtus acquainted him with the king's pleasure.

"Many thanks for the kind words," replied Hansei; "I'm much obliged to the king for his good opinion of me. I know him well; I rowed him across the lake twice while he was yet a merry lad, and a wide-awake huntsman. Tell the king that I hadn't thought he'd still remember me, but I can't part with my wife. I couldn't be so cruel to her, to myself, and, above all, to our child."

It was the longest speech he had ever made. He wiped the perspiration from his brow, and turned toward the table. He was as hungry as a wolf, and, seeing the nicely cut cake, took a piece, exclaiming: "Before I do it, may this morsel—"

"Don't swear!" cried the innkeeper, taking the cake from him. "Don't swear; you can do as you please; no one can compel you."

"And no one wishes to," said Doctor Sixtus; "may I have a piece of cake?"

"To be sure you may! Help yourself, — and you too, doctor! We've wine also. Ah, doctor, this day two weeks ago, out on the road, things looked very serious!"

There was eating and drinking, and with every morsel that Hansei swallowed, his face grew more cheerful.

"It seems to me, Mr. Landlord, that you could explain the matter to him better than we," said Sixtus. The innkeeper offered Hansei a pinch of snuff, with the words: "It would be a great honor to the village and to the whole neighborhood. Just think of it, Hansei! the king and the crown prince—"

"Perhaps it's a princess," interrupted Sixtus.

"Oh!" said Hansei laughing, "and so the child isn't born yet?" But while laughing, he thought to himself: "There's still time to think the matter over." Then he laughed again at the thought, for, with all his simplicity, he was rogue enough to determine to reap the greatest possible advantage from it; he couldn't think of such a thing for less than a thousand—no, two thousand—and, who knows, perhaps even three thousand florins. Hansei would probably have gone up to a hundred thousand if the innkeeper had not resumed the conversation, and thus interrupted the current of his thoughts.

"Hansei is perfectly right; he says neither 'yes,' nor 'no'; he says nothing; for here the wife must decide. He's a good husband, and won't force her to do anything against her will. Yes, gentlemen, although we're only simple country folk, we know what's right."

"It does you credit to respect your wife so," said Doctor Sixtus. The innkeeper took another pinch of snuff and went on to say: "Of course; but after all, if I may be allowed to speak my mind freely, a woman's only half a man in reason and judgment. With your permission, Herr Court Doctor, I think we'd better say no more for the present, but call the wife. She's ever so good."

Happiness and misery, pride and humility, were depicted in Hansei's features.

"Whatever she says, I'll abide by," said he.

He was proud of possessing such a wife, and yet dreaded her decision. He pulled at the buttons of his coat as if to make sure they were all there. At last, urged by the innkeeper, he went out into the garden and called Walpurga, who was still sitting under the cherry tree.

CHAPTER VI

After Walpurga had hurried out into the garden and had pressed the babe to her bosom, she quietly gave it to Stasi, saying:

"Take the child; I daren't feed it now. Oh, you poor, dear thing! They want to take me away from you. What harm have you ever done that they should treat you so? And what have I done? But they can't make me go! And who'd dare try? But what have they come for? Why to me? Come, darling, I'm all right again. I'm with you, and we'll not part from each other. I'm quite calm again."

When Hansei came to call Walpurga, he found her quietly pressing the child to her bosom and kissing its little hands.

"If you've had your talk out, do come in."

Walpurga motioned him to be quiet, lest he should disturb the child. He stood there silently for a while; not a sound escaped father, mother, or child; naught was heard but the starlings in the cherry-tree, who were feeding their young. Swift as the wind itself they would fly from their nests and return again. At last, the child, its hunger thoroughly sated, but its lips still softly moving, dropped back on the pillow.

"Come into the house," said Hansei, in a voice far gentler than his rough looks would have led one to expect, "Come in, Walpurga. There's no need of being rude, and there's nothing wrong in what they ask of us. They can't force us, you know, and we can thank them, at any rate. You can talk to strangers much better than I can. It's your turn to speak now; and I'll be satisfied with whatever you say or do."

Walpurga handed the child to the grandmother, and accompanied Hansei into the house. She looked back several times, and almost stumbled at the very threshold.

As soon as she entered the room, Doctor Sixtus came up to her, and, addressing her in a gentle, insinuating manner, said:

"My good woman! I should think it a sin to induce you to do anything that your heart condemns. But I feel it my duty to urge you to reflect upon the matter calmly and dispassionately."

"Many thanks. But-I hope you won't think ill of me-I couldn't be so cruel to my child." Her eye fell on Hansei, and she quickly added, "Nor my husband either. I can't go away and leave them all alone."

"Why they won't be alone; your mother's here," said the innkeeper, interrupting her. Doctor Sixtus interposed:

"Don't interrupt her, if you please, sir. Let her speak for herself, and pour out her whole heart. Pray go on, my good woman."

"I've nothing more to say; I know nothing more. Yes, there's one thing more. I've never been in service, except to do an odd day's work, now and then. I was born in this cottage, and I've lived here up to this time, and 'twas here my husband came to see me. I've never thought of leaving it, and I can't think of doing so now. I've never slept in a strange bed. If I had to leave here and go to the city for so long a time, I'd die of homesickness; and what would become of my child and my husband? I'm sure the king don't want us all to die of grief."

"I'd like to say a word, too," said Doctor Kumpan, casting an expressive glance at Doctor Sixtus. "We've already thought of your child. You've often wished for a cow, and we'll get you one that has just calved."

"I've got the very thing you want," exclaimed the innkeeper, rushing to the window and calling to a boy outside: "Go tell my man to bring my heifer, right away. Be quick about it! Hurry yourself! – I really didn't care to part with her," said he, addressing Doctor Sixtus and turning his back on Hansei, who well knew that the innkeeper dealt in cattle and pigs, all the year around. Everything in his stable had its price, and here he was acting just as if the heifer were a member of his family. "She's the

very best beast I've got," added he, "but one ought to give up everything for his king; and she's a bargain at forty crown thalers." Then turning to Hansei he said, with a grin: "You're getting a fine, plump little cow-not an empty hide."

"Not so fast, my friend," said Doctor Sixtus; "but if Hansei likes the heifer, I'll buy it of you."

"The mother goes and the cow takes her place," muttered Walpurga, absently.

"I never thought you could be so foolish," thundered the innkeeper. "Why, what a fuss you're making! You ought to shout for joy, and get down on your knees and thank God!"

Doctor Sixtus quieted him, and the village doctor now said: "Joy and song come at no one's bidding; if Walpurga won't go with us cheerfully we'll look further; there must be others besides her."

He arose, and took his hat as if to depart, Doctor Sixtus doing likewise.

"How soon would I have to go, and how long would I have to be away from home?" asked the young wife.

Seating himself again. Doctor Sixtus replied: "I can't say how soon, but you'd have to be ready to go at a moment's notice."

"Then I wouldn't have to go right off-and how long would I have to stay?"

"A year, or thereabouts."

"No, no! I won't go. God forgive me for giving it a moment's thought!"

"Then we'll take our leave, and may God bless you and your child," said Doctor Sixtus, offering her his hand. With a voice full of emotion, he added:

"It would do the royal child more harm than good if you were to leave here regretfully, and carry a constant grief about with you. That the mere idea pains you is quite natural. You couldn't, as a good woman and true mother, have consented at once, and who knows whether I would have accepted you if you had? What the queen desires is a good woman, who has a respectable husband and a kind mother; she will have no other, and has no thought of grieving or offending you. Therefore, if you can't be cheerful among strangers; if it doesn't gladden your heart to think that you may benefit the royal child, and that the king will be kind to you, you'll do far better to remain at home and not allow yourself to be tempted by the money. Don't let that induce you. No; you'd better not go."

He was about to leave, when the innkeeper detained him and said:

"I've only one word more to say. Listen, Walpurga, and you, too, Hansei. You've said: 'No, I won't go,' and the answer does you great credit. But ask yourselves what the consequence will be? To-day, to-morrow, perhaps even the day after to-morrow, you'll be quite content-will take each other by the hand, kiss your child, and say: 'Thank God! we've resisted temptation; we've remained united in poverty, and maintain ourselves honestly; we'd rather toil and suffer together than part.' But how will it be a day or a week later? How then? When sorrow and want and misfortune come-for we're only human after all-and you find yourselves helpless? Won't you say to yourselves: 'If we'd only consented.' Won't you then, by word or look, say to one another: 'Why didn't you urge me? Why didn't you decide to go?' I don't want to persuade you, I merely want to remind you of all you ought to consider in the matter."

Silence ensued. The husband looked at his wife and then at the ground; the wife looked at him for a while, and then suddenly raised her hand to her eyes.

The cracking of a whip was heard and then a fine black-pied cow bellowing loud and deep, as if the sound issued from a cavern. All were startled. The sound broke upon the silence like a ghost-call at noonday.

The innkeeper cursed and swore, and putting his head out of the window, abused the servant for not having brought the calf, which had, in truth, already been sold to the butcher.

The servant fastened the cow to the fence, and hurried home to bring its calf. The cow dragged at the rope, as if trying to strangle herself, and groaned and bellowed until she foamed at the mouth.

"That's only a beast, and see how she goes on!" cried Walpurga.

The arrival of the cow seemed to dissipate the effect of the innkeeper's eloquence. But Walpurga suddenly composed herself. Speaking quickly, as if addressing an unseen being, and without looking at any one, she said:

"A man or a woman can do more than a beast!" Then, turning toward her husband, she added: "Come here, Hansei, give me your hand. Tell me, from the bottom of your heart, will you be satisfied with whatever I may do or say?"

"Do you mean if you say 'no'?" replied Hansei, hesitating.

"Whether I say 'yes' or 'no' is what I mean."

Hansei could not utter a word. Had he been able to speak, his remarks would have been very sensible. He kept looking into his hat, as if there to read the thoughts that were running through his head. Then he took his blue pocket-handkerchief, and twisted it up as if he were trying to make a ball of it. When Walpurga found that Hansei did not answer, she said:

"I can't ask you to decide. I, alone, can do that. I'm the child's mother-I'm the wife, and ... if I go, I must, and I'm sure I can, keep down all grief, so that I may do no harm to the other child; and-and-here's my hand, sir-my answer is 'yes'."

It seemed as if a load had been lifted from the hearts of all present. Hansei felt a stinging sensation in his eyes, and as if choking. To allay this, he indulged in a fresh glass of wine and a large slice of cake. What a strange day! If the company would only go, so that one could get a bite of something warm. The morning seemed as if it would never end. The two physicians had much to say to Walpurga, who promised to keep herself as cheerful as possible. She told them that when she had once undertaken a thing she would carry it out; that God would help to preserve her child and that she would do all she could for the king's child. "You can depend upon it, when I've made up my mind to do a thing, I do it," she repeated again and again. Now that she had decided, she seemed to have acquired wondrous self-control. Spying her mother, who was carrying the child, she called her to her, and told her of everything. The child slumbered peacefully, and was placed in the cradle that stood in the bedroom. The grandmother seemed to look upon the whole affair as if it were an unalterable decree of fate. For years it had been her wont to allow Walpurga to decide in all things, and in this case, moreover, the king's pleasure was to be regarded.

"Your child won't be motherless; I understand her better than you do. We've got a cow, and we'll see that the child is well cared for."

The innkeeper hurried out and put the cow in the stable. That closed the purchase and gave him a pretty profit. He was provoked at himself to think that he had not asked ten thalers more. He managed to get two thalers additional, as a gratuity for the boy, but half of this sum found its way into his own pocket.

Hansei, who had in the mean while refreshed himself, thought it would be well to show that he was a man. He inquired as to the pay, and was just about to name the large sum he had been thinking of, when the innkeeper returned, and made it clear to him that the less he bargained the more he would get. He offered to give him five hundred florins for the christening gifts alone, and told him that, if he left it to the king, he would get all the more.

Walpurga now asked what she would have to take with her. Doctor Sixtus told her that her best suit would be all that was necessary.

Many of the villagers had gathered before the window. They had heard the news, and others, while on their way to afternoon church, stopped, and at last there was quite a crowd. There was much merriment, for every man said that he would gladly let the king borrow his wife for a year.

Stasi offered to help the grandmother. It was not without pride that she spoke of her being able to write a good hand and promised to send Walpurga a letter once a week, about the child, the husband, and the mother.

She then brought the plates, for it was high time they were at dinner. Walpurga said that she would put all to rights within the next few days.

"What I now deny my child," said she, "I can more than make up to her for the rest of her life."

While she was thus speaking, she heard the child crying in the other room and hurried to it.

The two physicians and the innkeeper were about to leave, when the sounds of a post-horn were heard in the direction of the road that led up from the lake.

The special post had arrived. The lackey whom Doctor Sixtus had left at the telegraph station near by, was sitting in the open carriage. He raised his hand, in which he held a letter aloft. He stopped before the cottage and called out to the crowd:

"Shout huzza! every one of you! A crown prince was born an hour ago!"

They cheered again and again.

An old woman, bent double, suddenly turned toward the lackey and gazed into his face with her bright, brown eyes that, in spite of her years, were still sparkling.

"Whose voice is that?" muttered the old woman to herself.

There was an almost imperceptible change in the features of the lackey, but the old woman had noticed it. "Clear the way, folks!" said he, "so that I may alight!"

"Get out of the way, Zenza!" (Vincenza) "Old Zenza's always in the way."

The old woman stood there, staring before her vacantly, as if in a waking dream. She was shoved aside, and lost the staff with which she had supported herself. The lackey tripped over it, but, without looking to the right or left, hurried into the cottage.

Doctor Sixtus advanced to meet him, took the dispatch, and returned to the room. Walpurga had come back in the mean while, and he said to her:

"It has happened sooner than we expected. I've just received a dispatch; at ten o'clock this morning, the crown prince was born. I am to hurry off to the capital and bring the nurse with me. Now, Walpurga, is the time to prove your strength. We leave in an hour."

"I'm ready," said Walpurga resolutely. She felt so weak, however, that she was obliged to sit down.

CHAPTER VII

The two physicians, accompanied by the innkeeper, left the house. Stasi brought in the soup and the roast meat for the christening dinner and placed them on the table. The grandmother offered up a prayer, in which the others joined; they all seated themselves at the table. Walpurga was the first to take a spoonful of the soup from the dish, but, finding that no one cared to eat, she filled her spoon again and said:

"Open your mouth, Hansei, and let me give you something to eat. Take this, and may God's blessing go with it. And just as the food I now offer you gives me more pleasure than if I were eating it myself, so, when I'm among strangers, not a morsel will pass my lips that I wouldn't rather give you and the child. I only go away so that we may be able to live in peace and comfort hereafter. I shall think of you and mother and the child, by day and night, and, God willing, I'll return again in health and happiness. Don't forget that God might have called me away in the hour of pain and trial, and that then you'd have been without me all your lifetime. Mother, I've often heard you say that a wife giving birth to a child has one foot in the grave. I'm only going away for a year, and you all know that I'll return the same Walpurga that I now am. Don't let our parting be sad, Hansei; you must help me! You can, and I know you will. You're my only support. Keep yourself tidy while I'm gone. You'd better wear a good shirt every Sunday morning, for now you can afford it. You'll find them in the blue closet-on the upper right-hand shelf. Do eat something; I'll eat just as soon as you do. We need all our strength. You'll be all right to-morrow, and so shall I. But do eat something! For every spoonful you take, I'll take one, too: – there, that's it-but not so fast, or I can't keep up with you!" Smiling through her tears, she went on eating.

"And now, mother," she continued, "you'll have no chance to say that you're a burden to us. When I'm gone, you can take the two pillows off my bed and put them on yours, so that you can sleep with your head right high. That'll do you good. If we didn't have you, I wouldn't dare to think of going. Don't spoil my husband, and, when I come back again, we'll fix up a little room for you where you can live as well as the first farmer's wife in the land."

They let her do all the talking, and when she said: "Do say something, Hansei," he replied: "You'd better keep on talking. I can hear my voice any time; but it'll be a long while before I listen to yours again. Who knows but-"

He was about to take a piece of meat, but he put it back on the plate. He could not eat another morsel; nor could the others. The grandmother arose and said grace. Time flew by. A coach drove up to the door. The lackey was the only one seated in it; the gentlemen intended to follow shortly after. Baum speedily found himself on a familiar footing with Hansei. The first step toward their intimacy was the offer of a good cigar. He said that he envied Hansei's luck in having such a wife, and in being so fortunate into the bargain. Hansei felt greatly flattered. Doctor Sixtus gave orders that some bed cushions should be placed in the coach, so that Walpurga might be comfortable and well protected against the night air.

"Do you ride all night?" inquired Hansei.

"Oh, no! We shall reach the capital by midnight."

"But your fast driving may hurt my wife."

"Don't let that worry you. Your wife will be as well taken care of as the queen herself."

"I don't know how it is, but when I look at this gentleman and hear him talk," said Hansei, looking Baum straight in the face, "I feel ever so queer."

"How so? Do I look so terrible?"

"God forbid! No, indeed! But the one I'm thinking of was a good-for-nothing fellow. No offense, I assure you. But old Zenza-there she is at the garden gate, watching us-had twins. One is named Thomas and the other was Wolfgang, or Jangerl, as they say hereabouts. Well, Jangerl joined

the soldiers and went to America. It must have been some thirteen or fourteen years ago, and no one has ever heard of him since, and really-but you won't think ill of what I say?"

"Of course not! Go on."

"Well, Jangerl looked just like you to the very hair. No, not the hair, for his was red and his face wasn't as fine as yours, either; but taking it altogether, just as the devil takes the farmers" – Hansei was delighted with his joke, and the lackey joined in his laughter-"one might say that you look like each other. But you're sure you're not angry at what I've said?"

"Not at all," said Baum, looking at his watch. The clock in the church steeple was just striking five, and he said: "There's a difference of exactly one hour between your clock and that at the capital. Did this house belong to your parents?"

"No, I got it with my wife. That's to say, we still owe a mortgage of two hundred florins on it, but the farmer who holds it, doesn't press us."

"Your wife can buy you another house, and you ought to consider yourself lucky to have so good-looking a wife."

"Yes, and that's what makes me sorry to give her up," complained Hansei. "However, there are only three hundred and sixty-five days in a year-but that's a good many, after all."

"And as many nights in the bargain," said Baum, laughing. Poor Hansei shuddered.

"Yes, indeed!" said he. He felt that politeness required an answer on his part.

In the mean while, Walpurga had asked her mother and Stasi to leave her alone with the child. She was kneeling beside the cradle and wetted the pillow with her tears. She kissed the child, the coverlet, and cradle, and then, getting up, said: "Farewell! A thousand times, farewell!" She had dried her tears, and was about to leave the room, when the door opened from without and her mother entered.

"I'll help you," said she. "You'll be either twice as happy, or twice as miserable, when you return, and will make us just as happy or as miserable as you are."

Then she took Walpurga's left hand in hers, and, in a commanding voice, said: "Put your right hand on your child's head!"

"What's that for, mother?"

"Do as I bid you. Swear by your child's head and by the hand I hold in mine, that you'll remain good and pure, no matter what temptations may assail you. Remember you're a wife, a mother, a daughter! Do you swear this with all your heart?"

"I do, mother, so help me God! But there's no need of such an oath."

"Very well," said the mother. "Now walk around the cradle three times with your face turned from it. I'll lead you; don't stumble. Now you've taken the child's homesickness from it, and I'll take good care of it. Take my word for that."

She then led Walpurga into the room and, handing her the great loaf of bread and the knife, said:

"Cut a piece for yourself, before you go. May God bless it for your sake, and when you've reached your journey's end, let the bread that you've brought from home be the first morsel you eat. That'll kill the feeling of strangeness; and now, farewell."

They remained there in silence, holding each other by the hand.

Walpurga found it wondrous strange that Hansei was walking about in the garden with the lackey and forgetting her. Just then, he went up the ladder to get him some cherries, and was smoking incessantly; after that, he took him into the stable, where the cow had been placed.

The two physicians had returned, and Hansei had to be called into the room, for it was here, and not out of doors in the presence of the crowd, that the wife wished to take leave of her husband. Doctor Sixtus put a roll of crown thalers in Hansei's pocket. After that, Hansei constantly kept his hand there and was loth to remove it.

"Give me your hand, Hansei," said Walpurga.

He loosened his grasp of the money and gave her his hand.

"Farewell, dear Hansei, and be a good man. I'll remain a good wife... And now, God keep you all of you."

She kissed her mother and Stasi, and then, without once looking back, she hurried through the garden and seated herself in the carriage. The cow in the stable bellowed and groaned, but the sounds were drowned by the postilion's fanfare.

During all this, old Zenza had been leaning against the garden gate; at times passing her hand over her face and rubbing her bright and sparkling eyes. And now, when the lackey passed her she stared at him so, that he asked, in a rough and yet not unkind voice:

"Do you want anything, mother?"

"Yes; I'm old, and a mother in the bargain. Hi-hi-hi!" said she, laughing, and the crowd hinted to the lackey that her mind often wandered.

"Is there anything you want?" asked the lackey again.

"Of course there is, if you'll give it to me."

With trembling hand, the lackey drew the large purse from his pocket, and took out a piece of gold. But no, that might betray him. After fumbling with the money a long while, he at last gave the gold piece to the old woman, and said:

"This is from the king."

He mounted the box and never looked back again. The coach started off.

People came up to Zenza and asked her to show them what she had received, but her hand was closed as with a convulsive grasp. Without answering, she went away, supporting herself upon her staff.

She walked on, constantly looking at the ruts that the carriage wheels had made in the road, and those who passed her could hear her muttering unintelligibly. Her staff was in her right hand, and with her left she still clutched the gold piece.

CHAPTER VIII

The carriage moved along the road by the lake, and, at last, turning the corner at the stone-pile, was out of sight. The hay on which Walpurga had rested a fortnight before was still lying in the same place.

They passed a handsome girl, dressed in once genteel, but now shabby, finery. She was of a powerful frame, tawny complexion, and her blue-black hair was braided in thick plaits. She stared at Walpurga, but did not greet her until after she had passed.

"That's the daughter of the old woman you gave a present to," said Walpurga, addressing the lackey. "She goes by the name of Black Esther. If the mother doesn't bury the money out of sight, she'll surely take it from her."

Although Baum turned toward Walpurga, he was not looking at her, but at the girl, who was no other than his sister. A little while ago, he had denied his mother, while bestowing an alms upon her. And now he sat up beside the postilion, his arms folded as if to brace himself, for he felt as if his heart would break. His whole life passed before him, and, now and then, he planted himself more firmly in his seat, lest he should fall. And now the carriage passed by a farmyard where, twenty years ago, he had, by his mother's order, stolen a goose. He was a slim lad then and had found it easy to slip in, on all fours, through the gap in the hedge, which had closed up in the mean while.

Thomas, his twin brother, had joined the poachers. But Baum, who was not apt at their work, was glad when they took him for a soldier. One day while he was on duty at the palace an old *valet de chambre* brought a letter from Baroness Steigeneck, who was then at the height of her power. The valet was kept waiting a long while, during which he chatted with Baum, to whom he took a great liking. He invited Baum to visit the Steigeneck palace, where they drank together in the servants' room and were exceedingly jolly.

"Why is your hair so red?" said the *valet de chambre*.

"Why? Because it grew so."

"But that can be remedied."

"Indeed! How so?"

The old man gave Baum the requisite directions.

"You must also change your name. Rauhensteiner is too hard for their lordships. It is difficult to pronounce, and particularly for those who have false teeth. You must take some such name as Beck, or Schultz, or Hecht, or Baum. For, mind you, a dog has no name except the one its master sees fit to call it by."

"'Baum' would suit me very well."

"Well then, let it be Baum." On his way home that night, he kept continually saying to himself, "Baum, Baum-that's a short and easy name and no one will know me." The old man had made him swear that he would have nothing more to do with his family. His recent visit to his native village had reminded him of his pledge, and, although he attached but little importance to an oath, he found it convenient and, as he thought, praiseworthy to keep this one.

Through the intercession of the Steigeneck valet, his military discharge was made out in the name of Wolfgang Rauhensteiner-surnamed Baum. After that, he was simply known as Baum, and none knew that he had ever borne another name. He was perfectly willing to forego his chance of any bequests that might be left to him under the name of Rauhensteiner.

He entered the service of the court, and his first position was as groom to the prince, while at the university and during his subsequent journey through Italy. As a precaution, he had gone home and obtained an emigrant's passport, and afterward had dyed his hair black. In his native village, all were under the impression that he had emigrated.

After he returned from his travels, he married the daughter of the *valet de chambre*, and ever grew in favor with his masters. He was discreet in all things, and would cough behind his raised left hand. He was delighted with the name of "Baum." Such was his zeal to serve his masters, that had it been possible he would, for their sakes, have banished all harsh consonants from the language.

"That's settled," said Baum, as he sat on the box beside the postilion and coughed behind his hand. "That's settled" – and his face assumed a calm and determined expression as if he thought some one was watching him. "I've emigrated to America. If I were there, I'd be dead and buried as far as my family are concerned. Family, indeed! They'd only ruin and beggar me, and always be at my heels. None of that for me!" He watched the people, many of whom he knew, walking along the road. "What a pitiful life these folks must lead-no pleasure the whole year round! Once a week, on Sunday they get shaved and preached to, and the next morning the squalor begins anew. Any one who has escaped, would be a fool to think of returning to it again!"

Whilst Baum was thus recalling long-forgotten incidents of his past, Walpurga was trying hard to repress her tears. It seemed as if some higher power to whose sway she submitted herself had deprived her of thought and feeling.

With wondering eyes she gazed at the brooks that hurried down from the hills and then, as if to see what was becoming of Walpurga, would run along beside the road. When they dashed across the wooden bridges that overhung the roaring brook, she would tremble with fear, and would not feel reassured until they had gained the smooth road on the other side. She looked up at the mountains, the houses and the Alpine huts; she knew the names of those who dwelt in every one of them. But they soon reached a region to which she was a stranger.

At the next station where they stopped to change horses, the Sunday idlers were astonished to see a peasant woman descend from so elegant a carriage. A woman nursing her child was sitting under a linden tree near by. Prompted by curiosity, she raised herself in her seat, and the child turning its head at the same time, mother and child were staring at Walpurga, who nodded to them kindly, while her eyes filled with tears and her throat seemed to close. The postilion blew his horn, the horses started off at a gallop, and Walpurga again felt as if flying through the air.

"This is fast traveling, Walpurga, isn't it?" exclaimed Baum. When she now looked at him, she, too, was startled by his wonderful resemblance to Thomas.

"Yes, indeed!" said she. The doctor said but little, for he was too deeply moved by sympathy for her. Nor did he, as usual, assert his pride of position. This woman was so much more than a mere tool that one might well treat her with kindness and consideration. She had found it so hard to leave her home. He was, for some time, considering what he should say to her, and, at last, inquired:

"Do you like your doctor?"

"Yes, indeed I do! He's very odd. He scolds and abuses everybody; but for all that, he does good wherever he can, be it day or night; rich and poor are all the same to him. Oh, he's a real good man!"

Doctor Sixtus smiled and asked her:

"I didn't get to see his wife. Do you know her?"

"Of course I do. It's Hedwig, the apothecary's daughter. Her family are very nice folks, and she's a sweet, charming creature; plain in her ways and quite a home body. They have fine children, too-five or six of them, I believe-and so she has her hands full. He might have taken you to his house, for it's ever so neat and tidy."

He was delighted with Walpurga's good report of his friend. And now that he had succeeded in changing the train of her thoughts, he concluded that he had done enough and could leave her to shift for herself.

She saw everything as if in a dream. There were fields and meadows, then a village, a window-shelf covered with carnations and hanging vines. You've such at home, too, thought she, and in a moment they had vanished from sight. Then they passed the churchyard, its black crosses half buried in the earth and yet standing out boldly against the clear sky. In the village there was music and

dancing, and merry youths and maidens, their faces flushed by their sport, hurried to the windows. Then they passed more fields and meadows and houses, and saw groups sitting together and talking. And then the postilion blew a loud blast. A child was running in the middle of the road. With a shriek of horror, the mother rescued it and hastened away. The carriage did not stop. Walpurga looked back, feeling sure that they must now be thanking God for the child's escape. And still they went on. Then they passed a cow grazing by the wayside, a boy near by watching her. In the level country where the climate is so much milder, the cherry-trees were already bare of fruit. And then they came to great fields, with their vast sea of waving grain-there were none such in the Highlands... How happy these people must be who live down here, where there is something more than water, meadow and forest. In yonder fallow field, there lies a plow as if sleeping over Sunday. It grows dark, lights begin to twinkle; there are men and women, too. They are in their homes, but I'm being taken away from mine... At the next post station, both the doctor and Walpurga remained in the carriage. The horses were quickly changed, the old ones going, with heavy steps, into the stable; a new postilion mounted the box, and they were off again. Walpurga saw nothing more; her eyes were closed, and it seemed as if it were a dream, when the carriage stopped again for a fresh relay of horses, and she heard Baum ordering the postilion not to blow his horn lest he might awaken those inside.

"I'm not asleep," said the doctor.

"Nor am I! Just blow your horn, postilion," said Walpurga.

The postilion blew a loud blast, and they were off again. The stars were glittering overhead. They passed through more villages; windows were quickly raised, but they dashed by so rapidly that they were out of sight before the surprised villagers had time to collect their senses. Objects at the wayside were strangely illumined by the ever-moving glimmer of the two carriage-lamps, and at last, in the distance, they descried a great light and, over it, a cloud of smoke.

"There's an illumination in the city!" exclaimed Baum. The horses were urged to greater speed, and the postilion blew his horn more merrily than before. They were, at last, in the capital.

The carriage made slow headway through the surging, joyous crowd that filled the streets.

"Here comes the crown prince's nurse," was soon noised about, and the merry crowd greeted Walpurga with loud cheers. Confused and abashed, she hid her face in her hands. At last they were safely in the courtyard of the palace.

CHAPTER IX

Walpurga found herself in the interior quadrangle of the palace. She was quite giddy, with looking at the many doors, the great windows, the broad staircases and the coats of arms, emblazoned with figures of wild men and beasts. All seemed wondrous strange under the glare of the gas lamps, the strong lights, here and there, contrasting with the deep, mysterious shadows. Walpurga stared about her with a dreamy vacant gaze. Giving way to memories of olden legends, she thought of the young mother whom the genii of the mountain had carried off to a subterranean cavern, where they detained her by means of a magic charm, while she nursed a new-born babe.

But she was recalled to herself at last. From the palace-guard, where the muskets were stacked in two long rows and the sentry was marching to and fro, she heard one of the songs of her home.

"The captain of the palace-guard has sent wine to the soldiers," said a young liveried servant addressing Baum, whom he assisted to unharness the horses: "the whole town will be drunk."

Walpurga felt like telling them that they should not permit the soldiers to sing so loudly, because the young mother who was lying overhead ought to sleep. She had no idea of the great size of the palace, but was soon to find it out.

"Come with me," said Doctor Sixtus; "I'll conduct you to the first lady of the bed-chamber. Have no fear! You will be cordially welcomed by all."

"I'd better bring my pillows with me," answered Walpurga.

"Never mind; Baum will attend to them."

Walpurga followed after the doctor. They ascended a staircase, brilliantly illuminated and decorated with flowers, and Walpurga felt ashamed at the thought of her coming empty-handed, just as if there was nothing she could call her own. "I'm not that poor, after all," said she almost audibly.

They reached the grand corridor. It was also brilliantly illuminated and filled with flowers. There were people in uniform, walking to and fro, but the soft carpets prevented their footsteps from being heard. The under-servants remained standing while Sixtus and Walpurga passed by them. At last they stopped before a door. Addressing the servant who was stationed there, Doctor Sixtus said:

"Inform her excellency that Doctor Sixtus is in waiting, and that he has brought the nurse."

This was the first time that Walpurga had heard herself spoken of as "the nurse," and as being "brought."

She again felt as if under a spell, or rather, as if sold. But she plucked up courage, and suddenly it seemed to her as if she were seated, as she often had been, in a boat on the lake; as if she were plying the oars with her strong arms—a furious wind resisting her progress, and the waves rushing wildly on high. But she was strong, and rowed with a steady hand, and at last conquered the wind and the waves. She stiffened her arms and clenched her fists as if to grasp the oars more firmly.

The servant soon returned, and held the door open while Doctor Sixtus and Walpurga entered a large, well-lighted apartment. A tall, thin lady, clad in a dress of black satin, was seated in an arm-chair near the table. She arose for a moment, but resumed her seat immediately. It is no trifling matter to be first lady of the bedchamber at the birth of a crown prince. This had been a great day with Countess Brinkenstein. Her name had been inscribed for all time in the great official record of the day.

Although she always judged her actions by a severe standard, she had reason to be satisfied with herself that day. While the court and capital were all commotion, she had been perfectly calm. She had kept up the dignity of the court and, moreover, of the king, who had shown himself strangely weak and excited.

She was resting on her laurels. One circumstance had greatly vexed her and had not yet been dismissed from her mind; but as she had a firm will, she controlled her feelings. She was always self-possessed, because she always knew just what was to be done.

To have waited so long before securing a nurse was a thing unheard of. Many had offered themselves, and, among them, some who belonged to good families; that is, of the nobility who had married lower officials. Countess Brinkenstein regarded the queen's resolve that the nurse must be of the common people—a peasant woman, indeed—as overstrained fastidiousness; there could be no harm in referring to princely errors in such terms. The preserver of decorum was therefore determined to assume the responsibility of filling the post with a nurse of her own choice, when the doctor's telegram, informing them that he had secured the ideal peasant woman, was received. Her displeasure at the queen's behavior was now transferred to the peasant woman, who was as yet a stranger to her, and who would, in all likelihood, bring trouble into the palace. But, after all, what were rules and regulations made for? By consistently observing them, all would yet be well.

When the peasant woman was announced, Countess Brinkenstein arose, her stern features softened by the noble thought that this poor woman ought not to suffer because of the queen's newly acquired love for the people; a love which would only render its objects the more unhappy and discontented.

The doctor presented Walpurga, and spoke of her in such terms that she cast down her eyes, abashed at his praise.

Addressing Countess Brinkenstein in French, he told her how difficult it had been to secure this, the fairest and best woman in the Highlands. Answering in the same tongue, the countess congratulated him upon his success and commented on Walpurga's healthy appearance. Finally she inquired, still in French:

"Has she good teeth?"

The doctor turned to Walpurga, saying:

"Her ladyship thinks you can't laugh."

Walpurga smiled, and the countess praised her perfect teeth. She then touched the bell on the table and a lackey appeared.

"Tell privy councilor Gunther," said she, "that I await him here, and that the nurse of his royal highness has arrived."

The lackey left the room. The countess now touched the bell twice; a tall lady, advanced in years, and wearing long, corkscrew curls, appeared, and bowed so low that Walpurga imagined she intended to sit down on the floor.

"Come nearer, dear Kramer," said the countess. "This is the nurse of his royal highness; she is in your especial charge. Take her to your room and let her have something to eat. What shall it be, doctor?"

"Good beef broth will do very well."

"Go with Kramer," said the countess, addressing Walpurga, and smiling graciously. "Whenever you want any thing, dear child, ask her for it. God be with you!"

The lady with the corkscrew curls, offering her hand to Walpurga, said: "Come with me, my good woman."

Walpurga nodded a grateful assent.

And so, after all, there was some one to take her by the hand and speak German to her. And they were kind words, too, for the old lady had addressed her as "dear child," and mademoiselle as "my good woman." While they were speaking French, it had seemed as if she were betrayed, for she could not help feeling that they were talking of her. Mademoiselle Kramer now conducted her to the second room beyond.

"And now let me bid you welcome!" said the lady, while her homely face suddenly acquired a charming expression. "Give me both hands. Let us be good friends, for we'll always be together, by day and by night! They call me the chief-stewardess."

"And I'm called Walpurga."

"A pretty name, too! I think you'll keep it."

"Keep my name! Why, who can take it from me? I was christened Walpurga, and I've been called so ever since childhood."

"Don't agitate yourself, dear Walpurga," said the stewardess, with much feeling. "Yes, pray be calm," added she, "and whenever anything displeases you, tell me of it, and I'll see that it is remedied. You ought to be contented and happy always; and now, sit in this arm-chair, or if you'd rather lie on the sofa and rest yourself, do so. Make yourself perfectly at home."

"This will do very well," said Walpurga, ensconcing herself in the great arm-chair and resting her hands upon her knees. Mademoiselle Kramer now ordered one of the serving-maids to bring in some good beef broth and wheaten bread for the nurse. Turning toward Walpurga, she saw that she was crying bitterly.

"For God's sake, what's the matter? You're not frightened or worried about anything? What are you crying for?"

"Let me cry. It does me good. My heart's been heavy for ever so long. I suppose you'll let me cry when I can't help it. I didn't know what I was doing when I said 'yes.' God's my witness, I never thought it would be like this!"

"What has happened? Who has done anything to you? For God's sake, don't cry; it will do you harm, and I'll be reprimanded for having allowed it. Just tell me what you want; I'll do all I can for you."

"All I want of you is to let me cry. Oh, my child! Oh, Hansei! Oh, mother! – But now I'm all right again. I'll be calm. I'm here now, and must make the best of it."

The soup was brought. Mademoiselle Kramer held a spoonful to Walpurga's lips, and said:

"Take something, my dear, and you'll soon feel better."

"I don't want any broth. Am I to be treated as if I were sick, and forced to eat what I don't like? If there was any one in the house who could make porridge, I'd rather have that than anything else. I'll go into the kitchen and make some myself."

Mademoiselle Kramer was in despair. To her great relief, there was a knock at the door. Doctor Gunther, the king's physician, entered, accompanied by Doctor Sixtus. He held out his hand to the nurse, and said:

"God greet you, Walpurga of the cottage by the lake! You've made a good catch in coming to this house. Don't be alarmed by the ways of the palace, and do just as you would at home. Take my word for it, water is needed for cooking, all the world over. The folks here are just as they are in your neighborhood-just as good and just as bad; just as wise and just as stupid; with this difference, however-here they know how to hide their wickedness and stupidity."

Doctor Gunther had, in part, used the Highland dialect while addressing her, and her face suddenly brightened.

"Thank you! thank you! I'll remember what you tell me," said she, cheerfully.

Mademoiselle Kramer now introduced the great question of the day-beef broth or porridge. Doctor Gunther laughed, and said:

"Why porridge, to be sure; that's the best. In fact, Walpurga, all you need do is to say what you've been used to at home, and you shall have it here, provided it is neither sour nor fat."

Addressing his colleague, he added:

"We'll keep the nurse on her accustomed diet for the present, and afterward can gradually bring about a change. Come here, Walpurga, and let me look into your eyes. I've something to tell you. In a quarter of an hour from now, you're to appear before the queen. Don't be alarmed, no one will harm you. She merely wishes to see you. Don't fail to prove that your eyes are right, when they say they belong to a clever head. Address the queen calmly, and if, as is quite likely, you still feel a homesick yearning for your child and the others you've left behind you, don't show it while you are with the queen. You might cause her to weep and make her ill, for she's very delicate. Do you quite understand me?"

"I do, indeed! I'll be very careful. I'll cheer her up."

"You must not do that either. Remain perfectly calm and composed; speak little, and in a low voice. Try to get out of the room as soon as you can, for she needs all the sleep she can get."

"I'll do everything just as you say. You can depend on me," said Walpurga. "Aren't you going along?"

"No; you'll meet me there. But now, take something to eat. Here comes the porridge. I hope it will do you good. You needn't eat it all; half will do for the present. But wait a little while until it cools. Come with me a moment. I suppose you're not afraid to go with me?"

"No; it seems as if I'd often heard your voice before."

"Very likely! I am also from the Highlands, and have already been in your father's house. If I am not mistaken, your mother was from our region. Was she not in service with the freehold farmer?"

"She was, indeed."

"Well then, your mother's a good woman, and don't forget to tell the queen that she's taking good care of your child. That will please her. I knew your father, too; he was a merry soul, and perfectly honest."

Walpurga felt happy to know that her parents were well thought of and that the others had heard them so favorably mentioned. If the doctor who had known her father had been that father himself, she could not have been more willing to accompany him into the adjoining room. He returned, in a few moments, and left in the company of Doctor Sixtus; and then Walpurga came, her eyes bent on the ground. When she at last looked up, she was glad there was no one in the room but Mademoiselle Kramer.

Her thoughts must have been of home, for she suddenly exclaimed:

"Dear me! I've got you, yet." She then took from her pocket the piece of bread which her mother had given her. And thus the first morsel she ate while in the palace, was brought from home, and was of her mother's baking. Her mother had told her that this would cure her of homesickness; and she really found it so, for, with every mouthful, she became more cheerful.

If seven queens were to have come just then, she would not have been afraid of them, and her crying was at an end. She ate all the crumbs that had fallen into her lap, as if they had some sacred potency. After that she tried a little of the porridge.

"Can't I go somewhere to wash my face and dress my hair?" asked she.

"Of course. Doctor Gunther has given orders that you should."

"I don't need orders for everything I do!" said Walpurga, defiantly.

Mademoiselle Kramer wanted to have her maid dress Walpurga's hair. But Walpurga would not allow it.

"No stranger's hand shall touch my head," said she.

And after a little while she presented a tidy and almost cheerful appearance.

"There, now I'll go to the queen," said she. "How do you address her?"

"Your majesty,' or, 'most gracious madam.'"

"In the prayers at church they call her the 'country's mother,'" said Walpurga, "and I like that far better. That's a glorious, beautiful name. If it were mine, no one should take it from me. And now I'll go to the queen."

"No! you must wait. You will be sent for."

"That'll suit me just as well. But I want to ask a favor of you. Call me 'Du'."¹

"Quite willingly, if the first lady of the bedchamber does not object."

"And so nothing can be done here without asking leave. But now we've done talking, let's be quiet. Ah, yes! there's one thing more. Whose picture is that hanging up there?"

"The queen's."

¹ The familiar "thou."

"Is that the queen? Oh, how lovely! But she's very young."

"Yes, she's only eighteen years old."

Walpurga gazed at the picture for a long while. Then, turning away from it, she sank on her knees beside the great chair, folded her hands and softly whispered a paternoster.

Walpurga was still kneeling, when a knock at the door was heard. A lackey entered and said: "Her majesty has sent for his royal highness's nurse."

Walpurga arose and followed the servant. Mademoiselle Kramer accompanying them.

CHAPTER X

Preceded by a servant bearing a lantern, they passed through the long, narrow, brilliantly lighted passage and ascending a staircase, reached the gallery of the royal chapel. There were cushioned chairs for the court. Walpurga looked down into the vast, dark hall. There was no light except that in the altar lamp, the rays of which faintly illumined the image of the Virgin.

"Thou art everywhere!" said Walpurga, half aloud, while she looked down into the dark church and saluted the Madonna with the Child, as familiarly as if greeting an intimate friend. A dim sense of the divine attributes of maternity, as glorified in ages of song and picture, prayer and sacrifice, filled her soul. She nodded to the picture once again, and then walked on. As uncertain of her steps as if walking on glass, she went through the throne-room, and the great ball-room. Then they passed through other apartments which, though evidently intended for more domestic uses, were without doors and were separated from each other by heavy double hangings. At last they descended a wide marble staircase with a golden balustrade. It was well-lighted and carpeted. Here there were servants and guards. They entered other apartments, which were filled with people, who paused in their eager conversation to glance at Walpurga. In the third room, Dr. Gunther advanced toward her. Taking her by the hand, he led her up to a gentleman who was attired in a brilliant uniform and wore the crosses and medals of many orders.

"This is his majesty, the king," said he.

"I know him; I've seen him before," replied Walpurga. "My father rowed him across the lake, and so did my Hansei, too."

"Then, as we have known each other so long, let us improve our acquaintance," replied the king. "And now go to the queen; but be careful not to agitate her."

He dismissed her with a gracious inclination of the head and, accompanied by Doctor Gunther and Countess Brinkenstein, whom they found in attendance, she passed through several other rooms, the heavy carpets of which deadened the sounds of their footsteps.

"Be careful not to agitate her." The words greatly troubled Walpurga. Why should she provoke the queen to anger? for that was the only meaning she could take from the word.

Although she did not know what they meant by the word, her being pushed hither and thither, up and down, through passages and rooms without number, encountering the glances of the courtiers by the way and, at last, receiving the king's warning, had had the effect of agitating her.

At last she stood at the threshold of a green apartment that appeared to her like an enchanted room, hollowed out of some vast emerald. A lamp with a green glass shade hung from the ceiling, and shed a soft, fairy-like light on the room and its inmates. And there on the large, canopied bed, with the glittering crown overhead, lay the queen.

Walpurga held her breath; a soft glow illumined the face of her who lay there.

"Have you come?" asked a gentle voice.

"Yes, my queen, God greet you! Just keep yourself quiet and cheerful. All has gone well with you, thank God!"

With these words, Walpurga advanced toward the bedside, and would not suffer Doctor Gunther nor Countess Brinkenstein to keep her back. She offered her hand to the queen. And thus two hands—one hardened by toil and rough as the bark of a tree, the other as soft as the petal of a lily—clasped each other.

"I thank you for having come. Were you glad to do so?"

"I was glad to come, but sorry to leave home."

"You surely love your child and your husband with all your heart."

"I'm my husband's wife, and my child's mother."

"And your mother nurses your child and cares for it with a loving heart?" inquired the queen.

"The idea!" replied Walpurga.

The queen did not seem to know that her answer meant: "That's a matter of course," and she therefore asked: "Do you understand me?"

"Yes, indeed; I understand German," replied Walpurga. "But Your Majesty shouldn't speak so much. God willing, we'll be together in happiness for many days to come. We'll arrange everything when we can look into each other's eyes in broad daylight, and I'll do all I can to please you and the child. I've got over my homesickness and now I must do my duty. I'll be a good nurse to your child; don't let that worry you. And now, good-night! Sleep well, and let nothing trouble you. And now let me see our child."

"Breath of my breath, it lies here, sleeping by my side. How infinite is God's grace, how marvelous are his works!"

Walpurga felt that some one was pulling at her dress, and hastily said:

"Good-night, dear queen. Put all idle thoughts away from you. This is no time to busy yourself thinking. We'll have enough to think of when the time comes. Good-night!"

"No, remain here! You must stay!" begged the queen.

"I must beg Your Majesty-" hurriedly interposed Doctor Gunther.

"Do leave her with me a little while," begged the queen, in childlike tones. "I am sure it will do me no harm to talk with her. When she drew near the bed, and I heard her voice, I felt as if a breath of Alpine air, in all its dewy freshness, was being wafted toward me. Even now I feel as if lying on a high mountain, from which I can look down into the beautiful world."

"Your Majesty, such excitement may prove quite injurious."

"Very well; I will be calm. But do leave her with me a moment longer! Let me have more light, so that I may see her."

The screen was removed from a lamp that stood on a side-table, and the two mothers beheld each other, face to face.

"How beautiful you are!" exclaimed the queen.

"That doesn't matter any longer," replied Walpurga. "God be praised, we've both got over having our heads turned by such nonsense. You're a wife and mother, and so am I."

The screen fell again; the queen, taking Walpurga's hand in hers, said in a gentle voice:

"Bend down to me, I want to kiss you-I must kiss you."

Walpurga did as she was bid, and the queen kissed her.

"You can go now. Keep yourself good and true," said the queen.

A tear of Walpurga's fell upon the face of the queen, who added:

"Don't weep! You, too, are a mother."

Unable to utter another word, Walpurga turned to go, and the queen called after her.

"What is your name?"

"Walpurga," said Doctor Gunther, answering for her.

"And can you sing well?" asked the queen.

"They say so," replied Walpurga.

"Then sing often to my child, or 'our child,' as you call him. Good-night!"

Doctor Gunther remained with the queen. It was some time before he uttered a word. He felt that he must calm her excited feelings, and he had a safe and simple remedy at command.

"I must request Your Majesty," said he, "to return my congratulations. My daughter Cornelia, the wife of Professor Korn of the university, was safely delivered of a little girl, at the very hour in which the crown prince was born."

"I congratulate the child on having such a grandfather. You shall, also, be the grandfather of our son."

"The congratulation that imposes a noble duty upon its recipient, is the best that can be given," replied Gunther. "I thank you. But we must now cease talking. Permit me to bid Your Majesty good-night!"

Gunther left the room. All was silent.

Instead of taking Walpurga back to the upper rooms, they had conducted her to a well-furnished apartment on the other side of the palace, where, to her great delight, she found Mademoiselle Kramer awaiting her.

"The queen kissed me!" exclaimed she. "Oh, what an angel she is! I'd no idea there were such creatures in the world."

Some time later, when the queen had fallen asleep, two women brought a gilded cradle into Walpurga's room.

When they took the child from the bed, the queen, as if conscious of what was being done, moved in her sleep.

Before taking the child to her bosom, Walpurga breathed upon it thrice. It opened its eyes and looked at her, and then quickly closed them again.

Throughout the palace, all was soon hushed in silence. Walpurga and the child by her side were asleep. Mademoiselle Kramer sat up during the night, and, in the antechamber on either side, there were doctors and servants within call.

CHAPTER XI

In the village by the lake, or, to speak more correctly, in the few houses clustered near the Chamois inn, Walpurga's strange and sudden departure caused great commotion.

All hurried toward the inn. The innkeeper assumed a wise air and desired it to be understood that he knew far more than people gave him credit for. The whole affair was, of course, of his planning; for had it not been proven that his acquaintance included even the king himself.

Immediately after Walpurga's departure, he urged Hansei to accompany him to the Chamois, for he well knew that his presence there would prove a far greater attraction than a band of musicians.

Hansei would not go at once, but promised to follow soon afterward. He could not leave home just then.

He went through the whole house, from cellar to garret. Then he went out into the stable, where, for a long while, he watched the cow feeding. "Such a beast has a good time of it, after all," thought he; "others have to provide for it, and wherever it finds a full crib, it is at home."

He went into the room and, silently nodding to the grandmother, cast a hurried glance at the slumbering child. He seated himself near the table and, resting his elbows thereon, buried his face in his hands.

"It still goes," said he, looking up at the Black Forest clock that was ticking on the wall. "She wound it up before she left."

He went out and sat down on the bench under the cherry-tree. The starlings overhead were quite merry, and from the woods a cuckoo called: "Yes, he goes away, too, and leaves his children to be brought up by strangers."

Hansei laughed to himself, and looked about him. Had the wife really gone? She must still be sitting there! How could those who belong together be thus parted?

He kept staring at the seat next to him, – but she was not there.

Half the village had gathered before the garden gate. Young and old, big and little, stood there, gazing at him.

Wastl (Sebastian), the weaver, who had for many years been a comrade of Hansei's, and had worked with him in the forest, called out:

"God greet you, Hansei! Your bread has fallen with the buttered side up."

Hansei muttered sullen thanks. Suddenly, there was a great peal of laughter. No one knew who had been the first to utter the word "he-nurse." It had been rapidly and quietly passed from one to another through the crowd, until it at last reached Thomas, Zenza's son—a bold, rawboned fellow, whose open shirt revealed a brawny chest.

"Walpurga's the crown prince's *she*-nurse, and Hansei's the *he*-nurse."

Wastl opened the gate and entered the garden, the whole crowd following at his heels. They went through garden, house and stable; peeped through the windows, smelled at the violets on the window-shelf, and sat down on the kindling-wood that lay under the shed. The house seemed to have become the property of the whole village. When joy or sorrow enters a home, all doors are open, and the rooms and passages become as a public highway.

"What do they all want?" inquired Hansei of Wastl, who had sat down beside him on the bench.

"Nothing! All they've come for is to see for themselves that the whole thing's true, so they can tell others about it. But they're all pleased with your good luck."

"My good luck! Well, I suppose it had to be," said Hansei, in a tone scarcely suggestive of happiness. "Wastl, it seems as if nothing is to go right with me. I'd just begun to think that everything would go on smoothly as it had been doing, and now, all at once, I've got to climb another mountain. But you're single and, of course, you can't know how I feel."

"It's very good of you to be so fond of your wife."

"My wife? So fond?"

"I know how you must feel."

Hansei shook his head with an incredulous air.

"Cheer up!" said Wastl. "Many a husband would be glad to be rid of his wife for a year."

"For a year."

"The longer the better, some would say," thought Wastl. "But your wife will come back again and turn your cottage into a palace, and then you'll be king number two!"

Hansei laughed loudly, although he was not in a laughing mood. He felt as if he must go out into the forest, where he should neither hear nor see anything of the world. Confound it all! Why did the wife leave? Was it for this that we married and pledged ourselves to be one for life, come weal come woe?

But Hansei could not get away. Half the village had gathered about him. All spoke of his good-fortune. The owner of the great farm up the road, he who was known as the Leithof bauer, even stopped his team at the garden gate and alighted in order to shake hands with Hansei and wish him joy.

"If you'd like to buy the meadow next to your garden, I'll sell it to you. It's a little too far off for me," said the Leithof bauer. The joiner who lived in the village, and who had long been anxious to emigrate, quickly said:

"You'll do far better if you buy my house and farm. I'll let you have them dirt cheap."

The starlings up in the tree could not out-chatter these people. Hansei laughed heartily. Why, this is splendid! thought he. The whole world comes to offer me house and farm, field and meadow.

"You were right, Walpurga!" said he suddenly. The people stared, first at him and then at each other, and did not know what to make of him.

He stretched his limbs, as if awaking from sleep, and said:

"Many thanks, dear neighbors. If I can ever repay you, in joy or in sorrow, I'll surely do so. But now, I'll make no change; no, I shant move a nail in the house till my wife comes back."

"Spoken like a man, good and true," said the Leithof bauer, and greater praise could befall no one, than to be thus spoken of by the wealthiest farmer in the neighborhood.

"Would you like to look at my cow?" said Hansei, beckoning to the Leithof bauer, who now seemed the only one on a level with himself.

The Leithof bauer thanked him, but had no time to stop. Before taking his leave, he assured Hansei that he would willingly advise him how to put out his money safely.

His money? Where could it be? Hansei trembled with fear and pressed his hands to his head—he had lost the roll of money! Where was it? He plunged his hand into his pocket. The roll was still there! And now that his hand again clutched it, he was quite affable to those who still remained, and had a kind word for every one.

At last, the villagers had all left, and Hansei could think of nothing better to do than to climb up into his cherry-tree—the true friend that would never desert him, and would give as long as it had aught to give.

He plucked and ate lots of cherries, while he looked at the telegraph wire, and thought: It runs into the palace and I could talk to my wife through it, if I only knew how. He bent forward until he could touch the wire, and having done so, quickly withdrew his hand, as if frightened.

Suddenly he heard a voice calling to him:

"Hansei! where are you?"

"Here I am."

"Come along!" was the answer. It was the priest who had called to him.

Hansei hurried down from the tree and now received the greatest honor that had yet been paid him. The priest beckoned to him, and Hansei approached, hat in hand.

"I wish you joy!" said the priest. "Come along to the inn; the host of the Chamois has opened a fresh tap."

Hansei looked at himself to see what had come over him. To think of the priest's inviting him to walk with him, and to drink in his company, too!

He received the new honor with dignity. While he walked with the priest, the people whom they met along the road would lift their hats and he would acknowledge their greetings quite affably.

In the large room at the Chamois, where every one was either talking to or of him, he felt so happy that he opened the roll of money, without, however, removing it from his pocket. He meant to offer the first piece to the priest, so that he might say a mass for Walpurga. But the pieces were so large. They were all crown thalers. And so Hansei merely said:

"I wish you'd say a mass for my wife and child. I'll pay you."

It was already twilight. The guests gradually departed. But Hansei remained sitting there, as if rooted to the spot. At last, he and the inn-keeper were the only ones in the room.

"Now that they've all had a talk at you," said the innkeeper, "you may as well listen to me. No one means it as kindly with you as I do, and I'm not a fool, either. Do you know what would suit you, Hansei, and would suit your wife still better?"

"What?"

"This is the place for you, – you and your wife! I've been landlord long enough. When your wife comes back, you can say 'good-night' to your cottage and settle yourselves here, where you'll find a good living for your children and your grandchildren. We won't talk about it now; but don't commit yourself to anything else. I'm your best friend; I think I've proved that, this very day. I don't care to make a penny by the affair-quite the contrary."

Oh, how kind they are when all goes well with one!

Hansei sat there for a long while, looking into his glass, and endeavoring to satisfy himself as to who he really was. Then he began to think of his wife again: where she might be, and how it was with her. If he could only go to sleep that very moment and remain asleep until the year was out; but to sit and wait... He looked up at the clock; it was just striking ten.

"How often you'll have to strike ten before we meet again," thought he to himself.

Hansei almost staggered as he walked through the village. The people who were sitting at their doors, or standing about, saluted him and wished him joy, and he well knew that, far away among the mountains, all were speaking of his good luck. He felt as if he must cut himself into a thousand pieces in order to thank them all.

He was standing near his garden and looking at the hedge. How long was it since he, who had never before known a spot which he could call his home, had prized himself as ever so happy in the possession of a little property! And now the grandmother was sitting in the house, and he heard her singing his child to sleep:

"If all the streams were naught but wine,
And all the hills were gems so fine,
And all were mine:
Yet would my darling treasure be
Dearer far than all to me.

"And since we needs must part,
One more kiss before I start.
Thou remain'st, but I must leave,
And parting sore the heart doth grieve;
But, though life drags, we'll not despond,
For longer far is the life beyond."

"But though life drags, we'll not despond, For longer far is the life beyond." The words sank deep into Hansei's heart, and the fireflies flitting about in the darkness, or resting on fence and grass, drew his glance hither and thither, as if they were some new and startling phenomenon. Hansei's waking dream continued for some time, and when he, at last, passed his hand over his face, it was wet with the dew. He felt as if some one must carry him into the house and put him to bed. But a sudden turn caused the roll of money to touch his hip, and he was wide awake again. He walked far out along the road, in the same direction that Walpurga had gone, and at last reached the pile of stones on which she had rested a fortnight ago. There was still some hay lying there. He sat down upon it and gazed out at the broad lake, over which the moon shed its bright rays. It was just as quiet as it had been a fortnight before; but that was in the daytime, and now it was night. "Where can my wife be now?" said he, springing to his feet, so that he might run to her, though it took the whole night. "How glad she will be to have me come to the palace the very first morning she is there!" With giant strides he hurried on. But he could not help asking himself: "How will it be if you have to leave again to-morrow, and what will the folks at home say, and what will grandmother think, left all alone with the child?"

And yet he walked on. Suddenly, he became alarmed at the thought of the money on his person. The neighborhood was safe enough, to be sure. It was long since any crime had been heard of in that region. But still there might be robbers, who, after helping themselves to his treasure, would murder him, and throw him into the lake... Tortured by fear, he hurriedly turned about and ran toward home.

Advancing toward him, he beheld a figure of threatening aspect. He grasped the knife in his belt-"If there's only one, and no other's lying in wait, I'm man enough to defend myself," thought he.

The figure advanced, greeting him from afar. The voice was that of a woman. Could Walpurga have-No, that were impossible.

The figure halted. Hansei advanced toward it and said: "Oh! is it you, Esther, out on the road so late?"

"And is this you, Hansei?" said Black Esther, laughing heartily. "I thought it was some drunken fellow, because I heard you, a great way off, talking to yourself. But, of course, now you're lonely enough, I suppose."

"Do you walk in the woods so late at night, and all alone?"

"I must go alone, if no one goes with me," said Black Esther, with a laugh that fell harshly upon the silent night. There was a pause. Hansei could hear the beating of his heart. Perhaps it was caused by his rapid walking.

"I must go home," said he, at last. "Good-night."

Laying her hand on his shoulder, Black Esther said:

"Hansei, I'm not used to begging and, if it were day, I'd rather starve than ask you for anything. But now, you've a good heart and are doing well; give me something, or lend it to me. I'll give it back to you again." She spoke so persuasively that Hansei trembled. Her hand still rested upon him; he was about to feel in his pocket for the crown thaler he had saved from the priest, when he suddenly pushed her hand from his shoulder, and said: "I'll give you something another time." He then ran off toward home. Her shrill laughter rang in his ears, and it sounded as if hundreds of voices were answering from the rocks. His hair stood on end and he felt, by turns, as if shivering with cold and burning with fever. She must surely have been one of the forest demons, who had merely assumed the form of Black Esther. And there really were such beings, for the old forest inspector had, on his deathbed, confessed to having seen one. They wander about when the moon is at its full. Instead of wearing clothes, they merely wind their long hair about their bodies, and on such a night as this, when the mother is away from her child, they can-

Hansei had never before run so fast, or found the road by the lake so long, as on this very night.

He reached home at last and, as if to assure himself that the house was still there, touched the walls with his hands. Nothing had been disturbed. All was as he had left it.

He went indoors. The light in the room was still burning. The grandmother was sitting on a low stool, and had the child on her lap. With one hand, she hid her eyes—they were red with weeping; with the other, she motioned Hansei to step lightly.

Hansei did not observe that there had been, and still was, something wrong with his mother-in-law. He had taken a seat behind the table, was thinking of no one but himself, and felt as tired and ill at ease as if he had just returned from a long and dangerous journey. He was even obliged to remind himself that, although he was at home, it was no longer the right sort of a home. The grandmother placed the child in the cradle and sat down, resting her chin upon her closed hand. Thoughts far different from Hansei's had passed through her mind. Stasi had remained with the grandmother for some time after Hansei left the house. How it would fare with Walpurga, was a topic of but short duration with them; for what could they say, or know, about that? When it began to grow dark, Stasi spoke of going, and promised to come again the next day. The grandmother nodded assent. She preferred being alone, for then there would be nothing to prevent her thinking of her child. Her prayers followed Walpurga; but the words flowed forth so easily that her mind was elsewhere much of the time. Her first thought was: Walpurga must be saying the same prayer and, although every word lengthens the distance between us, we are together in spirit, nevertheless. She felt happy that Walpurga had turned out so well in all things, and that she could be depended upon. It was hard to be among strangers; but they were men and women, after all. At times, her heart would misgive her, lest Walpurga should not be able to hold out to the end. She has lots of good notions—if she only thinks of them at the right time. "For my sake, if for nothing else, you'll keep yourself pure," said she aloud, as she ended her prayer. All at once, she felt so lonely and forlorn. She had never passed a night without Walpurga, and, looking up at the stars, she wished it were day again. Hansei might just as well have remained at home; still, it was a great honor to be invited by the priest. He'll surely send home a schoppen of wine to gladden grandmother's heart; and if it be only half a schoppen, it'll show his good heart. Her tongue seemed as if parched; she thirsted for the wine, and listened for a long while, in the vain hope that she might hear the footsteps of the innkeeper's servant, bringing the bottle under her apron. At last, pity for herself made her indescribably miserable, and she burst into tears. Oh, that her husband were still alive! A poor widow woman is always expected to be at hand, but no one thinks of how it fares with her. Tears came to her relief; for, after a little while, she said to herself: "What an awful sinner you are! Isn't it enough to have clothes and food and a home, and never to hear a harsh word? You ought to be thankful that you're still active enough to be of use to others."

As if ashamed of herself, she turned away, wiped the tears from her furrowed face, and then sang cheerful songs to the child. Then she waited silently, until Hansei, at last, returned. And thus he found her, seated beside the cradle and resting her chin upon her clenched hand.

"Where have you been so long?" asked the grandmother, in a low voice.

"I hardly know, myself."

"Walpurga must be in bed by this time."

"Very likely; they can travel fast, four-in-hand."

"Do you hear the cow lowing? The poor beast isn't used to be alone and, this very evening, the butcher drove her calf by the stable. It's awful to hear her moan. Do go and look after her."

Hansei went out to the stable, and the cow became perfectly quiet. He walked away, and she began lowing again. He returned and spoke to her kindly. As long as he talked to her and kept his hand upon her back, she was quiet; but as soon as he left her, she would low more piteously than before. In despair, he was constantly going back and forth, between the room and the stable. He returned several times, gave her some fodder, and then sat down on a bundle of hay. At last the cow lay down and slept, and Hansei, overcome with fatigue, also fell asleep. Indeed, few had ever gone through so much in one day as our poor Hansei had.

CHAPTER XII

When Walpurga awoke next morning, she fancied herself at home, and looked at the strange surroundings as if it were all a dream that would not vanish at her bidding. She gradually realized what had happened. Closing her eyes again, she said her prayers and then boldly looked about her; the same sun that shone on the cottage by the lake, shone on the palace, too.

Full of fresh courage, she arose.

She lay at the window for a long while, looking at the scene so strange to her.

She saw nothing of the bustling city. The palace square, encircled by thick, bushy orange-trees, was far removed from the noise of the streets. At the palace gate, two soldiers, with their muskets at rest, were seen marching up and down.

But Walpurga's thoughts wandered homeward. In her mind's eye, she saw the cottage by the lake and all within its walls. In fancy, she heard the crackling of the wood with which her mother kindled the fire, and saw the lamp which she took from the kitchen-shelf. We have milk in the house, for we've got a cow. Mother will be glad to go milking again. I'm sure they never light a fire at home without thinking of me. And the chattering starlings, up in the cherry-tree, are saying:

"Our goodwife is gone; a cow has taken her place."

Walpurga smiled and went on thinking to herself: My Hansei's oversleeping himself this morning. If you didn't call him, he'd sleep till noon; he never wakes of himself. She hears her mother calling: "Get up, Hansei; the sun is burning a hole in your bed!" He gets up and washes his face at the pump, and now she sees them at their meal; the child is fed with good milk. If I'd only taken a good look at the cow! And now Hansei is getting fodder for it from the innkeeper. If he only doesn't let the rogue cheat him; and Hansei will feel more forlorn than the child; but, thank God, he has work enough to keep him busy. It's fishing time, and so he doesn't go into the woods. I see him jump into his boat; what a noise he makes! The oars are plashing, and away he rows to catch what fish he can.

Walpurga would have gone on picturing to herself her home at noon and at evening. Suddenly, she felt as if she had lost her reason. Absence and death are almost one and the same. You can have no idea of how it will be one hour after your death; you cannot imagine yourself out of the world. Her head swam and, as if startled by an apparition, she turned to Mademoiselle Kramer, and said:

"Let's talk!"

Mademoiselle Kramer required no second hint, and told Walpurga that every one in the palace knew of the queen's having kissed her the night before, and that it would be in all the newspapers of the next day.

"Pshaw!" said Walpurga; whereupon Mademoiselle Kramer declared that, although it made no difference in her case, it was highly improper to answer in that way, and told her, also, that she ought always express herself distinctly and in a respectful manner.

Walpurga looked up and listened, as if waiting for Mademoiselle Kramer to continue and, at last, said: "My dear father once said almost the very same thing to me; but I was too young to understand it then. All I meant to say was, that the city people must have very little to do, if they can make a fuss about such a matter" – mentally concluding her remarks with another "pshaw!"

The little prince awoke. Walpurga took him up and speedily put him to sleep, while she sang in a clear voice:

"Ah, blissful is the tender tie
That binds me, love, to thee,
And swiftly speed the hours by
When thou art near to me."

When she had finished her song, and had placed the child in the cradle, she looked toward the door and beheld the king and Doctor Gunther standing there.

"You sing finely," said the king.

"Pshaw!" said Walpurga, and, acting as her own interpreter, she quickly added, while casting a hurried glance at Mademoiselle Kramer: "It's good enough for home use, but not particularly fine."

The king and Doctor Gunther were delighted with the appearance of the child.

"The day on which one beholds his child for the first time is a red-letter day," observed the king; and Walpurga, as if to confirm what he had said, added:

"Yes, indeed; that makes one look at the world with different eyes. His majesty told the truth that time."

Although her remark caused the king to smile, it was received in silence. Accompanied by Doctor Gunther, he soon left the room. After they had gone, Mademoiselle Kramer endeavored, as delicately as possible, to impress Walpurga with the importance of observing the first commandment:

"You must not speak to their majesties, unless they ask you a question."

"That's sensible," exclaimed Walpurga, to the great surprise of Mademoiselle Kramer. "That prevents you from hearing anything out of the way. What a clever idea! I won't forget that."

During breakfast, in the pavilion, it was plainly to be seen that Mademoiselle Kramer, and perhaps Walpurga, too, had spoken truly. The various groups on the veranda and under the orange-trees were engaged in what seemed to be confidential conversation. After they had sounded each other, and had satisfied themselves that they could safely indulge in scandal, the common topic was the manner in which the queen's sentimentality had manifested itself in her behavior toward the nurse. It was agreed that this mawkishness was an unfortunate legacy from the house of – . Some even went so far as to say that Countess Brinkenstein was quite ill with anger at the queen's disregard of etiquette.

"The queen's conduct deprives her favors of their value," said an elderly court lady, who must have had at least a pound and a half of false hair on her head.

"Nothing is so great a bore as mawkish sensibility," observed another one of the ladies attached to the palace. She was corpulent, and piously inclined withal. As if to cover her ill-natured remark with the mantle of charity, she added:

"The queen isn't much more than a child, and really means well at heart."

She had thus made herself safe with both parties—those who praised, and those who abused the queen.

"You look as if you had slept but little," said an elderly lady, addressing a very young and pale-looking one.

"You are right," sighed the latter, in reply. "I sat up to read the last volume of – " giving the name of a recent unequivocal French novel—"and finished it at a single sitting. I shall return the book to you to-day. It is very interesting."

"Please let me have it next," resounded from several quarters at once.

The pious lady, who had, indeed, read the novel in secret and was loth to talk of such subjects, changed the conversation by introducing the topic of Walpurga. As the latest piece of news, she acquainted them with the report that the nurse could sing beautifully.

"Who sings beautifully?" inquired Countess Irma, joining the group.

"This will interest you, dear Wildenort. You will be able to learn many new songs from Walpurga, and accompany them on the zither."

"I'll wait until we are in the country again. A peasant woman seems strangely out of place in a palace. When does the court return to the country?"

"Not for six weeks."

There was much talk about Walpurga. One lady maintained that Doctor Gunther was a native of the Highlands, and that it was only through his intriguing that a nurse had to be brought from the same region; that he was constantly surrounding himself with allies, and was clever enough to know

that this person would exert a great influence upon the queen. They also spoke of the doctor's love of intrigue, and of his affecting to sympathize with the queen in all her extravagant fancies. Of one thing they all felt assured: that it was impossible to retain the favor of the court for so long a time, by fair means alone.

"The doctor isn't so very old," remarked a very thin lady. "He is only a little over fifty. I think he must have dyed his hair white, in order to appear venerable before his time."

Loud laughter greeted this sally.

Before breakfast, the ladies and gentlemen were in separate groups. A knot of courtiers were discussing the telegrams which had been sent out to various governments, and to which, in some instances, replies had already been received.

It was not until after breakfast that a council of the royal household was to determine who, besides the queen's parents, should be invited to stand as sponsors. It was even reported that the christening would be celebrated by a special papal nuncio, assisted by the bishop.

Countess Irma's brother, the king's aid-de-camp, again diverted the conversation from such lofty topics back to Walpurga. He extolled her beauty and her droll ways, and they smacked their lips, when they spoke of the queen's kiss. The aid-de-camp had given vent to a joke on the subject, at which they laughed uproariously.

"The king!" suddenly whispered several of the gentlemen.

They separated and, while making their obeisance, arranged themselves in two rows. The king, acknowledging their salutation, passed between the rows and entered the hall of Diana, where breakfast was served. The frescoes on the ceiling represented the goddess with her hunting train, and had been painted by a pupil of Rubens. The lord steward handed a packet of telegrams to the king, who instructed him to open them, and inform him when they contained anything more than congratulations.

They now sat down to breakfast.

The company was not so cheerful and unconstrained as it had been at the summer palace. Indeed, no one had yet recovered from the excitement of the previous night, and conversation was carried on in a quiet tone.

"Countess Irma," said the king, "I commend Walpurga to you; she will be sure to please you. You will be able to learn some beautiful songs from her, and to teach her new ones."

"Thanks, Your Majesty! If Your Majesty would only deign to order the first lady of the bedchamber to grant me access, at all times, to the apartments of His Royal Highness the crown prince."

"Pray see to it, dear Rittersfeld!" said the king, turning to the lord steward.

Countess Irma, who sat at the lower end of the table, received the congratulations of all. Walpurga had become the sole topic of conversation.

The morning papers were brought to the king. He glanced through them hurriedly and, throwing them aside with an angry air, said:

"This babbling press! The queen's kiss is already in all the newspapers." His face darkened; it was evident that, as the fact itself had displeased him, the publicity given it was doubly annoying. After a time, he said:

"I desire you, gentlemen and ladies, to see to it that the queen does not hear of this." He rose quickly, and left the apartment.

The breakfast party lingered for some time, and the pious lady could now openly join the ranks of the scandalmongers. The mantle of charity was no longer necessary-it was very evident that the king had already tired of his sentimental wife.

If Countess Irma-? Who could tell but what this was part of a deep-laid plan to give her free access to the crown prince's apartments? The king could meet her there-and who knows but that-

They were quite ingenious in the malicious conjectures which they whispered to each other with great caution and circumspection. For a while, at least, Walpurga, the queen and even the crown prince were completely forgotten.

CHAPTER XIII

"There, my boy! Now you've seen the sun. May you see it for seven and seventy years to come, and when they've run their course, may the Lord grant you a new lease of life. Last night, they lit millions of lamps for your sake. But they were nothing to the sun up in heaven, which the Lord himself lighted for you this very morning. Be a good boy, always, so that you may deserve to have the sun shine on you. Yes, now the angel's whispering to you. Laugh while you sleep! That's right. There's one angel belongs to you on earth, and that's your mother! And you're mine, too! You're mine, indeed!"

Thus spake Walpurga, her voice soft, yet full of emotion, while she gazed into the face of the child that lay on her lap. Her soul was already swayed by that mysterious bond of affection which never fails to develop itself in the heart of the foster-mother. It is a noble trait in human nature that we love those on whom we can confer a kindness. Their whole life gradually becomes interwoven with our own.

Walpurga became oblivious of herself and of all that was dear to her in the cottage by the lake. She was now needed here where a young life had been assigned to her loving charge.

She looked up at Mademoiselle Kramer, with beaming eyes, and met a joyful glance in return.

"It seems to me," said Walpurga, "that a palace is just like a church. One has only good and pious thoughts here; and all the people are so kind and frank."

Mademoiselle Kramer suddenly smiled and replied:

"My dear child—"

"Don't call me 'child'! I'm not a child! I'm a mother!"

"But here, in the great world, you are only a child. A court is a strange place. Some go hunting, others go fishing; one builds, another paints; one studies a *rôle*, another a piece of music; a dancer learns a new step, an author writes a new book. Every one in the land is doing something, — cooking or baking, drilling or practicing, writing, painting, or dancing—simply in order that the king and queen may be entertained."

"I understand you," said Walpurga, and Mademoiselle Kramer continued:

"My family has been in the service of the court for sixteen generations"; — six would have been the right number, but sixteen sounded so much better; — "my father is the governor of the summer palace, and I was born there. I know all about the court, and can teach you a great deal."

"And I'll be glad to learn," interposed Walpurga.

"Do you imagine that every one is kindly disposed toward you? Take my word for it, a palace contains people of all sorts, good and bad. All the vices abound in such a place. And there are many other matters of which you have no idea and of which you will, I trust, ever remain ignorant. But all you meet are wondrous polite. Try to remain just as you now are, and, when you leave the palace, let it be as the same Walpurga you were when you came here."

Walpurga stared at her in surprise. Who could change her?

Word came that the queen was awake and desired Walpurga to bring the crown prince to her.

Accompanied by Doctor Gunther, Mademoiselle Kramer and two waiting-women, she proceeded to the queen's bedchamber. The queen lay there, calm and beautiful, and, with a smile of greeting, turned her face toward those who had entered. The curtains had been partially drawn aside and a broad, slanting ray of light shone into the apartment, which seemed still more peaceful than during the breathless silence of the previous night.

"Good-morning!" said the queen, with a voice full of feeling. "Let me have my child!" She looked down at the babe that rested in her arms and then, without noticing any one in the room, lifted her glance on high and faintly murmured:

"This is the first time I behold my child in the daylight!"

All were silent; it seemed as if there was naught in the apartment except the broad slanting ray of light that streamed in at the window.

"Have you slept well?" inquired the queen. Walpurga was glad that the queen had asked a question, for now she could answer. Casting a hurried glance at Mademoiselle Kramer, she said:

"Yes, indeed! Sleep's the first, the last, and the best thing in the world."

"She's clever," said the queen, addressing Doctor Gunther in French.

Walpurga's heart sank within her. Whenever she heard them speak French, she felt as if they were betraying her; as if they had put on an invisible cap, like that worn by the goblins in the fairy tale, and could thus speak without being seen.

"Did the prince sleep well?" asked the queen.

Walpurga passed her hand over her face, as if to brush away a spider that had been creeping there. The queen doesn't speak of her "child" or her "son," but only of "the crown prince."

Walpurga answered:

"Yes, quite well, thank God! That is, I couldn't hear him, and I only wanted to say that I'd like to act toward the-" she could not say "the prince" – "that is, toward him, as I'd do with my own child. We began right on the very first day. My mother taught me that. Such a child has a will of its own from the very start, and it won't do to give way to it. It won't do to take it from the cradle, or to feed it, whenever it pleases; there ought to be regular times for all those things. It'll soon get used to that, and it won't harm it either, to let it cry once in a while. On the contrary, that expands the chest."

"Does he cry?" asked the queen.

The infant answered the question for itself, for it at once began to cry most lustily.

"Take him and quiet him," begged the queen.

The king entered the apartment before the child had stopped crying.

"He will have a good voice of command," said he, kissing the queen's hand.

Walpurga quieted the child, and she and Mademoiselle Kramer were sent back to their apartments.

The king informed the queen of the dispatches that had been received, and of the sponsors who had been decided upon. She was perfectly satisfied with all the arrangements that had been made.

When Walpurga had returned to her room and had placed the child in the cradle, she walked up and down and seemed quite agitated.

"There are no angels in this world!" said she. "They're all just like the rest of us, and who knows but-" she was vexed at the queen: "Why won't she listen patiently when her child cries? We must take all our children bring us, whether it be joy or pain."

She stepped out into the passageway and heard the tones of the organ in the palace chapel. For the first time in her life, these sounds displeased her. It don't belong in the house, thought she, where all sorts of things are going on. The church ought to stand by itself.

When she returned to the room, she found a stranger there. Mademoiselle Kramer informed her that this was the tailor to the queen.

Walpurga laughed outright at the notion of a "tailor to the queen." The elegantly attired person looked at her in amazement, while Mademoiselle Kramer explained to her that this was the dressmaker to her majesty the queen, and that he had come to take her measure for three new dresses.

"Am I to wear city clothes?"

"God forbid! You're to wear the dress of your neighborhood, and can order a stomacher in red, blue, green, or any color that you like best."

"I hardly know what to say; but I'd like to have a workday suit, too. Sunday clothes on week-days-that won't do."

"At court, one always wears Sunday clothes, and when her majesty drives out again you will have to accompany her."

"All right, then. I won't object."

While the tailor took her measure, Walpurga laughed incessantly, and he was at last obliged to ask her to hold still, so that he might go on with his work. Putting his measure into his pocket, he informed Mademoiselle Kramer that he had ordered an exact model, and that the chief master of ceremonies had favored him with several drawings, so that there might be no doubt of success.

Finally, he asked permission to see the crown prince. Mademoiselle Kramer was about to let him do so, but Walpurga objected. "Before the child is christened," said she, "no one shall look at it just out of curiosity, and least of all, a tailor, or else the child will never turn out the right sort of man."

The tailor took his leave, Mademoiselle Kramer having politely hinted to him that nothing could be done with the superstition of the lower orders, and that it would not do to irritate the nurse.

This occurrence induced Walpurga to administer the first serious reprimand to Mademoiselle Kramer. She could not understand why she was so willing to make an exhibition of the child. "Nothing does a child more harm than to let strangers look at it in its sleep, and a tailor at that."

All the wild fun with which, in popular songs, tailors are held up to scorn and ridicule, found vent in Walpurga, and she began singing:

"Just list, ye braves, who love to roam!
A snail was chasing a tailor home,
And if Old Shears hadn't run so fast,
The snail would surely have caught him at last."

Mademoiselle Kramer's acquaintance with the court tailor had lowered her in Walpurga's esteem, and with an evident effort to mollify the latter, she asked:

"Does the idea of your new and beautiful clothes really afford you no pleasure?"

"To be frank with you, no! I don't wear them for my own sake, but for that of others, who dress me to please themselves. It's all the same to me, however! I've given myself up to them, and suppose I must submit."

"May I come in?" asked a pleasant voice. Countess Irma entered the room. Extending both her hands to Walpurga, she said:

"God greet you, my countrywoman! I am also from the Highlands, seven hours distance from your village. I know it well, and once sailed over the lake with your father. Does he still live?"

"Alas! no; he was drowned, and the lake hasn't given up its dead."

"He was a fine-looking old man, and you are the very image of him."

"I am glad to find some one else here who knew my father. The court tailor-I meant the court doctor-knew him, too. Yes, search the land through, you couldn't have found a better man than my father, and no one can help but admit it."

"Yes: I've often heard as much."

"May I ask your ladyship's name?"

"Countess Wildenort."

"Wildenort? I've heard the name before. Yes, I remember my mother's mentioning it. Your father was known as a very kind and benevolent man. Has he been dead a long while?"

"No, he is still living."

"Is he here, too?"

"No."

"And as what are you here, Countess?"

"As maid of honor."

"And what is that?"

"Being attached to the queen's person; or what, in your part of the country, would be called a companion!"

"Indeed! And is your father willing to let them use you that way?"

Countess Irma, who was somewhat annoyed by her questions, said:

"I wished to ask you something-can you write?"

"I once could, but I've quite forgotten how."

"Then I've just hit it! that's the very reason for my coming here. Now, whenever you wish to write home, you can dictate your letter to me, and I will write whatever you tell me to."

"I could have done that, too," suggested Mademoiselle Kramer, timidly; "and your ladyship would not have needed to trouble yourself."

"No, the countess will write for me. Shall it be now?"

"Certainly."

But Walpurga had to go to the child. While she was in the next room, Countess Irma and Mademoiselle Kramer engaged each other in conversation.

When Walpurga returned, she found Irma, pen in hand, and at once began to dictate.

"Dear husband, dear mother, and dear child. No, stop! don't write that! Take another sheet of paper. Now I've got it, now you can go on."

"I wish to let you know, that by the help of God, I arrived here safe and sound, in the carriage with the four horses. I don't know how. And the queen's an angel, and there were millions of lights, and my child-"

Walpurga covered her face with both hands-she had said "my child," without knowing which child she meant.

A pause ensued.

"And my child," said Countess Irma, repeating the words after her.

"No!" exclaimed Walpurga, "I can't write to-day. Excuse me; there's no use trying. But you've promised to write for me to-morrow or the day after. Do come and see us every day."

"And shall I bring a good friend with me?"

"Of course; any friend of yours will be welcome. Isn't it so. Mademoiselle Kramer?"

"Certainly; Countess Irma has special permission."

"I'll bring a very good friend with me; she can sing charmingly, and her voice is soft and gentle-but I'll not torment you with riddles; I play the zither, and will bring mine with me."

"You play the zither?" exclaimed Walpurga, scarcely able to contain herself for joy.

Any further expressions on her part were prevented by the presence of the king, who entered at that moment.

With a gentle inclination of the head, he greeted Countess Irma, who had risen from her seat and bowed so low that it seemed as though she meant to sit down on the floor.

"What are you writing?" asked the king.

"Walpurga's secrets, may it please Your Majesty," replied Countess Irma.

"The king may read all that's there," said Walpurga, handing him the sheet.

He hurriedly ran his eye over it, and then, with a glance at the countess, folded it and put it in his breast pocket.

"I shall sing with Walpurga," said Irma, "and Your Majesty will again observe that music is the highest good on earth. Singing together, Walpurga and I are equals. The creations of other arts, poetry especially, may be translated by every one into his own language, according to the measure of his knowledge and experience."

"Quite true," replied the king; "music is the universal language, the only one that requires no translation, and in which soul speaks to soul."

While they were thus talking, Walpurga stared at them in dumb amazement.

The king, accompanied by Countess Irma, looked at the prince for a little while, and then, having said: "The christening will take place next Sunday," he withdrew.

It was with a strange expression that Walpurga's eyes followed the king and then rested in earnest gaze upon Countess Irma.

The countess busied herself with the papers, and then, with cheerful voice, took leave of Walpurga. Her cheerfulness almost seemed constrained, for she laughed while there was nothing to laugh at.

For a long while, Walpurga stood looking at the curtains, behind which the countess had disappeared, and at last said to Mademoiselle Kramer:

"You told the truth, when you said that the palace isn't a church."

She did not enter into any further explanation.

"I will teach you how to write," said Mademoiselle Kramer; "it will be pleasant employment for us, and you will then be able to do your own writing to your family."

"Yes, that I will," said Walpurga.

CHAPTER XIV

"I want to ask a favor of you," said Walpurga to Countess Irma, the next day. "Always tell me frankly whenever I do anything wrong."

"Quite willingly; but, in return, you must always tell me when I-"

"Then I've something on my heart, this very moment."

"Speak out."

"Some time when we're alone together, I will."

"Pray, dear Kramer, would you oblige me by retiring for a few moments?"

Mademoiselle Kramer went into the adjoining room, and Walpurga could not help feeling astonished when she observed how, in the palace, people were pushed hither and thither, just like so many chairs.

"And now, what is it?" inquired the countess.

"You won't think ill of me, if I say anything foolish; you're sure you won't?"

"What is it?" asked Irma again.

"You're so beautiful, so very beautiful; more so than any one I've even seen; you're even more beautiful than the queen-no, not more beautiful, but more powerful, and your eyes are full of kindness-"

"Well what is it? speak out."

"I'd rather think I'm wrong; but it's best to feel sure. Well, I didn't like the way you and the king looked at each other yesterday; while your hand was on the cradle-rail, he placed his upon it; and he's a husband and a father. You're an unmarried girl, and don't know what it means when a man looks at you in that way; but I'm a married woman, and it's my duty to warn you. You said that we'd be good friends, and now there's a chance to test our friendship."

Irma shook her head, and replied:

"You mean well enough; but you're mistaken. The king has a noble heart and, since the birth of his son, would like to make every one as happy as he is himself. He loves his wife dearly and, as you have seen for yourself, she's an angel-"

"And if she weren't an angel, she's his wife and the mother of his child, and he must be true to her; for with every glance he gives another woman he's a confounded adulterer, whose eyes ought to be put out. Look here! If I were to think that my husband could do such a thing-but the men are wicked enough to do anything-that a man could stand by the cradle of his new-born babe, and let the same eyes with which he had just been looking at his child tell another woman, 'I love you,'-if I were to think that, I'd go mad. And if a man whose hand has pressed that of a woman not his wife, can offer his hand to that wife, or touch his child's face with it, the world in which such things could happen ought to be burned up and the Lord ought to shower pitch and brimstone down on it."

"Speak softly, Walpurga; don't scream so. Don't let such words pass your lips. You are not here to look after our morals, nor is it for you to pass judgment. What do you know of the world? You've not the slightest idea of what politeness means."

Countess Irma's words were harsh and severe, and had deeply humbled Walpurga.

"Now that you know who you are and what you are about, I've something more to tell you: I forgive you for insulting the king and myself with your silly talk. If I didn't pity your ignorance, I would never speak to you again; but, as I feel kindly disposed toward you, and know that you meant no harm, I shall give you a bit of advice. No matter what may happen, don't concern yourself about it. Attend to your child, and let no one induce you to speak ill of others. Take my word for it-here, all are deceitful. They are ever ready to speak ill of one another, and unless you are very careful you'll not have a friend in the whole palace. Mind you don't forget what I've said to you. And now I must thank you once more for having spoken to me as you did. You meant it all well enough, and it is

proper that you should be perfectly frank. I shall always be your good friend. Although one treats the king respectfully, he is, nevertheless, as good as your Hansei, and I'm as good as you. And now, let's shake hands! Let bygones be bygones. Whatever you do, not a word of this to Kramer; and don't forget that, hereabouts, the walls have ears."

Without saying another word, Countess Irma began the melody of a Highland song upon her zither.

Walpurga could hardly realize what had happened to her. She was provoked at her own stupid and forward behavior, and was firmly resolved to keep her own counsel in the future.

While Irma was playing, the king again passed through the *portière* and stopped to listen. Irma did not look up; her eyes were fixed upon her zither. When she had finished, the king applauded faintly. She arose and bowed, but did not accompany the king when he went into the adjoining chamber to look at the prince.

"Your zither is in perfect tune, dear countess, but you seem to be somewhat out of tune," said the king, as he came back into the room.

"I am in tune. Your Majesty," replied Countess Irma. "I've just been playing an air to Walpurga, and it has deeply affected me."

The king left very soon afterward, and without offering his hand to the countess. Walpurga's saddest thought was that she dared not even trust Mademoiselle Kramer.

"Oh, you poor child!" said she to the prince, one day, when no one was by. "Oh, you poor, dear child! you're expected to grow up among people who don't trust each other. If I could only take you with me, what a fine boy you'd become. You're still innocent-children, until they begin to speak, are the only innocent creatures in this world. But what matters it? I didn't make the world, and needn't change it. The countess is right. I'll nurse you well, care for you tenderly, and leave the rest to God."

CHAPTER XV

"Your wish is fulfilled at last," said Countess Irma to Doctor Gunther, just as they were rising from the dinner-table.

"What wish?"

"I how have a female friend, a companion, and, in the words of the song, 'you'll ne'er find a better.'"

"Your treatment of the peasant woman is quite amiable and does you great credit, but she is not a friend. Your friend should be one who is your equal. Your relation toward this peasant woman will always be that of a patron. She never dare find fault with you, and if she were to make the attempt, you could readily silence her. Mere common-sense is defenseless against the armory of culture."

Without noticing how Irma started at these words, the doctor calmly continued:

"There's just as much difference, mentally, between yourself and such a type of popular simplicity as there is between a grown person and a child. I fear you've neglected to secure yourself a friend who is your equal in birth."

"My equal in birth? So you, too, are an aristocrat?"

The doctor explained that equality of rights could be conceded without doing away with social distinctions.

"Whenever I leave you," said Irma, her face radiant with enthusiasm—"whenever I've been under the influence of your thoughts, all that I do or attempt seems petty and trifling. At such moments, I feel just as I do after listening to glorious music, and long to accomplish something out of the usual way. I wish I were gifted with artistic talent."

"Content yourself with being one of nature's loveliest works. That's the best thing to do."

The doctor was called away.

Irma remained seated for some time, and at last repaired to her room, where she amused herself with her parrot. Then, after looking at her flowers for a while, she began to copy them in colors on a slab of marble. She evidently intended it to be a rare work. But for whom? She knew not. A tear fell on a rose, the color in which was still wet. She looked up and left her work. Then she dried the tear, and found herself obliged to paint the rose anew.

On the day before the christening, Walpurga dictated the following letter to Countess Irma:

"To-morrow will be Sunday, and I'll try to be with you, too. In thought, I'm always there. It seems as if it were seven years since I left home. The day's ever so long here, and there are more than three times as many people in the palace as could get into our church. There are lots of married servants here who have servants of their own; there are none but tall, fine-looking men in service here. Mademoiselle Kramer tells me that their lordships don't care to have any but handsome people about them; and some of them are as prim and proper as a parson. They call them lackeys, and whenever the king goes near one of them, they bow very low and double up with a snap, just like a pocket-knife. Oh, what lots of good things I have! If I could only send you some of them. I'm ever so glad that we shall go to the country palace in four weeks and stay there till autumn. But how's my child, and how goes it with Hansei and with mother, and you too, Stasi? In my sleep at night, I'm always with you. I can't sleep much, for my prince is a real night-watchman, and the king's doctor said I mustn't let him cry as much as Burgei does at home. But he has good lungs, and to-morrow is the christening. The queen's brother and his wife are to be godfather and godmother, and there'll be lots of princes and princesses besides. And I've got beautiful new dresses and two green hats with gold lace, and two silver chains for my stomacher, and I can take them all home with me when I go, but that won't be for a long while. If all the weeks are as long as last week, I'll be seven hundred years old when I get home. I'm quite lively again. But, at first, it seemed as if I could always hear the lowing of the cow in the stable.

"She who writes this is the Countess Wildenort, from over beyond the Chamois Hill; she's a very good friend of mine. She knew our dear father, too, and you, mother, know of her family.

"And I've something to tell you, Hansei. Don't have too much to do with the innkeeper; he's a rogue, and he'll talk your money out of your pocket. There are good folks and bad everywhere; at home with us and here too; and the king's doctor says you mustn't give the cow any green fodder, nothing but hay, or else the milk won't agree with the child.

"I'm learning to write. Indeed I'm learning a great many things here.

"And tell me what the people say about my leaving home so suddenly, and about my having left at all.

"But I don't care what they say. I know I've done my duty by my child; my husband, and my mother.

"And, dear mother, take a servant-girl into the house; we can afford it now.

"And, Hansei, don't let the innkeeper wheedle you out of your money. Put it out safely at mortgage, till we have enough to buy a few acres of land.

"And don't forget, Wednesday's the day on which father died; have a mass said for him.

"We've got a church in the house here, and I hear the organ every morning, while I stand in the passage. Tomorrow will be a great day, and I remain your ever faithful

"Walpurga Andermatten.

"I send you a little cap for my child; let her wear it every Sunday. A thousand greetings to all of you, from your

"Walpurga."

CHAPTER XVI

"Oh how lovely! How beautiful! – And is it all mine? – And is it you, Walpurga, of the cottage by the lake? – How proud she'll be!"

Such were Walpurga's extravagant expressions of delight, while she stood looking at herself in the full-length mirror. Mademoiselle Kramer was indeed obliged to hold her back, lest she should rush through the glass in her eager desire to embrace the figure she saw reflected in it.

The court tailor had sent home the new clothes. It was difficult to decide which was the most beautiful—the stomacher, the skirt, the collar, the shirt with the short, wide sleeves—but no! the narrow-rimmed hat, trimmed with flowers and gold lace and with gold tassels, was the most beautiful of all. It fitted perfectly, and was as light as a feather. "There, I'll just move it a little to the left. Gracious me! – Well, you are beautiful! The folks are right!" She placed her arms akimbo and danced about the room, like one possessed. And then, placing herself before the mirror, she stared into it, silently, as if lost in contemplation of her own image.

Ah, that mirror! Walpurga had never before seen her full figure, from head to foot. What could she see in the twopenny looking-glass at home? Nothing but the face and a little of the neck!

She lifted her hand to her throat. It was encircled by a necklace composed of seven rows of garnets and fastened in front with an agraffe. And how clever Mademoiselle Kramer was! How many things she could do!

She had placed a large mirror behind Walpurga, who could now see how she looked in the back, and on all sides. Oh, how clever these people are! What do they know out our way? Nothing of the world, and less about themselves!

"And this is how Walpurga looks to those who walk behind her? And so," turning herself on one side, "and so," turning again on the other. "I must say, I like your looks; you're not out of the way, at all! So that's Hansei's wife? He ought to feel satisfied with her; but then, he's good and true and has well deserved her."

Giddy with excitement, Walpurga thus talked to herself; it was the first time that she had ever seen a full length reflection of herself.

The first stranger who saw her thus was Baum.

He always wore shoes without heels and, putting down his whole foot at once, managed to step so softly that you could never know when he was coming. He always approached with a modest air, as if fearful of disturbing you, but always kept his own counsel and was an available tool, no matter what the nature of the service might be.

"Oh! how pretty!" he exclaimed, staring at her as if quite lost with admiration.

"It's nothing to you, sirrah, at any rate," said Walpurga; "you're a married man and I'm a married woman."

Assuming an air of command, and acting as if these were the first words uttered since he entered the apartment, Baum went on to say:

"It's the lord steward's pleasure that the nurse shall come to the court chapel immediately, if His Royal Highness the crown prince, is asleep. The rehearsal is about to begin."

"I've tried my clothes on," answered Walpurga.

Baum told her that it had nothing to do with trying on clothes, but that, excepting the highest personages, all who were to take part in the grand ceremonies of the morrow, were now to rehearse the order of the procession, so that there might be no confusion.

Walpurga went with Baum.

The ladies and gentlemen of the court were assembled in the throne-room. Most of them were eagerly engaged in conversation, and the confused sound of many voices was strangely echoed back from the high, vaulted ceiling. When Walpurga entered, she could hear them whispering on all sides.

Some spoke French, but others used plain German, to say that the nurse was a fine specimen of a Highland peasant woman. Walpurga had a smile for every one, and was quite unembarrassed.

The lord steward, bearing a gold-headed stick in his hand, now stationed himself on the lowest step of the throne, which had been covered with an ermine mantle. He struck the floor thrice with the stick and then held it up. Every one was provided with a printed programme, and Walpurga also received one. After reading it to the company, the lord steward enjoined its strict observance on all. The procession now moved toward the chapel, passing through the picture-gallery and the portrait-gallery, by the way. The open space before it presented the appearance of an enchanted garden. It was filled with exotic trees, and the air was laden with the odor of flowers. The chapel was also decorated with flowers and shrubbery; and the paintings on the ceiling represented angels flying about in the air.

Countess Brinckenstein, whose appearance was even more austere than on the first evening, was engrossed with her official duties; this was no time for her to be ill.

She cautioned Walpurga, who walked beside her, to be very careful how she carried the prince, and earnestly enjoined her not to withdraw her arms until she felt quite certain that the prince was safely in his godfather's arms.

"Of course I won't; I'm not that stupid," said Walpurga.

"I require no answer from you." Countess Brinckenstein was vexed at Walpurga. She was indeed displeased with the queen, who, she thought, was spoiling the poor servant, but found it more convenient to vent her resentment upon Walpurga than upon so exalted a personage as her majesty.

The various groups were chatting and laughing in as careless a tone as if they were in a ball-room instead of a church.

The lord steward, who had stationed himself at the altar, inquired whether all were in readiness.

"Yes," was answered from various quarters, amid much laughter.

Walpurga looked up at the image of the Virgin, which she had seen by the light of the everlasting lamp on the evening of her arrival, – it was the first time she saw it by daylight – and said: "Thou, too, must look on while they rehearse." She now fully understood Mademoiselle Kramer's remark that, for royalty, everything must be arranged in advance. But was it right to do so with sacred matters? It must be, thought she, or they wouldn't do it. The court chaplain was there too, but not in his ecclesiastical robes. She saw him taking a pinch from the golden snuff-box of the lord steward, with whom he was talking just as if they were in the street.

And so this is the rehearsal, thought Walpurga to herself, when Countess Brinckenstein approached and said that, as she now knew her place for the morrow, she might go. She also ordered Walpurga to wear white cotton gloves, and said that she would send her several pairs.

Walpurga went out by way of the throne-room and the picture-gallery. Without looking about her, she walked through numerous apartments, and suddenly found herself standing before a large, dark room. The door was open, but she could not see where it led to. She turned in alarm, for she had lost her way. All was silent as death. She looked out of the window and saw a street that she had never seen before. She knew not where she was, and hurried on; from a distance, she could see strange men and beasts and places on the walls, and suddenly she uttered a shriek of terror, for the devil himself, black as pitch, came toward her, gnashing his teeth.

"O Lord! Forgive me! I'll never be proud and vain again! I'll be good and honest," she cried aloud, wringing her hands.

"What are you making such a noise about? who are you?" exclaimed the devil.

"I'm Walpurga, from the lake; and I've a child and husband and mother, at home. I was brought here to be the crown prince's nurse, but indeed, I didn't want to come."

"Indeed! and so you're the nurse. I rather like your looks."

"But I don't want you, or any one else, to like my looks. I've a husband of my own and want nothing to do with other men."

The black fellow laughed heartily.

"Then what were you doing in my master's apartments?"

"Who's your master? I've nothing to do with him. I and all good spirits praise God the Lord! Speak! What is it you want of me?"

"Oh, you stupid! My master is the queen's brother. I'm his *valet de chambre*. We arrived here last evening."

Walpurga could not understand what it all meant. Luckily for her, at that moment, the duke and the king came out of the apartment.

Addressing the Moor in English, the duke inquired what had happened; answering in the same tongue, the Moor said that the peasant woman had taken him for the devil incarnate; upon hearing which, the duke and the king laughed heartily.

"What brings you here?" inquired the king.

"I lost my way, after leaving the chapel," replied Walpurga. "My child will cry. Do please show me the way back to him."

The king instructed one of the lackeys to conduct her to her apartments. While going away she overheard the uncle, who was to be chief sponsor, saying: "What a fine milch-cow you've brought from the Highlands!"

When she had returned to her room, and again beheld herself in the large mirror, she said:

"You're nothing but a cow that can chatter, and is dressed up in clothes! Well, it served you right."

CHAPTER XVII

The night was a bad one. The crown prince suffered because of the fright which the Moor had given his foster-mother. Doctor Gunther sat up all night, in the adjoining room, so as to be within ready call, and was constant in his inquiries as to Walpurga and the child. He instructed Mademoiselle Kramer never again to allow the nurse to leave the room without his permission.

To Walpurga this imprisonment was welcome, as she wished to have nothing more to do with the whole world; for the child filled her soul and, while she lay on the sofa, she vowed to God that nothing else should enter her mind. She looked at the new clothes that were spread out on the large table and shook her head; she no longer cared for the trumpery. Indeed, she almost hated it, for had it not led her into evil? and had not the punishment quickly followed?

Walpurga's sleep was broken and fitful, and whenever she closed her eyes, she beheld herself pursued by the Moor. It was not until near daybreak, that she and the child slept soundly. The great ceremony could therefore take place at the appointed time.

Baum brought the beautiful pillows and the brocaded coverlet embroidered with two wild animals. While passing Walpurga, he softly whispered:

"Keep a brave heart, so that you don't get sick again; for if you do, they will discharge you at once. I mean well by you, and that's why I say so."

He said this without moving a feature, for Mademoiselle Kramer was to know nothing of it.

Walpurga looked after him in amazement; and Baum, indeed, presented quite an odd appearance, in his gray linen undress uniform.

"And so they'll send you away when you get sick," thought she to herself. "I'm a cow. They're right, There's no longer any room in the stable for a cow that's barren."

"I and thou and the miller's cow-" said she, to the prince, as she again took him to her bosom, while she laughed and sang:

"Cock a doodle doo!
The clock strikes two;
The clock strikes four.
While all sleep and snore.

"Be it palace or cot,
It matters not,
Though they cook sour beets,
Or eat almonds and sweets-
As long as they care
For the little ones there."

Walpurga would have said and sung much more that day, were it not for the constant hurrying to and fro in the prince's apartments. Countess Brinkenstein came in person, and said to Walpurga:

"Have you not all sorts of secret charms which you place under the pillow for the child's sake?"

"Yes, a twig of mistletoe will do, or a nail dropped from a horse-shoe; I'd get them quick enough if I were at home; but I've nothing of the sort here."

Walpurga felt quite proud while telling what she knew of the secret charms; but grew alarmed when she looked at Countess Brinkenstein and saw that her face wore an expression of displeasure.

"Mademoiselle Kramer," said she, "you will be held responsible if this peasant woman attempts to practice any of her superstitious nonsense with the child."

Not a word of this was addressed to Walpurga, who had persuaded herself into believing that she was the first person in the palace, and now, for the first time, experienced the mortification of being ignored, just as if she were nothing more than empty air.

"I won't lose my temper, in spite of you. And I won't do you the favor to get sick, so that you may send me off," muttered Walpurga, laughing to herself, while the countess withdrew.

And now followed a beautiful and happy hour. Two maidens came, who dressed the prince. Walpurga also allowed them to dress her, and greatly enjoyed being thus waited upon.

All the bells, throughout the city, were ringing; the chimes of the palace tower joined in the merry din, and almost caused the vast building to tremble. And now Baum came. He looked magnificent. The richly-embroidered uniform with the silver lace, the scarlet vest embroidered with gold, the short, gray-plush breeches, the white stockings, the buckled shoes—all seemed as if they had come from some enchanted closet, and Baum well knew that he was cutting a grand figure. He smiled when Walpurga stared at him, and knew what that look meant. He could afford to wait.

"One should not attempt to reap too soon," had been a favorite saying of Baroness Steigeneck's valet, and he knew what he was about.

Baum announced a chamberlain and two pages, who entered soon afterward.

Heavy steps and words of command were heard from the adjoining room. The doors were opened by a servant and a number of cuirassiers entered the room. They were a detachment from the regiment to which the prince would belong, as soon as he had received his name.

The procession that accompanied the prince moved at the appointed hour. The chamberlain walked in advance and then came Mademoiselle Kramer and Walpurga, the pages bringing up the rear. It was fortunate for Walpurga that Baum was at her side, for she felt so timid and bashful, that she looked about her as if imploring aid. Baum understood it all and whimpered to her: "Keep up your courage, Walpurga!" She merely nodded her thanks, for she could not utter a word. Bearing the child on her arms, she passed through the crowd of cuirassiers who, with drawn swords and glittering coats of mail, stood there like so many statues. Suddenly, she thought of where she had been last Sunday at the same hour. If Hansei could only see this, too. And Franz, tailor Schenck's son, is in the cuirassiers—perhaps he, too, is among those lifeless ones; but they must be alive, for their eyes sparkle. She looked up, but did not recognize the tailor's son, although he was in the line.

The prince's train, with its escort, passed on to the so-called grand center gallery, where the procession was forming.

Walpurga had been told to seat herself with the prince on the lowest step of the throne, and when she looked about her she beheld a sea of splendor and beauty. There were richly embroidered costumes, lovely women, their heads adorned with flowers, and jewels that sparkled like dew-drops on the meadow at early morn.

"Good-morning, Walpurga! Pray don't rise," said a pleasant voice, addressing her. It was Countess Irma. But she had scarcely commenced speaking to her, when the lord steward thrice struck the floor with his gold-headed stick, the diamonds on which sparkled brightly.

A train of halberdiers, wearing gay plumes on their helmets, marched in from a side apartment. And then the king came. He carried his helmet in his left hand and at his side. His face was radiant with happiness.

At his side walked the duchess, a diamond crown on her head, and with two pages bearing her long silk train. She was followed by a numerous and brilliant suite.

Irma had hastened to her appropriate place. The bells were slowly tolling, and the procession moved. At the entrance of the palace chapel, the duchess took the child from the nurse and carried it up to the altar, where priests, clad in splendid robes, were awaiting it, and where countless lights were burning.

Walpurga followed, feeling as if bereft—not only as if the clothes had been torn from her body, but as if the body had been rent from her soul. The child cried aloud, as if aware of what was taking

place, but its voice was drowned by the tones of the organ and choir. The whole church was filled with a mighty volume of sound, which descended from the gallery and was echoed back from the floor beneath, like sullen, muttering thunder. Involuntarily, Walpurga fell on her knees at the altar—there was no need to order her to do so.

Choir, organ and orchestra burst forth with a mighty volume of sound, and Walpurga, overwhelmed with awe and surprise, imagined that the end of the world had come and that the painted angels on the ceiling, — aye, the very pillars, too—were swelling the heavenly harmonies.

Suddenly all was silent again.

The child received its names. One would not suffice: there were eight; a whole section of the calendar had been emptied for its benefit.

But from that moment until she reached her room, Walpurga knew nothing of what had happened.

When she found herself alone with Mademoiselle Kramer, she asked:

"Well, and what am I to call my prince?"

"None of us know. He has three names until he succeeds to the throne, when he himself selects one, under which he reigns, and which is stamped on the coins."

"I've something to tell you," said Walpurga, "and mind you don't forget it. You must send me the first ducat you have stamped with your name and your picture! See! he gives me his hand on it!" cried she, exultingly, when the child stretched out its little hand as if to grasp hers. "Oh, you dear Sunday child! Let the first lady of the bedchamber say it's superstition—it's true, for all. I'm a cow and you're a Sunday child, and Sunday children understand the language of the beasts. But that's only once a year—at midnight on Christmas eve. But as you're a prince, I'm sure you can do more than the rest."

Walpurga was called into the queen's apartment, the dazzling beauty of which suggested a glittering cavern in fairy-land. All was quiet; here nothing was heard of the noisy, bustling crowd overhead. The queen said:

"On that table you will find a roll containing a hundred gold pieces. It is your christening present from my brother and the other sponsors. Does it make you happy?"

"Oh, queen! If the lips on these gold pieces could speak, the hundred together couldn't tell you how happy I am. It's too much! Why, you could buy half our village with it! With that much you could buy—"

"Don't excite yourself! Keep calm! Come here, and I'll give you something else, for myself. May this little ring always remind you of me, and may your hand thus be as if it were mine, doing good to the child."

"Oh my queen! How happy it must make you to be able to speak right out when your heart is full of kind thoughts, and to have it in your power to do so many great and good actions; besides, God must love you very much, to permit so much good to be done by your hand! I thank you with all my heart! And to Him who has given it all to you, a thousand thanks!"

"Walpurga, your words do me more good than all that the archbishop and the rest of them said. I shall not forget them!"

"I don't know what I've said—but it's all your fault! When I'm with you, I-I hardly know how to say it—but I feel as if I were standing before the holy of holies in the church. Oh, what a heavenly creature you are! You're all heart! I'll tell the child of it, and though it doesn't understand what I say, it'll feel it all. From me it shall get only good thoughts of you! I beg your pardon now, if I should ever offend you, even in thought or do anything out of the way—" She could say no more.

The queen motioned Walpurga to be quiet and held out her hand to her; neither spoke another word. Angels were indeed passing through the silent room.

Walpurga went away. It was self-confidence, not boldness, that made her look straight into the faces of the courtiers whom she passed by the way. As far as she was concerned, they did not exist.

When she was with the child again, she said:

"Yes, drink in my whole soul! It's all yours! If you don't become a man in whom God and the world can take delight, you don't deserve a mother like yours!"

Mademoiselle Kramer was amazed at Walpurga's words. But the latter did not care to tell what was passing in her mind. There was perfect silence, and yet she sat there, motionless, as if she could still hear the organ and the singing of the angels.

"It isn't this that makes me so happy," said she, looking at the money once more. "It must be just this way when one gets to heaven and the Lord says: 'I'm glad you've come!' Oh, if I could only fly there now! I don't know what to do with myself."

She loosened all her clothes; the world seemed too close and confined to contain her.

"God be praised! the day's over," said she, when she lay down to rest that evening. "It was a hard day, but a beautiful one; more beautiful than I'll ever see again."

CHAPTER XVIII

(IRMA TO HER FRIEND EMMA.)

"You ask me how I like the great world. The great world, dear Emma, is but a little world, after all. But I can readily understand why they term it 'great.' It has a firmament of its own. Two suns rise daily; I mean their majesties, of course. A gracious glance, or a kind word, from either-and the day is clear and bright. Should they ignore you, the weather is dull and dreary.

"The queen is all feeling, and lives in a transcendental world of her own into which she would fain draw every one. She suggests a 'Jean Paul' born after his time, and is of a tender, clinging disposition, constantly vacillating between the dawn and twilight of emotion, and always avoiding the white light of day. She is exceedingly gracious toward me, but we cannot help feeling that we do not harmonize.

"I know not why it is, but I have of late frequently thought of a saying of my father's: 'Whenever you find yourself on friendly or affectionate terms with any one, imagine how he would seem if he had become your enemy!'

"The thought follows me like a phantom, I know not why. It must be my evil spirit.

"All here regard me as wonderfully naïve, simply because I have the courage to think for myself. I have not inherited the spectacles and tight-lacing of tradition. The world seems to follow the fashion, even in clothing the inside of their heads.

"I admire the first lady of the bedchamber most of all. She is the law incarnate, carefully covered with *poudre de riz*. The ladies here ridicule her, but I have only pity for those who are obliged to resort to the use of cosmetics. Ah, you can have no idea, my dear Emma, how stupid and bored some persons are when unable to indulge in scandal. There are but few who know how to enjoy themselves innocently. But I am forgetting that I intended to tell you about Countess Brinkenstein.

"She read me a lecture on etiquette. What a pity that I cannot give it you, word for word. She said many pretty things; for instance, – that we have as little right to doubt in matters of etiquette as in religion, that, in either case, reasoning always led to heresy and schism, and that one ought to feel happy to have the law ready made, instead of being obliged to frame it.

"Countess Brinkenstein, like Socrates the peripatetic, teaches by example. In the park of the summer palace there is a jutting rock, from the top of which a fine view can be obtained. It is protected on all sides by an iron rail. 'Do you observe, my dear countess,' said this high priest of etiquette to me—for she seems to have conceived quite an affection for your humble servant—'it is because we know there is a railing, that we feel perfectly safe here. If it were not for that, we should become too dizzy to remain. It is just the same with the laws of court etiquette; remove the railing and there will be some one falling every day.'

"The king enjoys conversing with Brinkenstein and, although decorous and dignified demeanor best pleases him, he is not averse to unconstrained cheerfulness. The queen is too serious; she is always grand organ. But one cannot dance to organ music, and as we are still young, we often feel like dancing. Brinkenstein must have commended me to the king, for he often addresses me, and in a manner that seems to say: 'We understand each other perfectly.'"

"June 1st (at night).

"It is a pity, dear Emma, that what I have written above bears no date. I have completely forgotten when I wrote it—*auld lang syne*, as it says in the pretty Scotch song.

"I feel the justice of your complaint, that my letters are written for myself and not for the one to whom they are addressed; that is, whenever I feel like writing, but not when you happen to wish

for news. But you are wrong in charging this to egotism. I am not an egotist. I am wholly absorbed by the impressions of the moment. Ah, why are you not here with me! There is not a day, not a night, not an hour- But I shall do better. That is, I mean to try, at all events.

"The king distinguishes me above all others, and I enjoy the favor of the whole court. If it were not for the demon that ever whispers to me-

"I send you my photograph. We are now wearing wings on our hats, and the feather you see on mine was taken from an eagle that the king shot with his own hand.

"Oh, what lovely days and nights we are having! If one could only do without sleep. I am giving great attention to music and sing nothing but Schumann. His music invests the soul with a magic veil, with a fire that seems to consume while it fills you with happiness, and from the spell of which none can escape, though they try ever so hard. I gladly yield to its influence. I have just been singing 'The heavens have kissed the earth.' It was late at night, and I felt as if I could go on singing forever. You know my habit of repeating the same song again and again; of all things a *pot-pourri* of the emotions is least to my liking. At last I lay down by the window-who was it that glided past? I dare not say. I do not care to know. There was a humming in the direction of the lamp on my table. A moth-fly had flown into it and had been consumed by the flame. The moth had not wished to die; it had imagined the light to be a glowing flower-cup, and had buried itself in it.

"It was a beautiful death! To die in the summer night, amid song and in the light of the fiery calyx. Good-night!"

"June 3d,

"No matter where I am or what I do, I am always excited, without knowing why. But I have it, after all. I am constantly thinking that this letter to you is still lying in my portfolio. If any one at court knew what I have written-I have already been on the point of burning these sheets. I beg of you, destroy them. You will, – will you not? or else conceal them in some safe place. I cannot help it, I must tell you all.

"The queen is very kind to me. Her present condition invests her with a touching, I might almost say, a sacred character.

"'Man is God's temple,' said the archbishop, who paid us a visit yesterday, 'and of no one is this so true as of a young mother; above all, a young royal mother.'

"What a noble thought!

"I now think quite differently of the queen. When she said to me, yesterday: 'Countess Irma, the king speaks of you with great affection, and I am very glad of it,' I thought to myself: Blessed be the etiquette that permits me to bend down before the queen and kiss her hand.

"Her hand is now quite full and round."

"June 5th,

"The most cheerful hours are those we spend at breakfast. I do not know how, after such Olympic moments, the rest can content themselves with every-day matters, for I always wing my flight into the boundless realm of music.

"The king is very kind to me. He is of a noble and earnest character. While I was walking with him in the park, yesterday, and we both kept step so beautifully, he said:

"'You seem like a true comrade to me, for we always walk together in perfect step. No woman has ever walked thus with me. With the queen I am always obliged to slacken my usual pace.'

"'That is only of late, I suppose.'

"'No, it is always so. Will you permit me, when we are alone, to address you as my good comrade?'

"We stopped where we were, like two children who have lost their way in the woods and do not know where they are.

"'Let us return,' was all I could say.

"We went back to the palace. I admire the king's self-control, for he at once entered into earnest conversation with his minister. Such self-control can only result from great education and innate mental power.

"But there is one thing more. Let me confide it to you.

"I feel sure that the queen meditates a step which must needs be fraught with evil to the king, to herself, and to who knows how many more. I would have liked to acquaint him with my fears, but I dared not speak of the queen at that time, and Doctor Gunther, the king's physician, had made me afraid to utter a word on the subject. I am talking in riddles, I know. I will explain all to you at some future day, if you remind me of it. In a few weeks, all will be decided. My lips are not sealed, for the queen has confided nothing to me. I have simply reasoned from appearances. But enough of this. I shall no longer torment you with riddles.

"My best friend, after all, is Doctor Gunther. He is great by nature, and still more so by education. He is always up to his own high standard. I have never yet seen him confused or uncertain. The old-fashioned phrase, a 'wise man,' is, indeed, applicable to him. He is not fond of so-called 'spirituality' or 'intellectuality,' for he is truly wise. He has great command of language. His hands are beautiful, almost priestly, as if formed for blessing. He never loses his equanimity and, what is best of all, never indulges in superlatives. When I once mentioned this to him, he agreed with me, and added: 'I should like to deprive the world of its superlatives for the next fifty years; that would oblige men to think and feel more clearly and distinctly than they now do.'

"Do you not, dear Emma, perfectly agree with this? Let us found an *anti-superlative* society. I admire the man, but will never be able successfully to imitate him. Through him, I have learned to believe that there have been great and wise men on earth. While yet a surgeon in the army, he was my father's friend. Afterward, he filled a professorship in Switzerland, and, for the last eighteen years, has been physician to the king. You would be delighted with him. To know him, is to enrich one's life. If I were to write down all his sayings, half the charm were lost, for you would lose the spell of his presence. He has a most convincing air and a sonorous voice, and I have heard that he used to sing very well. He is a perfect man, and loves me as if I were his niece. I shall have much more to tell you about him. Above all things, I am glad that he has a fine vein of humor. This furnishes the salt and prevents him from being included among the class of sugar-water beings.

"Colonel Bronnen is his best, perhaps his only intimate, friend, and the doctor recently told me that the colonel's manner and appearance greatly resemble that of my father while a young man."

June 15th,

"Ah, how hateful, how horrible is the thought of man's birth and death! To die-to be laid in the earth, and to know that the eyes that once glowed with life, and the lips that once smiled, are to decay. The very idea is a barbarous one. Why do we know of death? We must be immortal, or else it were terrible that we human beings should alone know that we must die. The moth-fly did not know it. It simply thought the burning light was a lovely flower, and died in that belief.

"Since last evening, we have been greatly concerned for the queen, indeed, for a double life. She was so good, so angelic. – But no, she still is, and will remain so. She will live. I have prayed for it with all my heart. Away with doubts! My prayer must avail.

"When I met the king to-day he scarcely looked at me, and it is better for me, that it should be thus. A feeling was beginning to bud within me, and now I pluck it out by the roots. It dare not be. I will be his comrade; his good, his best comrade.

"My piano, my music, my pictures, my statuettes, my bird-all seem strange to me. A human being, a two-fold life, is in mortal danger. What does all the trumpery in the world amount to now? All of it together cannot save a human life. Is original sin a truth, and is it because of that, that man must pass through the throes of death before he can behold the light?"

"I would like to read, but there is no book that can serve one in such moments. One cannot even think. Nothing, nothing can be done. All the wisdom in all the books is of no avail."

"June 16th.

"Hallelujah! I have just come from church. Oh, that my song could reach you. I have just sung the Hallelujah as if I were pouring out my whole soul to God above.

"Hallelujah!

"All is well!

"The crown prince is born!

"The queen is doing well. The king is happy! the world is bright, and the blue sky overhead is cloudless.

"God be praised, that I have so soon escaped from my perplexing doubts. Perhaps it was all imagination, after all. There was not the slightest ground for my alarm.

"I am but a silly cloister plant, after all, and do not yet understand the ways of the court. Is it not so? I see you laughing at me, and see the dimples in your cheeks. I send you many kisses. Ah, all are so good and pious, and holy, and happy, and- If I could only compose, I should produce some great work. A mute Beethoven dwells within my soul."

"July 18th.

"The crown prince's nurse is a peasant woman from the Highlands. At the king's desire, I paid her a visit. I was standing by the prince's cradle, when the king approached.

"Softly he whispered to me: 'It is indeed true; there is an angel standing by my child's cradle.'

"My hand was on the rail, and his hand rested on mine.

"The king left the room, and just imagine what happened afterward.

"The nurse, a fresh and hardy-looking peasant woman, with shrewd blue eyes-a perfect rustic beauty, indeed, to whom I had been kind in order to cheer up, and prevent her from growing homesick-now turned upon me and told me harshly, and to my face: 'You're an adulteress; you've been exchanging love-glances with the king!'

"Emma, I now feel the force of what you have often said to me: 'You idolize the people; but they are just as sinful and corrupt as the great world, and without education to curb and restrain them.'

"But what is the peasant woman to me, after all? Certain persons exist, only in so far as they serve our purposes.

"No, she is a good and sensible woman, and has asked me to forgive her boldness. I shall remain her friend. I shall, indeed."

"June 25th.

"The king evinces the greatest kindness toward me. It is only yesterday that he remarked to me, while passing:

"Should you ever have a secret, confide it to me.'

"He knows full well that I could hardly go to my brother, as a sister should, and that my father is so far away.

"Colonel Bronnen, of the queen's regiment, is very attentive to me. He is usually quite reserved. Ah, how I envy those who possess such self-control. I have none. The demonstrative are always flattering themselves that their irrepressibility is simple honesty, whereas it is nothing but weakness.

"Bronnen tells me that you write to him at times. Can it be possible that a single thought of yours enters this palace, without being mine?

"I am delighted to know that we return to the summer palace in a fortnight from now. Cities ought to vanish during the summer. We ought to be able to transport our houses into the woods, among the mountains, or in the valleys, and in the winter they might be brought together again.

"Last evening, while we were sitting on the verandah, we were greatly amused by a joke of my brother Bruno's. He gave us a description of what might happen if the feet of all the four-post bedsteads in the city were endowed with life and, with their contents, were to come stalking along the garden-walks. It was very droll. Of course, there was some little that was scarcely proper; but Bruno, with all his impertinence, has so charming a manner that he knew how to couch his descriptions in most discreet yet piquant terms.

"It was this that suggested the idea of a migration of houses.

"It was a lively evening, full of merry jests that still seem to ring in my ears while I write to you.

"The king has a new walking-stick—he has quite a collection of such—and this one pays court to me.

"I am said to be intellectual, and this walking-stick is intellectual *par excellence*, and 'birds of a feather flock together,' you know.

"It is Baron Schnabelsdorf, privy councilor of one of the legations.

"Picture to yourself a dapper, beardless bachelor, always in faultless attire. Every one of the few hairs left him is made to do service, and is artistically brushed up into the form of a cock's comb. He passes for an authority in matters of statecraft. He has just returned from Rome, and was formerly attached to the embassies at Paris and Madrid and, if I am not mistaken, that at Stockholm, also. He is a fluent and ready anecdotist. He must have a familiar spirit who crams for him, for he knows everything, from the cut of Queen Elizabeth's sleeve to the latest discoveries in the milky-way and the recent excavations at Nineveh. The ladies and gentlemen have several times amused themselves by reading up one or more articles in the encyclopedia, and then directing their conversation to the subjects they had prepared themselves upon. But the omniscient Baron was, even then, better informed as to dates and circumstances than they were. He is always provided with a *bonbonnière* full of piquant anecdotes. He is almost constantly with the king, and it is rumored that a high position will soon be conferred upon him.

"What do you think of it? had I better marry him?

"My brother would like me to do so and, although he stoutly denies it, I still believe that Schnabelsdorf sent him to broach the affair to me. I could not help laughing, if I were to stand at the altar with this learned walking-stick. But it is, nevertheless, very flattering to know that so learned a man desires me as his spouse.

"I must be excessively learned and clever, and you ought to respect me accordingly.

"A thousand greetings and kisses, from

"Your ever spoiled

Irma.

"P. S. – The queen's brother, the hereditary prince of – , was at the christening, and his wife was also present. She rarely utters a word, but is beautiful. It is reported that the hereditary prince intends to seek a divorce from her, as she is childless. If, as really seems to be the case, she loves her husband, how terribly the poor thing must feel. She must have noticed my interest in her, for she treats me with marked favor, and has more to say to me than any one else. She wishes me to ride with her. The christening ceremonies were impressive and beautiful. At church, I wore a white *moiré* dress, and a veil fastened to my *coiffure*.

"At the banquet, Baron Schoning, the chamberlain, escorted me to the table. I am regarded here as of a highly poetic temperament, and the chamberlain has already presented me with a copy of his poems. (You know them. He has disguised his sublime emotions in the Highland dialect.) He affects my company and, while at table, told me lots of fearfully silly stuff. Well, as I was going to say, at the banquet I wore a dress of sea-green silk, cut out square *à la madonna*, and in my hair a simple wreath of heather. They all said that I looked very well, and I am inclined to believe that they told the truth."

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

Life at the palace again moved in its wonted channel. Bulletins as to the condition of the queen and the crown prince, were no longer issued. The amnesty which had been proclaimed in consequence of the happy event, had been received with satisfaction throughout the land.

Irma spent much of her time in the crown prince's apartments, and endeavored to enter into the feelings of the peasant woman who had been transplanted into a world that was entirely new and strange to her. She was greatly amused by the droll conceits that this new life awakened in Walpurga. Her peculiar way of looking at things was frequently in accord with Walpurga's simple-minded notions, and when Irma was absent, the nurse would speak to the child for hours, endeavoring, as it were, to outdo herself with all sorts of droll expressions which, eccentric as they were, failed to satisfy her.

A strong and deep spring of happiness and content, earnest resolve and all that makes men true, welled up from Walpurga's soul and ministered to the benefit of the babe that she had pressed to her bosom; the child had become as a part of herself.

With constant regularity the prince was daily carried to the queen. That was the event of the day, after which life, in the crown prince's apartments, went on in its usual course.

Doctor Gunther now relaxed his orders; for one day, he said: "The weather is charming, and it will do the prince good to send him out of doors a little while. We will arrange it in this way: – At eleven o'clock, you can drive out with Walpurga and the prince, as far as the Nymph's Grove. Arrived there, you can walk about with the child under the pines, or can sit down, if you wish to do so. After remaining there about half an hour, you will return and at once remove to the new apartments. You have taken good care of yourself, Walpurga; continue to do so. Let nothing move you from your accustomed ways, and you will continue to afford pleasure to all of us, as well as to yourself."

Walpurga was quite beside herself with happiness. "We're going out riding," said she to the child, when the physician had left. "God sends you everything good while you are asleep. But you'll let me have some, too, won't you? for you've a good heart, and I've given you mine."

Walpurga would have continued in this vein for a long while, but Mademoiselle Kramer came up and, while gently patting her cheeks, said: "You'll have red cheeks again. Show your love for the prince, with calmness and moderation, and not with such extravagant expressions."

"You're right," said Walpurga. "It's true; I'm not always so. I was always cheerful, but prudent at the same time: not so giddy as I now am," said she, after she had walked up and down the room several times, and at last sat down by the window. "I'll tell you what ails me."

"Indeed, does anything ail you?"

"Yes, the worst of all ills. I've nothing to do. I don't know what to put my hands to. This constant talking, dressing and undressing, eating and drinking, with nothing else to do, makes me stupid. The next time the doctor comes, tell him to give me some work. I'll carry wood or do anything that is to be done. They're mowing the grass in the palace garden, and if I could only be down there with them, I'd feel the better of it. No man could beat me at mowing grass. Grubersepp often used to say that the women sharpened their scythes seven times as often as the men, but that never happened with me."

"Oh, that would never do. But I shall see that you get some exercise."

"Come, you're to go out of doors, into the fresh air," said Walpurga to the prince.

"Thy cage is open! Fly away,
Far o'er land and sea.

But tell me, birdie; tell me pray, -
Where can my darling be?"

"What a pity that the birds have stopped singing. Yes, dear child, they only sing so long as there are young ones in the nest; but I shall have you in my nest for a whole year, and I'll sing better than the birds could," – and she sang:

"Ah, blissful is the tender tie
That binds me, love, to thee,
And swiftly speed the hours by
When thou art near to me.

"My heart doth bear a burden, love,
And thou hast placed it there-
And I would wager e'en my life
That none doth heavier bear."

"Brava! charming!" said Countess Irma, entering the room. "I should like to learn that song. Sing it again."

Walpurga repeated it and, at the second verse, Irma joined in the song.

"It doesn't really suit a child," said Walpurga, "but what does such a youngster know about lowing cows or singing birds? It's all one to him. We're going out riding to-day. Do you go with us?"

"I would be glad to ride with you, but I may not," replied Countess Irma.

"Then you're not allowed to do whatever you please."

Her words surprised Irma: "What do you mean?" asked she, sharply.

"Forgive me, if I've said anything stupid. I only meant to say you're in service as well as the rest of us. You're a maid of honor, I believe."

"All must serve some one; the king and queen serve God."

"We must all do that."

"Yes, but princes have a much harder time of it than we, for theirs is a far greater responsibility. But what am I saying? You ought to feel happy that you needn't know everything. I've brought some writing copies for you. I owe you thanks for one thing, already. Ever since I've resolved to teach you, my own writing has become far plainer than before-"

Irma suddenly checked herself, for she realized the full force of what she had been saying, and continued: "for you are to learn it thoroughly."

Baum came to announce that the carriage was waiting. Irma left, saying that she would meet Walpurga in the park.

They now went out and Baum let down the carriage steps for them. Mademoiselle Kramer, who was the first to enter, held the child until Walpurga had seated herself. Baum jumped up behind and took his place beside the second lackey; the four horses stepped out and the carriage started.

"Are we driving?" asked Walpurga.

"Certainly."

"It seems like flying. I can't hear the least rumbling of the wheels."

"Of course you can't. The tires are covered with india-rubber."

"And so they wear cloth shoes just as we do when we walk on smooth floors. Oh, how clever they all are here. Out yonder, they don't know a thing. They live just like cattle; the only difference is they don't eat grass-but what's the matter?" said she, starting with fright. "They're beating the drums and the soldiers are rushing toward us. Is there a fire somewhere?"

"That's on our account. The guard always present arms when a member of the royal family passes by-watch them. They're presenting arms and after we've passed they'll lay their muskets aside and return to the guardroom. Their regiment is known as the crown prince's, for it belongs to him."

"And so he'll have live soldiers to play with when he grows up."

Mademoiselle Kramer showed all the self-command befitting one who could boast of a line of sixteen ancestors. A slight start and an odd, nervous twitching of the features, as if suppressing a yawn, were the only visible effects of Walpurga's words. But of laughter there was not a sign. An upper servant of the right sort must hear and see all that is going on, and yet stand by as if he were no more than the table or plate that can be moved about at will; and although Walpurga was not her superior, it would not do to laugh at her, for she was nurse to his royal highness the crown prince. Mademoiselle Kramer therefore refrained from laughing, and, as if to evade answering, merely said: "When we pass the guard on our way home, the same thing will happen again."

"And may I ask what's the good of it all?"

"Certainly; there is a good reason for everything, and this serves to accustom the people, and especially the soldiers, to show proper respect to their superiors."

"But our prince don't know anything of that."

"We must show our respect for him, even though he know nothing of it; and now let me tell you something which it would be well for you to know. Whenever you speak or think of their majesties, the king and queen, let it be as 'his majesty' or 'her majesty,' but never simply as king and queen, so that you may never so far forget yourself as to speak of them in a disrespectful manner. Bear this in mind."

Walpurga scarcely heard a word of what she said.

"Oh, Lord!" she exclaimed, "how wisely they've arranged everything. It must have taken many thousand years before they could get so far."

"It has, indeed. But you needn't nod to everyone you see bowing. It isn't meant for you."

"But I'd like to do it for my prince, until he can attend to it himself. They all show how glad they'll be to get a look at him. They all bow to you, my child-you're well off, indeed-oh, what a lovely carriage this is. It's as soft as a bed, and as comfortable as a room, and you can sit here and see all that's going on outside, and-dear me, how fast we're going."

They turned into the park. The carriage drove slowly while they passed the lake, and Walpurga was ever saying:

"I feel as if I were in fairyland."

They alighted by the shady and fragrant Grove of the Nymphs. As soon as she had left the carriage, Walpurga, who was carrying the child in her arms, said:

"Open your eyes! Look about you! The whole world's yours. There are trees and meadows and, overhead the blue sky. But your father can't give you that; you'll have to earn it by being good, and if you and I both remain good, we'll meet again, up above."

"Sit down here, Walpurga, and pray cease talking," said Mademoiselle Kramer.

She was terribly anxious about Walpurga, who talked incessantly and incoherently, and was as unmanageable as a young foal that had just been let loose in the meadow.

For this reason, Mademoiselle Kramer again remarked: "Speak softly, and address all your remarks to me. I should be sorry if the lackeys behind us were making sport of you. Do you see the outrider over there? He is my nephew." Walpurga had not, until then, noticed that two lackeys, one of whom was Baum, were following them. The carriage was being driven up and down the side avenues. Suddenly Walpurga stopped, as if spellbound, before a marble figure.

"Isn't it beautiful?" asked Mademoiselle Kramer.

"Fie!" replied Walpurga. "It's abominable; and to think of men and women walking about here and looking at such an object."

When the old king had the statues placed in the park, Mademoiselle Kramer had deemed them objectionable, but as their majesties had found them beautiful, she had gradually come to look upon them in the same light.

They went into a side avenue, where Walpurga sat down on a bench and, falling into a reverie, soon knew as little of the world as did the child in her arms.

"Who's there?" said she, as if awakened from sleep.

Riding between two horsemen, she beheld a lady mounted on a glossy black steed. Her riding-habit was of blue and the long flowing veil fastened to her hat was of the same color.

"It looks like the countess."

"It is she, and now they dismount. His majesty the king and their royal highnesses the hereditary prince and princess, are with her. They are coming this way," said Mademoiselle Kramer. "Keep your seat. As nurse, you need not trouble about being polite."

But Walpurga could not help putting her hands up to her hat, in order to feel whether the tassel at the back and the flowers in front were still in place.

Mademoiselle Kramer begged their highnesses not to look at the sleeping child, lest they might awaken it.

Irma was the first to speak. "How deeply significant are all of nature's laws. The waking eye arouses the sleeping child. In the depths of every human soul, an infant soul rests sleeping, and it is not well to permit either sympathy or idle curiosity to disturb it."

"I would like to know how you always manage to have such original thoughts," replied the king.

"I don't know," replied Irma, playing with her riding-whip. "I've courage enough to say what I think, and that passes for originality. Nearly all human beings are changelings. They were changed while in the cradle of education."

The king laughed. Walpurga, however, quickly turned her thumbs inward, and said:

"Changelings. It's wrong to speak of anything of that sort before a child that's less than seven months old, for the evil spirits are all powerful up to that time, even if the child is christened."

In order to exorcise any evil spell from the child, she breathed upon it thrice.

The princess looked sadly at the nurse and the child, but did not utter a word.

"I don't understand a word of what the nurse says," remarked the hereditary prince.

Walpurga blushed scarlet.

"Why do you look at me so?" asked Countess Irma, "don't you know me?"

"Of course I do, but do you know who you look like? like the Lady of the Lake. When she rises from the waves, her dress hangs about her in a sea of folds just like yours."

Irma laughed, while she, in High German, told the prince and princess what the nurse had been saying. The prince nodded to Walpurga much as he would have done with a dumb animal to which he could not render himself intelligible.

"But Countess Irma's feet are not swan's feet. Don't believe that, Walpurga," said the king laughing. "Come, 'Lady of the Lake.'"

They mounted their horses and rode away.

It was time for the prince to return.

On their return, they at once repaired to the new apartments on the ground floor, into which everything had been removed during their absence.

They now had sunlight at all hours of the day. The apartments opened out on the park, where the blackbird sang in the broad daylight, and where the breezes were laden with the odor of the orange bushes. Tall trees were whispering in the wind and a great fountain was constantly murmuring and plashing.

Walpurga was quite happy, and the fountain was her greatest delight.

"It's far more comfortable on the first floor," she would often say; "I feel as if I'd just returned from a long journey. The rooms are so nice and cool, and my night-watchman sleeps in the daytime just as a night-watchman should, and-and-"

And Walpurga, too, fell asleep, although 'twas daylight.

CHAPTER II

Walpurga soon accustomed herself to her changed mode of life. She was often concerned because she received no tidings from home.

But if there were no letters, there was a messenger at all events. A servant entered the room and said:

"There's a woman outside, who comes from the same place as Walpurga. She wishes to speak to you for a few moments."

"I'll go to her. Who is it?"

"No," said Mademoiselle Kramer; "receive her here."

The servant went out at once, and returned, bringing old Zenza with him.

"Oh, is it you, Zenza? Have you brought me anything from my child, my husband, or my mother? For God's sake, has anything happened? Are they sick?"

"No, they're all well, thank God, and send their love to you."

Walpurga, with an affectionate glance, gazed into Zenza's cunning eyes, which now seemed good and truthful, because they had seen her child. Smiling, Zenza went on to say:

"I'm glad you still know me. How bad the folks are. They told me you wouldn't recognize me, because you'd become a fine lady. But no, you always were a good girl, and I've always said so."

"Yes, yes, that's all very well; but what do you want of me?"

"I want you to help me. If you don't, my son Thomas will take his life and I'll drown myself in the lake. You'll help me, won't you? See, I'm kneeling at your feet. You must help me. Your dear father and I were almost cousins, and if your father were alive, he'd say what he's now calling down to you from heaven-'Walpurga, if you don't help Zenza, I'll never forgive you.'"

"Get up! What's the matter? How can I help you?"

"I won't get up. I'll die at your feet unless you promise to help me."

"I'll do all I can for you."

Mademoiselle Kramer interposed and said that unless Zenza would calm herself, she would not be allowed to remain in the room another moment.

Zenza arose and asked:

"Is that the queen?"

Walpurga and Mademoiselle Kramer laughed at her question, and Zenza at last made known her wish.

Her son Thomas, she said, was standing down there before the palace, as the guard would not allow him to enter. He had been caught poaching and, as it was his second offense, he had been sentenced to two years' imprisonment. And yet he was not to blame. It lay in his blood. He must go hunting. His father had been that way before him. He had only shot one little chamois buck and for that he was to go to jail again. He had sworn an oath that, before he would let them lock him up, he would take his own life or else commit a murder, so that they might behead him at once; and Zenza went on to say that Walpurga would have two, – nay, three human lives on her conscience if she did not help them; that Walpurga must procure her an audience with the king or queen, so that she might, on her knees, beg them for mercy.

"Your husband and the landlord of the Chamois sent me," added Zenza, "and they both say it'll be easy enough for you to help me, and if you do, I'll be your slave as long as I live."

"Yes, I'd like to help you, but I can't see how. Things are not managed here as they are at home."

"Oh, you can find a way, quick enough. You're clever, the whole neighborhood says so; and I've known it ever so long, and said so, too, on last St. Leonard's day. Schenck, the tailor will bear me witness, and so will Spinnerwastl, too; 'Walpurga bears herself,' said I, 'as if she were one of the

lowliest, but she's the first in the whole neighborhood. You'll all live to see what becomes of her. Her wisdom and her goodness will show themselves.' Now, Walpurga, you'll help me: won't you."

"Yes, as soon as there's a chance."

"But I can't wait. Thomas is to go to jail to-morrow, at daybreak, and, if he's not released to-day, there will be murder."

"My dear woman," interposed Mademoiselle Kramer, "his majesty the king declared a general amnesty at the birth of the crown prince. That covers your son's case, does it not?"

"No; that's the very trouble. All the courts in the country are against my Thomas. Look at this. It's all there. The innkeeper wrote it down, better than I can tell you. The writing must reach the king before noon, or it'll be too late. My son Thomas is walking up and down out there, and it's an even chance whether he goes to heaven or hell. He's got a double-barreled pistol with him, and he'll shoot the first man he looks at and himself, too, before this very palace, if I go out there without having done anything for him."

"Yes, but I can't run up to the king as I would to the innkeeper, or I'd gladly do it."

"I must sit down, my knees are breaking under me," exclaimed Zenza; and Mademoiselle Kramer hurried to bring her a chair. And while she sat there with drooping head, great tears dropped upon the bony, thick-veined hands that lay folded on her knees.

Walpurga motioned to Mademoiselle Kramer, who was trying to console the old woman. She wanted to tell her that Zenza was not so very good, after all, and that Thomas was still worse; but Mademoiselle Kramer turned about and said:

"I have an idea. Countess Wildenort's brother is aid-de-camp to his majesty, and, in half an hour from now, will present his report and get the countersign. Now, Walpurga, go to Countess Irma at once and request her to hand the petition to her brother, so that he may submit it to his majesty."

"Yes, yes, do go-do! Lord, what a wise angel you have here with you, Walpurga; – but go right off-don't lose a moment! May I stay here a little while longer, or shall I wait down there before the palace?"

"No! you may remain here, my good woman," said Mademoiselle Kramer, consoling her. "But hurry yourself," said she, addressing Walpurga, who still held the letter before her, and stood there as if immovable.

Walpurga left the apartment. When she drew near to Irma's door, she heard the countess, with fervid expression, singing Schumann's song to Friedrich Rueckert's words:

He came to me,
In storm and rain,
And boldly, he
My heart hath ta'en.

Was my heart won,
Or his, that day?
Methinks both hearts
Did meet half-way.

The chambermaid announced Walpurga. Irma stopped in the middle of her song.

"Welcome! What good thought brings you here?"

Walpurga hesitated, but, at last, preferred her request and handed the paper to the countess.

"Take courage," said Irma, consolingly.

She rang for a servant, to whom she said: "Tell my brother to come here at once." Then, addressing Walpurga, she continued: "I'll add a few words of my own. Be calm. I am glad to be able

to grant your request. I've often wanted to ask you whether there was not some wish that you would like to have gratified. The king will surely grant the pardon."

Walpurga would have liked to interrupt her, but everything seemed as if bewitched. Before she could say a word, the aid-de-camp had come. Irma begged him to wait while she added a few lines of her own.

The aid-de-camp had taken his leave. Irma passed her hand over Walpurga's face and said: "Let me banish all your sad thoughts. Be happy and take my word for it-the man is saved. Go to the poor woman and quiet her in the mean while. I'll bring the answer to your room."

Walpurga could not find words, or she would have said something, even then. But the petition had already gone. After all no one would be harmed in the matter, and, although Thomas really was a wicked fellow, this might make a better man of him. Walpurga left Irma's apartment. Stopping at the door, for an instant, to recover herself, she heard Irma singing again. When she reached her room, she was in a calmer state and said to Zenza:

"Your Thomas will get off; depend upon it. But you must give me your word, and promise to keep it, too, that Thomas will become an honest man, and that you won't help him sell his stolen wares and hide his evil ways. You needn't look at me so, for I've a right to talk to you this way. I've risked a great deal for you."

"Yes, indeed; you've a right to say it," replied Zenza, in a half-earnest, half-jesting tone. "You make our whole neighborhood happy. We're all proud of you. On Sunday, before the church, I'll tell them what influence you have here, and they'll all believe me. Your mother was my playfellow, and if my Thomas had got an honest woman like you for his wife, he'd been thrifty, too. He must get himself a good wife. I'll give him no peace till he does."

Zenza was enjoying some good coffee which Mademoiselle Kramer had prepared for her, and the kind-hearted housekeeper filled her cup again and again.

"If I could only give my son some of this! Oh, how he must be suffering out there! But it serves him right; that's his punishment. He's on the lookout now, but not as a poacher. It's quite a different thing, now." Zenza was quite voluble and Mademoiselle Kramer was charmed with the frankness and motherly affection of the old woman.

When Zenza had emptied her cup and eaten nearly all the cake, she said:

"May I take this little bit of sugar with me? It'll always remind me that I've drunk coffee in the king's palace."

Mademoiselle Kramer wrapped a piece of cake in a paper, and said: "Take this to your son."

It seemed as though Zenza would never get done thanking them. She was in great good-humor, and asked permission to see the prince; but Walpurga refused it and well knew why; for, at home, Zenza was regarded as a witch and, even if it were mere superstition, thought Walpurga, who can know what might happen? She had already become so politic that she availed herself, as an excuse, of the doctor's order that no stranger should be allowed near the person of the crown prince.

Zenza now told them how great a commotion Walpurga's sudden departure had created in their neighborhood. Ever since, the people would talk of nothing else. The folks were all late at church on Sunday, because they had stopped before Walpurga's house and stared at it as if there was something new to be seen, and Hansei had been obliged to show his cow to half the congregation, as if there was something strange about it. But the thoughts of all were of Walpurga; and she also said that it was well known that Walpurga's influence had secured Stasi's betrothed his position as ranger. In spite of Walpurga's protestations that she knew nothing of it, Zenza insisted on her story, and praised her the more for her modesty.

The time passed quickly.

Countess Irma, her face radiant with joy, brought the king's letter of pardon.

Zenza would have fallen on her knees to her and kissed her feet, but Irma held her up and said:

"I've something more for you: take this, so that, besides being free, you may be able to get some pleasure."

She gave her a gold piece.

Old Zenza's eyes sparkled, while she said:

"If the gracious princess should ever want any one who'd go through fire and water to serve her, she need only think of Zenza and Thomas."

She would have said much more, but Walpurga said:

"Thomas is waiting for you at the gate; make haste and go to him."

"You see, dear princess, how good she is. She deserves to be happy."

"Walpurga," said Mademoiselle Kramer, "you might give the woman the money for your husband."

"I'll take it for you."

"No, I'll send it. I must wait awhile," said Walpurga hesitating. She could not well explain that she distrusted both Zenza and her son.

"Here," said Irma, handing Zenza the little golden heart which she wore; "take this to Walpurga's child, from me." Then, removing her silk kerchief, she added, "give her this, too."

"Oh, what a lovely neck!" exclaimed Zenza.

Walpurga again reminded her that she had better return to her son.

Irma felt happy to think that she had brought about the pardon. Walpurga was afraid to tell them Zenza was a stranger to her and that she almost hated her; or that Red Thomas was one of the worst men in their neighborhood. She consoled herself with the thought that all would yet be well. Bad men can grow better, or else all talk of repentance would be mere lies and deceit.

In the mean while, Zenza, holding the pardon on high, had hurried out of the palace.

"Is my reckoning settled?" asked Thomas, spitting as far as he could.

"Yes, thank God! See what a mother can do."

"I don't owe you much thanks for that, what did you bring me into the world for? But the best of it all is it's a slap in the face for the great snarling country justice. Now, mother, I'm as thirsty as three bailiff's clerks. Waiting has almost used me up. Have you anything more about you?"

"Of course I have; just look."

She showed him the gold piece, which he most dexterously removed from her hand and into his pocket.

"What else have you got?" said he, when he noticed the little gold heart that she had taken from her pocket at the same time.

"The beautiful princess gave me that and this silk kerchief for Walpurga's child."

"Hansei's child will have enough with the kerchief," said Thomas, appropriating the gold heart, while he good-naturedly allowed his mother to retain the black cord which had been attached to it.

"There, mother; that'll do very well, and now let's take a drink for having waited so long. While I was waiting out here, I saw a splendid rifle at the gunsmith's. You can take it apart and put it in your pocket, and we'll see if the greencoats catch me again."

The first thing young Thomas did was to take the chamois beard and the black cock plume out of his pocket and stick them in his hat again. Then he put on his hat in a defiant manner, and his whole bearing seemed to say: I'd like to see who'd dare touch them.

Just as they were going away, Baum came in from the street. He seemed anxious to avoid them, but Zenza went up to him and thanked him again for the handsome present he had given her when Walpurga had been sent for. She looked at him strangely and Baum, with a side glance, noticed that Thomas's eyes were fixed upon him. He felt a shudder passing like a flash of lightning, from his heart to his head. It actually made his hair stand on end, and obliged him to raise his hat and adjust it differently; but he took a nail-file from his pocket and began trimming his nails, and then said: "You've thanked me already; once is enough."

"Mother! if Jangerl wasn't in America, I'd have sworn that was he."

"You're crazy," replied Zenza.

They went into the town together. Thomas always walking briskly in front. It seemed as if it would not worry him much, were he to lose his mother.

They repaired to an inn, where, without taking time to sit down, he drank off a schoppen of wine. Then, telling his mother to wait, he went off to purchase the rifle.

Meanwhile, Walpurga was sitting by the window and imagining how the folks at home would be talking of her great power, and how, at the Chamois, they would have so much to say about her, and that the innkeeper's wife, who had always looked down upon her, would almost burst with envy.

Walpurga laughed and was pleased to think that the envious and proud would be angry at her good fortune. This, indeed, seemed her greatest delight, and at all events, was the thought on which she dwelt longest. Another reason may have been that the joy of the virtuous is more quickly exhausted than the angry and evil speeches of the wicked, which keep fermenting and sending bubbles to the surface long after they have been uttered. Walpurga remained sitting by the window, her lips silently moving, as if she were repeating to herself the words of those who envied and were angry at her, until, at last, Countess Irma addressed her:

"I can see how happy you are. Yes, Walpurga, if we could only do good to some fellow-creature every moment, we would be the happiest beings under the sun. Don't you see, Walpurga, the real divine grace of a prince lies in his being able to do good at any moment?"

"I understand that quite well," answered Walpurga. "A king is like the sun which shines down on all, and refreshes the trees near by, as well as the flowers in the distant, hidden valley; it does good to men and beast and everything. Such a king is a messenger from God; but he must be careful to remain one, for being lord over all pride and lust may overpower him. He's just given life to Thomas, and all the prison doors open as they do in the fable when they say: '*Open sesame*,' Oh, you good king! don't let them spoil you, and always have such kindhearted people about you as my Countess Irma."

"Thanks," said Irma. "I now know you perfectly. Believe me, all the books in the world contain nothing better and nothing more than does your heart; and, although you cannot write, it has been so much the more plainly written there. – But let us be quiet and sensible. Come, you must take your writing lesson."

They sat down together, and Irma taught Walpurga how to use the pen. Walpurga said that she did not care to write single letters, and that she would prefer having a word to copy.

Irma wrote the word "pardon" for her. Walpurga filled a whole sheet with that word, and when Irma left the room, she took the writing with her, saying:

"I shall preserve this as a memento of this hour."

CHAPTER III

"What can be the matter with the queen? – "

–"Her majesty," added Mademoiselle Kramer.

–"What can it be?" said Walpurga; "for some days, the prince–"

"His royal highness," said Mademoiselle Kramer.

–"Has hardly been noticed by her. Before that, whenever she saw the child and held it to her heart, she always seemed lifted up to the skies, and once said to me: 'Walpurga, didn't it make you feel as if you'd become a girl again, free and independent of everything? To me, the world is nothing but myself and my child'-and now she hardly looks at it, just as if her having had a child were a dream. There must be great trouble in a mother's heart–"

"Royal mother," said Mademoiselle Kramer.

–"When she doesn't care to look at her child."

The queen's heart was, in truth, torn by a mighty struggle.

Her feelings had, for months past, been of a most distressing and excited nature. There was one point on which she dared not even think aloud, and which she would have thought profaned by speaking of it to others. It was her wish to determine for herself, and she had done so. Ever since she had become a mother, she had felt as if separated from the rest of the world. When she thought of her child and, above all, when she clasped it to her heart, she felt as if nothing more remained to be done. She and the child were her world; all else was as nothing. And yet she loved the king with all her heart, and ardently desired that their union should be so complete that they be one in feeling, in belief, and in affection.

The thought that they ought to be united in all things, constantly grew upon her. Father, mother and child should be as one, praying to the same God, with the same thoughts, and in the same words.

The isolation of the sick chamber only helped to strengthen these thoughts, and, now that she was about to return to the world, she longed to make the bond that united her to the king, perfect in the highest sense.

She was allowed to do but little talking, and, therefore, did not indulge in conversation. After a few days had passed, she had a Madonna, by Filippo Lippi the younger, brought to her dimly lighted chamber. She gazed at the picture for hours, and it seemed to be looking at her in return—the two mothers were one in bliss.

The canon visited her and found her in this devotional frame of mind. With trembling lips, she confided to him her desire to belong to the church of her husband and child. He lent a ready assent to the request that she might be spared all dogmatic teachings. When the canon had left, she became oppressed with a sense of fear. There goes a man, thought she, who bears my secret with him. He had promised to keep it to himself and thus prove himself worthy her confidence. But the secret had, nevertheless, ceased to be entirely her own.

She soon quieted her fears, and a glow of delight overspread her features at the thought that, although she was now a mother, there was yet another sublime and exalted function which would perfect her union with her husband and furnish one more proof of her great love for him.

In the fullness of life, the thought of death occurred to her, and she ordered another painting to be placed on the easel before her. It was the *Maria Ægyptica*, by Ribera.

The queen often felt as if she must seek the glance of the penitent. But those eyes, instead of beholding aught, seem as if listening: not in alarm, for an angel is calling to her—but submissive and trustful, for she is used to the sound of heavenly voices. Instead of representing the penitent daughter of the king as crushed and bruised from having mortified the flesh, the artist has made her features expressive of restored, childlike innocence and youthful beauty—a nude figure, divested of all raiment, wrapped in the long, fair tresses that descend to her knees. She is kneeling beside the open grave

that is to receive her. Her blue eyes gaze into eternity; her lips are closed, as if in pain, and above her hovers an angel who spreads the mantle of mercy over her and exclaims: "Thou art forgiven!" Forgiven and redeemed, she sinks into the grave.

The ascetic tone of the picture fully accorded with the queen's mood, and the canon often found her lost in ecstatic admiration of it.

Although Doctor Gunther disapproved of this mute companionship, his wishes and his orders were alike unavailing. It was the first time that this man, who was so highly esteemed by the queen, had encountered obstinacy and unyielding defiance at her hands. When Irma saw the picture, she carelessly remarked that the position of the eyes was faulty, but that the artist had skillfully availed himself of this fault in order to produce a peculiar expression. The queen pressed her hand to her heart-she was alone in her feelings and wished to remain so.

Walpurga was successful where both Gunther and Irma had failed.

"Is that a forest-sprite?" asked she,

"What's that?"

"Out our way, they tell of the forest-sprites. They haunt the mountains on ghost-nights, and can wrap themselves in their long hair."

The queen related the legend of Maria Ægyptica to Walpurga. She was a princess who had led a dissolute life. Suddenly, she left the palace and, renouncing all pleasures, went out into the desert, where she supported herself on roots and lived many years, until all her clothes fell from her body: and, when her dying hour arrived, an angel descended from above and spread the mantle of mercy over her-

"That's all very good and pretty," said Walpurga, "but, no offense to you, my queen, it seems a sin to have such a terrible picture before one's eyes. I wouldn't want to sleep in the same room with it. It seems as if some night it would come down and drag me into the open grave with it. Oh, dear Lord! I'm afraid of it, even in broad daylight."

Walpurga's words were not without effect. When night came, the queen really imagined that the picture was coming toward her. She could not sleep, and was obliged to have it removed during the night.

Her calmness and equanimity were thus restored, and, as reading was now permitted her, the priest provided her with suitable books.

Her whole life was possessed by the one idea. Walpurga had observed correctly. The queen scarcely looked at her child, although the step she contemplated taking was prompted by love for her husband and her child.

A few days before she went out for the first time, she sent for the king, and said:

"Kurt, next Sunday will be the first time that I go out, and the first day that I enter your church, and that of our son. Henceforth, I shall pray at the same altar with you and him."

"I don't understand you-"

"I have vowed that if God, in his mercy, would preserve my life and that of the child, I would be united with you in all things. I am not fulfilling an enforced vow, but a free and well-considered resolution. I offer this, not as a new proof, but rather as a confirmation or final sealing of our love. Kurt, my every thought, all that I am, is yours. We are as one before the world; let us be as one before God. Henceforth, we will not take separate ways, or have separate thoughts. Let our child learn nothing of the differences between men, and, above all, between those to whom he owes his life. I feel happy that I can do this as a free offering and not as a sacrifice."

"Mathilde," said the king, with a strangely cold tone, "is this the first time you speak of this, or have you already made preparations-"

"My resolution was formed in secret, and in all earnestness. Afterward, I announced it and all is now in readiness. I had intended it as a surprise for you. The canon almost insisted that I must tell you of it in his presence, but I wouldn't consent."

"Thank God!" said the king, drawing a long breath, "all may again be well!"

"Again? 'Well?'" inquired the queen in amazement.

The king calmly explained to her that, although he appreciated the sacrifice, he could not accept it. The queen deprecated his terming it a sacrifice, and the king said:

"Very well, then; you need go no further than myself, who of all beings am most in accord with you, to discover that others may-nay, must-judge of your actions differently from yourself. What will the world, the courts, our subjects, think of it?"

"What need we care about that, when we know that we are right? 'What will the world say?' is always the great question. But the world must not force us to be different from what we are."

"Mathilde, you speak like a martyr. Your feelings are exalted and worthy of all reverence. You are both good and noble; but, believe me, the best actions, indeed, the only proper ones, are those which require neither explanations nor apology. We are not hermits. Although your motives are pure and lofty, the world will be unable and unwilling to understand them. Nor dare we make explanations. A prince degrades himself by stooping to explain his actions. You regard the world with heavenly feelings; but the heaven lies in your way of looking at things, not in the world itself. I should be sorry to reveal the world's wickedness to you, and thus cast a gloom over your kindly views of life. Hold fast to your belief in the Highest, but do it after the forms of your own faith."

"And must I, all my life, walk in one path, while you and the child take another?"

"Mathilde, we are not anchorites; we are not even private citizens. Our position is an exposed one. A sovereign can have no private actions—"

"Do you mean that all we do is to be as an example to others?"

"I mean that, too," said the king, hesitating; "but what I meant to say was, that, in whatever you do, it is not yourself alone, but the queen who acts. Its effects are felt far and near. I am happy to be the object of so much love. You feel it, do you not, Mathilde?"

"Don't speak of it. Our best and deepest feelings do not seek expression in words."

"Bear this well in mind—the wife of a private gentleman can perform such an action in secret. You cannot. You would be obliged to close the Protestant court chapel, and would thus offend all throughout the land who hold your present faith."

"I don't wish to offend any one. The world can't ask me to make such a sacrifice. My highest, my only aim, is to be one with you, on earth and in heaven, now and hereafter."

"Very well, then; promise me one thing."

"Whatever you wish."

"Promise me that you will defer acting on your resolve, for at least a month. It would be wrong to allow a passing mood to change the course of one's life."

"You're a noble creature," said the queen; "I'll obey you."

"So you give up your resolve?"

"No, I shall wait. I don't wish it to be what you imagine it—the outgrowth of a sickly mood, engendered by the seclusion of my chamber. I'll allow it to ripen in the sunlight, and you will then discover that it is something more than a mere mood."

The king was satisfied with the result. But, strangely enough, he refrained from any display of affection, and when, at parting, he took the queen's hand in his, his manner seemed cold and distant.

CHAPTER IV

The king had shown great self-command while conversing with his wife, and, now that he was alone, felt that her words had aroused a dormant feeling of displeasure.

He sincerely loved his wife, but he was of an heroic, active temperament, and all that savored of pettiness, self-questioning or sentimentality, was utterly distasteful to him. His great ambition was to promote the happiness of his subjects, and to achieve for himself a place in history. But a period of peaceful development, in which all were friendly to the government and anxious to serve it, afforded no opportunity for heroic deeds, or for new and startling measures. All that could be done was to hold fast to what had already been achieved and, at the same time, to encourage new growths. But such labors absorb the work of many whose names remain unknown to fame, and it was this that explained the king's fondness for building. The construction of great edifices devoted to art, science, the church and the army, could not but be regarded as proofs of a mind anxious to achieve great deeds.

The king loved his wife, and was content to have it so. The queen, on the other hand, was ever anxious to furnish new proofs of her love, and her deep sensibility was again displayed in this attempt to carry out a resolve which, although prompted by the best motives, was utterly impracticable. She idealized everything, and, in that respect, the king's temperament was the very opposite of hers. Her apartments were always so dimly lighted that, when he entered them, he was obliged to grope his way. On emerging from this gloom, it seemed to him as if the morn had dawned anew, for he dearly loved the bright light of day. This continual worrying about religious problems that none can solve—this constant mental excitement, incapacitates one for prompt action. He who desires to have his life-fabric rest on a firm foundation, must be free from over-refined self-criticism. He must subordinate all his feelings, all his passions, to the one aim, and to no one does this so forcibly apply as to the monarch who desires to direct the diversified and all-embracing interests of his subjects.

The queen's aim was to realize, in her own person, her ideal of the wife and the mother; but then she had no right to forget that she was a queen. Something more was required than eternal trifling and weaving of garlands, ingeniously devised as they might be. Love, such as hers, is exacting withal, for, while it lavishes endearments, it constantly requires a return in kind. It is exclusive and, at the same time, wearisome. The sun shines and love exists, but why constantly worry about either.

The lonely life the queen had been leading had produced an excited condition that sought vent in the attempt to change her faith, and, although the king had determined that it should be nothing more than an attempt, her words had tended to confirm a corresponding feeling of loneliness on his part—a result to which his recent experience had in no slight degree contributed.

The king was alone in his cabinet. How would it have stood with him, if his wife had possessed a great and commanding mind? The thought had suddenly flashed upon him. He passed his hand across his brow, as if to banish the idea; he dared not, could not think of such a thing. He sent for Doctor Gunther, for this affair must be disposed of at once.

Gunther came.

The king, at first, cautiously sounded him, in order to discover whether this confidant of the queen's knew aught of what had happened, and then, under the seal of secrecy, informed him of all.

To the king's great surprise, Gunther, instead of thanking him for this mark of confidence, politely said:

"I should much prefer that Your Majesty had graciously permitted me to remain ignorant of secrets and troubles in which I can be of no assistance."

The king stared at him in astonishment. This man was always obstinate and preserved his dignity.

"I was about to ask you," said the king, harshly, "whether you believe that you can influence the queen in this matter."

"I fear not; but if Your Majesty desires it, I am ready to make the effort."

"Pray do."

"But I fear her majesty will be offended. I understand her idiosyncrasies. If the matter is noised about, she will think it profaned by the touch of others, and it will thus, in her opinion, lose its greatest charm."

"That would be the very thing," said the king, eagerly. "Perhaps that will be the best way to cure her of her enthusiasm. Everything is considered a fit subject for debate, nowadays. Your friends in the chamber of delegates debate everything, and they might as well—"

It was a constant source of annoyance to the king, that the doctor, who never obtruded his opinions, would, when drawn into an argument on questions of religion or politics, always espouse the liberal side; but, with all that, he could ill afford to do without Gunther. Although the king found him objectionable in some respects, he nevertheless had a high regard for him. He held so high a position in the world of science and in the esteem of his countrymen, that the presence, near the king, of one possessed of such liberal views, reflected peculiar glory on the court itself.

The king now formally requested Gunther to endeavor to move the queen from her resolve.

It was a difficult undertaking.

The queen had, heretofore, made this trusted friend her confidant, and now he was possessed of a secret of hers that had been given him by another. Gunther endeavored to draw the queen into some allusion to her secret resolve, but, failing in the attempt, was obliged to introduce the subject himself.

The queen seemed surprised and grieved.

"Why has the king done this?" asked she, her features expressing intense pain.

"Perhaps his majesty," replied Gunther, "credits me with the possession of more powerful arguments than any which have yet been advanced."

"I know them, all," answered the queen, excitedly; "in such a matter, no stranger should dare to breathe a word of—"

"Then, Your Majesty, I've nothing more to say, and humbly beg leave to withdraw."

"No, no! Speak on—I must hear you."

"Must? You must not."

"Wish, or must, it's all the same. You're always saying that there's no such thing as free will, and with monarchs it is certainly so."

"Your Majesty," said Gunther, in a gentle voice, "the high resolve you have formed was not an act of your will. It is the natural and inevitable consequence of a chain of events and impressions, which have been shaped by your temperament. Fervent natures are always afraid lest they cannot do enough for themselves and for the world. They would like, with every hour-day, with every breath—to make others happy, or impress the world with some great thought."

"So you, too, can flatter."

"I never flatter. I simply take the diagnosis which, in your case, is not flattering. This excess of sensibility is not health—"

"So you consider my mood as unhealthy—"

"We should not use that term. — But I entreat you. Your Majesty! this tone, with either of us, is hardly—"

"Speak on. I like to hear you. I don't feel hurt that you know of this. I regard you as part of the daylight that was to ripen my resolve."

"Well then, all that is to ripen must needs be subjected to currents of air and even to storms. But I shall bring you no storm, and shall not even speak of the fact that whoever deserts the faith into which he was born, insults his parents; nor shall I tell you that the ceremonies to which we have been accustomed from youth, are the soul's mother-tongue. All that does not address itself to the mind. Mind and reason are the parents of conscious man. It is our duty to live up to our convictions, and I can, therefore, find no fault with a change of religion based upon conviction. But it seems to me,

Your Majesty, that your change of faith is simply superficial or, if it be deeper, only from love for your husband. You know, however, that I view all these things from an entirely different standpoint. I believe I know the spring in paradise, whence flows the stream that on earth is divided into so many little rivulets; and these again, to use the words of my friend Eberhard, Countess Irma's father, furnish the power for the mills that grind out sermons. Your Majesty knows that the legend of the four streams that flowed from the tree Igdrasil, which is found in the most beautiful of all books, the Bible, is also to be found in our old German Saga."

"Very well-but I beg of you, my dear friend, spare me your literary curiosities."

"Your Majesty," resumed Gunther, "as long as we remain in the faith of our fathers, we can enjoy great latitude of opinion. Our thoughts can reach far beyond its confines, and no inquisition has power over us: but, as soon as we profess another religion, we forfeit the right to be free. It is our duty to live up to it. One who is noble by birth can afford to admit civil equality, but he who has had nobility conferred on him, cannot do so. Will Your Majesty permit me to say one word more? I regard it as fortunate for mankind in general, and our German fatherland in particular, that there is a diversity of religious beliefs. That of itself tends to preserve feelings of humanity, for thus we cannot help seeing that there are different forms of soul utterances for one and the same thing. A multiplicity of sects affords the best protection against fanaticism and, moreover, helps to prove that religious forms are of no consequence; that is, one can be righteous in any faith and, indeed, without any outward show of religion."

Gunther remained with the queen for a long while, offering further explanations of the ideas he had advanced.

He was still with her, when the canon was announced.

The queen sent word that she desired to be excused, and requested him to come the next day.

When Gunther left, she was still as firm in her resolve as at first. She felt persuaded that this was an action in which no other being should interfere, and, least of all, a man.

She was on the point of taking Irma into her confidence. She felt that the countess was clever and, moreover, a true friend. Unconquerable dread held her back. She feared lest she might appear weak and vacillating in Irma's eyes.

CHAPTER V

For days, the queen remained alone. Walpurga and the child were the only ones permitted near her. She did not wish to speak to any one else, be it her husband, Gunther, or the priest.

One afternoon, when Walpurga was with her, she felt impelled to ask:

"Walpurga, do you know that I don't belong to your faith?"

"Yes, indeed, I do; and I'm glad of it."

"Glad of it?"

"Of course I am; you're the first and only Lutheran I've ever known, and if they're all like you, it must be a beautiful religion."

"It is beautiful, and so are all religions that make good beings of us."

"Why, do you know, queen, that's the very thing my father used to say, and in the very same words? Oh, if he'd only lived long enough to have had a talk with you."

The queen was silent for a long while.

At last she asked:

"Walpurga, if your religion was different from Hansei's, would you go to his church?"

"Why, Hansei's Catholic, as well as I am."

"But if it were otherwise?"

"But it isn't otherwise."

"But just imagine it were."

"But I can't do that," said she, as if about to cry.

The queen was again silent for some time. Presently Walpurga, of her own accord, said:

"Yes, I can, after all. I've thought it out. Why, you're Lutheran and your husband's Catholic. But why do you ask me that?"

"Imagine yourself in my position. If you were a Protestant, would you not visit your husband's church?"

"No, queen, never! As long as I'd been an honest wife while a Protestant, I'd remain one. May I tell you a little story, queen?"

"Yes; go on."

"What was I going to say? – Yes, now I know. – You see, my dear father-the king's physician has surely told you what a good man he was-But I'm beginning at the wrong end; I wanted to tell it to you differently. – Well, as I was going to say, I went to school to a very strict priest who condemned all people that didn't belong to our faith, to the lowest depths of hell. I was once telling my father about it, when he said: 'Purgei,'-he always called me Purgei when he wanted to speak right to my heart-'Purgei,' said he, 'there are many millions of people in the world, and the smallest portion of them are Christians, and what a vile God it would be who would condemn all the rest to hell just because they aren't Christians, when they can't help it, and were born as they are. Don't you believe,' said he, 'that a man's damned for his faith; as long as he's virtuous.' Well, I hold fast by that. Of course, I didn't say anything to the priest about it, for he needn't know everything. I'm sure he don't tell me all he knows."

The queen was silent, and Walpurga soon began again:

"And now I think of something, better than all. Oh, my dear queen, I must tell you this, too. It's about my father, who used to think a great deal. The old doctor, the father of the one who's living there now, often used to say that if father had studied he'd have become a great man. Well, one evening, on the very Sunday that I was confirmed, I was sitting with father and mother on the bench behind our little cottage by the lake. The evening bells were tolling; we had said our aves and were sitting about in front of the cottage, when we heard the Liederkrantz. They were coming across the lake in a boat, and were singing so beautifully-I can't tell you how lovely their singing was. And then

father got up from his seat, his face glowing in the sunshine, and said: 'Now I know how our Lord in heaven must feel.' 'Don't blaspheme,' said my mother. 'I'm not blaspheming; quite the reverse,' said father. His voice seemed wondrous strange. 'Yes, I know it, I feel it,' said he; 'all churches-our own, the Protestant, the Jewish, the Turkish, and whatever their names may be-every one of them has a part in the song, and though each sings as best he can, they go together very well, and make a chorus that must sound glorious up there in heaven. Let every one sing according to the voice God has given him, for He will know how it will harmonize, and it surely does harmonize beautifully.'"

Walpurga's beaming glance met that of the queen.

"Your father spoke wisely," said the queen; a tear glistened in her eye and in that of the nurse, too.

Walpurga went away, taking the child with her.

The next day the queen sent for the king, and said:

"Kurt, I have courage."

"I know it."

"No. I have a courage that you do not know."

"A courage that I do not know?"

"And never will know. I have courage enough to appear weak and vacillating; but, Kurt, you will not misjudge me on that account?"

"Pray speak more plainly, and with fewer preliminaries."

"I am determined," continued the queen, "I hardly dare utter that word, now-but you will not misjudge me? I shall remain in the faith in which I was born, and we shall nevertheless be as one."

The king thanked her quite cordially, and only regretted that the canon knew of the matter. He hoped, however, to be able to silence his tongue.

The queen was surprised to find that he manifested so little joy; but, on second thought, this seemed quite natural to her, for why should that which had been nothing more than a passing cloud, leave great results in its wake? Others could know nothing of the bitter struggle it had cost her.

She felt sensible that it would be a long while before any expression or resolve of hers would obtain weight or authority, for it would not soon be forgotten that she had once shown herself weak.

While she was in the Protestant court chapel, on the following Sunday, she scarcely ventured to raise her eyes. She was thinking of how it would have been if she now were in the other church, and of how the eyes of the congregation would have been directed to the pew that was thenceforward to remain vacant. In spirit, she had already deserted this church and its congregation. Her soul trembled when she thought of the resolve she had entertained, and, from the bottom of her heart, she thanked her husband, whose strong arm had held her back.

When the whole congregation arose and, in the prayers for the royal household, offered up thanks for her preservation and that of the royal prince, she could no longer restrain her tears.

Contrary to her usual habit, she went to church again that afternoon.

Meanwhile, the king and Countess Irma were pleasantly sauntering in that portion of the park from which the public was shut out.

The king informed Irma of the queen's resolve and of how she had been induced to give it up. Irma replied that she had, long since, surmised as much, but had not felt that she had a right to speak of it. She had dropped a hint to Doctor Gunther, who had refused to have anything to do with the matter.

The king expressed his dislike for Gunther, but Irma defended him with great enthusiasm.

"The doctor is very fortunate," said the king, "to have so eloquent an advocate in his absence."

"I am that to all friends whom I truly respect."

"I could wish that I, too, were accused," continued the king.

"And I believe," replied Irma, smiling, "Your Majesty could not wish for a more earnest advocate than I would be."

A pause ensued. The king gracefully and frankly retracted his complaints against Gunther, and this conversation seemed merely a bridge over which they passed to another topic.

The king spoke of the queen and of her peculiar temperament.

It was the first time that the king and Irma had spoken of the queen. That the king not only prompted, but actually called forth her remarks, was the cause, at a later day, of incalculable suffering.

They extolled the poetic sense, the fervent feeling, the flower-like tenderness of the queen, and while they thus depicted her in glowing colors, they, in their own minds, found fault with her weakness and overflowing enthusiasm.

When a husband thus speaks of his wife, to a third person, it inevitably leads to estrangement and exposure.

Thus far, all was veiled in terms of praise. It was here just as it was with the queen in church. With all the power of her will, she strove to forget herself in her prayer, and to be again as she had once been; and yet, while the sense of the words she uttered entered her soul, she could not help being aware of a secret numbness and estrangement that seemed to say to her: "You will never again be as you once were."

While the king and Irma were thus conversing, they appeared to each other as equals. Their views of life were in accord, and while they spoke of how easily one might yield to temptation, their intimacy seemed to them a proof of strength rather than of weakness. They went on in perfect step with each other, and Irma no longer said: "Let us return."

The queen, since she had again appeared in society, was, if possible, more gracious and amiable than she had ever been. She placed every one far above her. They had none of them been as weak and vacillating as she. She felt it her duty to do good to every one, because, although she was no better than they, she was placed far above them. Her soul was all humility.

A few days later, the newspapers mysteriously hinted that attempts had been made to take advantage of the angelic purity of the queen, in order to estrange her from herself and alienate the affections of the people from her.

This, it was readily understood, alluded to the queen's contemplated change of faith.

The queen had always openly acknowledged herself on the side of the liberal opposition, and the king regarded Gunther as the mediator who had procured her the goodwill of the press, and who, in doing so, had not feared committing an indiscretion.

This plain and flagrant perversion of the truth only served the more to embitter him against the press and the machinations of the queen's party at court. Nevertheless, he dissembled his resentment, for he felt that he could well afford to bide his time.

CHAPTER VI

(IRMA TO HER FRIEND EMMA.)

"Let me tell you all that I did yesterday. I wanted to read-I saw the letters but could not read a word, for they all seemed to be moving about the page, like so many ants in an anthill. I wanted to sing, but no song was to my liking. I wanted to play, but even Beethoven seemed strange, and I lay for hours, dreaming. I followed the little mother and her son beyond the mountain. The larks sang my thoughts to them. They reach their home, and the wild, daring lad is tractable once more. He carols his merry song to his beloved. I fancy I hear him. Ah, Emma! what is there so glorious as making others happy? It is hard enough to be a human being, fettered by a thousand trammels, by ailments, consideration for others, and all sorts of misery; but to suffer want beside! The very idea of jails is a disgrace to humanity. Ah, Emma! how noble, how like a revelation from the great heart of the people, were the words of the simple-minded wife of the wood-cutter. I tried to put what she had said into verse, intending to give it to the king the next morning; but I could not do it; nothing satisfied me. Language is worn out, narrow, coarse. I was ever thinking of Schiller's words: 'When the soul speaks, it has ceased to be the soul.' I left my scribbling. I passed a restless night. When the soul's depths are stirred, it wanders about like a spirit, and can find no rest in sleep.

"While at breakfast this morning, I informed the king of what Walpurga had said. I was annoyed to find that he did not understand more than half of it. How else could he have answered me: 'Yes, the Highlanders have great affection for their rulers. Pray tell that to your father.'

"The king observed that he had made a mistake, but, adroit and amiable as he is, quickly recovered his good nature and said: 'Dear Countess, I will give you a secret title, which is to be known only by us two. I appoint you as spy on the popular heart. Seek and listen, and whenever you find anything, you can always count upon unquestioning compliance on my part. Does it not seem to you that Egeria was nothing more than a spy on the popular heart? At the altar in the temple, she could overhear the secret thoughts of the people, and then repeated them to king Numa, whom they deified and adored.'

"'But our people only use prescribed prayers,' said I.

"'The thought is quite suggestive,' replied the king, and when Schnabelsdorf entered shortly afterward, he commissioned him to make brief notes of what fixed prayers the Grecians and Romans used in their temples.

"And thus the whole story ended. What I had imagined would create a deep impression, merely served to furnish amusement for an evening.

"Ah, dear Emma, *amusement* is the point about which all revolves. If an apostle were to appear to-day, he could not help preaching, 'Ask not, how shall we amuse ourselves to-day, but'-etc., etc., - finish the sentence for yourself.

"I am no better than the rest of them. I, too, am nothing but a puppet, wound up to run seventy years, and to dance and laugh and ride and amuse itself in the mean while. All of us are mere singing-birds; the only difference being that some are contented with grain and caterpillars and flies, while others require larger morsels, such as rabbits, bucks, deer, pheasants, fish. And the higher education of that variety of singing-birds known as man, lies in the fact that he cooks his food. There is terrible vacuity in many men. *To make conversation*. Therein lies the whole art. Try to get a clear notion of the expression: *to make conversation*, and you will find how nonsensical it is. The people find me entertaining, but I don't *make conversation*. I merely speak when I have somewhat to say.

"My evil spirit is constantly shouting the word '*dilettante*' in my ear.

"Dilettante-One who junkets or feeds on tit-bits for pastime,'-says my dictionary. Rather rough, but there is something in it."

"One day later.

"The king has just sent me the following poem. I must apologize to him; he seems to have understood my communication far better than I had suspected. What do you think of the lines? Why should a king not write verses? Ideality is required of him. Indeed a king should understand all things, but be a dilettante in none.

"P. S. – I have just looked at the lines again, and find that I cannot copy them for you."

"A day later.

"Don't laugh at my continually telling you of Walpurga.

"It was during our writing-lesson to-day, that the king found me with her. He told me how much pleasure it had afforded him to be able to pardon her relative.

"Our relationship is very distant,' said she, 'nothing more than forty-second cousins; and, Your Majesty, I've something on my mind. If Red Thomas turns out badly, I can't help it.'

"The king laughed and replied: 'Nor can I.' It is hard to understand how Walpurga never speaks of Zenza and her son except in anger, and that she will have nothing to do with them. Strange demons jostle each other in the hearts of the people. I fear that my office of spy on the popular heart will prove very difficult.

"By the king's orders, I have been furnished with a copy of the church prayers of the Greeks and Romans.

"I must write it down and then the idea will cease tormenting me. I am constantly picturing to myself, how would it have been if Zenza had become first lady of the bedchamber, and her son, the poacher, master of the hounds. She would be ready enough of speech. She has exceedingly clever and cunning eyes, and the lad would surely have been an elegant cavalier.

"In spite of all their prating about human equality and pride of birth, I cannot help regarding it as a sign of divine grace, that I was born a countess, instead of Zenza's daughter; but there are two sides to that question.

"God's creatures are not so badly off in this world, after all. The frog croaking in the marsh is just as happy as the nightingale that sings on the tree.

"To say to the frog, 'Thou, too, should'st dwell in the rosebush and sing like the nightingale,' were not humane, but simply tyrannical.

"Have you ever patiently listened to the croaking of the frogs? How expressive it is of comfort! While I write, they are having a grand concert over in the park pond. I enjoy listening to them. We human beings are impudent enough to judge everything by the standard of our own taste, and yet Mistress Frog will, very justly, find no music so sweet to her ears as the song of Master Frog.

"I feel so grateful, dear Emma, that I can write everything to you. You cannot imagine what a relief it is to me.

"I am a spy on my own heart; there are many wild spirits in it-adventurers and fortune-hunters and, with them all, a nun. I am quite curious to know how so mixed a company will get on together.

"My behavior toward the whole court is so free and independent, because I have a secret daily task: writing to you.

"But my thoughts go out to you a thousand times oftener:

There's not an hour in the silent night.
But what my thoughts go out to thee.

"Do you remember it? It was your favorite song. I sing it, for your sake, at least once every day. You and my piano are all in all to me. You patiently await my coming. All the music of all the

masters that ever were. Or ever will be, dwells within you, and you only await the coming of the one whose touch can release those tones.

"I have a dual soul. In its one phase, the piano-in its other, the zither. The one is easily moved from place to place; the other not. The one requires that the fingers touch the strings. But ah, dear Emma, I scarce know what I am writing. I wish I could get rid of the habit of thinking. I wish I were Zenza's daughter and the poacher were my brother. But no; our thieves and rogues who have been at school long enough to know the seven cardinal sins and the whole of the catechism by heart, are timid and cowardly; they drop the petition for pardon into their mother's lap, while they stand by whining: Forgive us, we have done nothing wrong. All the world over, there is no longer genuine scorn of nature. Methinks the 'Italian robber behind the rock' that you once worked in wools, has, in these days, ceased to be more than a traditional pattern for embroidery. The arts simply serve to gloss over life.

"Good-night-good-night."

"A day later,

"I never read what I have once written. I do not care to be reminded of it again. Yesterday's sun does not shine to-day. – But that was not what I meant. The sun is the same, but the light is ever new, and I am happy to-day and do not care for all the churches and palaces, men and women, frogs and crocodiles in the world.

"To-day, the king said to me:

"I am well aware, Countess, that you have thought contemptuously of me, during the last two days. Every withdrawal of your sympathy affects me as sensibly as if it were an electric shock. Do not let this happen again, I beg of you!" and while he spoke, he looked at me like a beseeching child. Ah, he has such deep, beautiful eyes!

"I remember your once saying to me: 'There are glances without a background, void of depth or soul'; but the glances of this friend have unfathomed depths.

"The bonds that held me captive shall no longer restrain me! I-I-but no-I cannot write the word.

"Oh, Emma! How I wish I were a peasant on a lonely mountain height. Last night, it seemed to me as if my native mountains were calling out to me, 'Come home'-'Do come'-'It is good to be with us.' Ah, I would like to come, but cannot.

"Walpurga is a great friend to me at present. I become absorbed in her life, so full of true, natural repose. I find it excessively amusing to behold the court as reflected through her eyes. It seems like a very puppet-play, and we, like two merry children at a raree-show.

"We often sing together, and I have learned some lovely songs from her. Oh, how charmingly independent the country people are.

"'On mountain heights there dwells no sin.' The song is ever haunting me.

"The king departs for the baths to-day: my brother is in his suite. The king requested me to write to him, now and then. I shall not do it."

"Two days later,

"The king knows that I cannot live unless there be flowers in my room, and has given orders to have a fresh bouquet placed there every day. This displeases me. A flower that a friend has stooped to pluck for you is worth more than a thousand artistically arranged bouquets.

"The king has also left orders that bouquets shall be sent daily to Baroness N- and Countess A-. I think this is only to avoid remarks upon the attentions shown me. I am angry at the king. He shall not have a line from me.

"I have for some time past been taking lessons in modeling, from a professor at the academy. He has finished a bust of me, and has used it as a model for a figure of Victory, to be placed on the new arsenal. Have I not reason to be proud? After this, I shall ever be in the open air, and shall see nothing but the blue sky, the sun, the moon, and the stars, and, at noon, the guard-mounting.

"The professor says that I have talent for modeling. This has made me quite happy. Painting and drawing are only half the battle-mere makeshifts. Will you permit me, on my return, to make a *relievo* of you?

"Did I not, in one of my letters to you, speak of a secret in regard to the queen?

"I think I did.

"The affair is now at an end. For love of the king, the queen wished to enter our church, or rather yours-pardon me, once and for all time, I have no church. The king behaved nobly in the matter. I shall never forget the time he told me of it. He is, indeed, a great man. How glorious it is, that there are princes on earth who realize our ideal of the perfect man. Free and yet self-possessed, unspoiled, unperturbed and unbiased. If there were no kings, we could no longer know a free, beautiful, perfect man. I use the word *beautiful* in its highest sense, and of course presuppose the existence of a noble mind. All are not gods who suffer themselves to be worshiped.

"The poet and the king are, of all men, alone perfect. All others-be they musicians or painters, sculptors or architects, artists or scholars-have narrow, contracted vocations, solo instruments, as it were. The poet and the king are the only ones who grasp life in all its phases. To them, naught is devoid of meaning, because all belongs to them. The poet creates a world; the king is a world in himself. The poet knows and depicts the shepherd and the huntsman, the king and the waiting-maid, the seamstress-in fact, all. But the king is hunter and statesman, soldier and farmer, scholar and artist, all in himself. He represents the orchestra of talents. Thus is he king, and thus does he represent a people, an age-aye, humanity itself, and at its best.

"Ah, Emma! Call me Turandot. Schoning, the poetic chamberlain, is also paying his addresses to me.

"Do you know what I ought to have been?

"I do.

"Queen of a tribe of savages. That is what I was created for. My true vocation would be to found a new civilization. Don't laugh at me. I am not joking; indeed, I'm not. I am fit for something far better than all I have here. I am not modest. I judge others and myself, too. I know my merits and my faults, also.

"On father's estate, there is a hammock that hangs between two elms. My greatest pleasure was to lie in it, suspended in the air, while I dreamt of distant woods.

"Do you know some savage tribe that would elect me as its queen? I have procured some of the Indian melodies, if they really deserve the name. One of the professors at the university, who spent six years among the Indians, recently gave a lecture at court. He brought some of their instruments with him, and had them played on. There was more noise than music. It seemed like the lisp of a nation which, as regards civilization, is yet in its infancy."

"Four o'clock in the morning,

"Forget all that I have written to you, as you would the breezes and the weather-changes of yesterday.

"I have just left my bed, in order to write to you. I cannot sleep. I am scarcely dressed while I sit here speaking to you. Oh, that I *could* speak to you! Writing is a miserable makeshift-nay, helplessness itself.

"I don't know what ails me. All that I am-my very self-seems as if only for the time being. I feel as if waiting for something, I know not what. I fancy that the very next moment must bring it, and that I shall either be doing some wonderful thing, or have it happen to me-that I shall be completely changed and become a great healing power, instead of the puny, useless child of man that I now am. I listen and fancy that I must hear a tone that has never yet been uttered on earth.

"There is no use trying-I cannot write. I imagined that it would soothe me if I could force myself to think and speak of all things in definite terms, but I know nothing definite. I only know that I am unhappy. Not unhappy, but as if dead and yet alive. I imagine myself a sleep-walker.

"I can write no more. I close my letter and shall go to bed. I want to sleep. All the world about me lies hushed in slumber. Oh, that I could dream myself into another world, even though my sleep were one from which there is no waking!

"Good-night! Good-morning! Irma."

CHAPTER VII

"To-morrow, I mean to bring Countess Irma to you," said Doctor Gunther to his wife, one evening. "She's the daughter of my old friend."

"In voice and manner, the countess is full of majesty, but her singing is not practical."

"Then you shall teach her. She will be glad to learn from you."

"If she be willing, I am quite at her service."

The doctor was delighted to find it so easy to bring the two ladies together. He knew, of course, that his wife complied with his every wish, but in this instance he was doubly anxious that all should go smoothly.

For some time past, he had observed that Irma was in a feverish condition which, during the last few days, had been growing worse; but he was one of those physicians who pay great attention to mental conditions and, instead of waiting for disease to make its appearance, endeavor to avert it by proper changes in the mode of living. He did not know the cause of Irma's excitement, but he knew that her temperament was one of extremes, and felt sure that if she could only obtain an insight into a pure home and, perhaps, become initiated into its ways, it would have a tranquilizing effect and lead her mind to move in quieter channels. He had enough experience to know that there are no substitutes for sympathy and friendship, but felt that the acquaintance of a citizen's wife, of exalted character and ripe culture, could not fail to have an effect upon Irma, who had thus far known no life but that of the cloister and the court.

Gunther had no need to give his wife instructions, or even a mere hint as to the way in which she was to endeavor to gain an influence over Irma. He felt as sure of his wife's course in the matter as if she were a force in nature, and well knew that, if left to her own methods, the result would be so much the more certain.

Gunther usually kept his household free from all relations with the court; but this was the daughter of his friend-although that friend was angry at him-and he allowed her the freedom of his house.

Some weeks before, when speaking of the Te Deum on the occasion of the birth of the crown prince, Irma had casually referred to her having met Gunther's wife and youngest daughter. The doctor had again, as if by the merest chance, introduced the subject, and, almost without knowing it, Irma had expressed a wish to improve the slight acquaintance thus begun. This was just what he wished for, and, on the afternoon of the day following, he conducted Irma to his beautiful, well-furnished home.

Gunther's wife was Swiss by birth, and had come from a wealthy and cultured family. She spoke High German with a strong Alemannic accent. She endeavored neither to retain the dialect nor to acquire the language of books. Her easy, natural ways seemed the result of careful culture, but there was no attempt to show off either. As a matter of course, she was perfectly conversant with all that related to the economy of the household, and at the same time fully alive to all that makes for beauty and the common weal.

As a singer, Madame Gunther had been a great favorite, both in social circles and at important vocal performances. Her voice was a full, resonant soprano and, although she had given up singing solos, she and her daughters would still take part when great musical works were performed. When fresher voices had taken the solo parts, she had, without a murmur of regret, retired to her place in the chorus.

And thus, too, was her life. Self-reliant and diligent at home, she took an active interest in all public institutions in which women were permitted to take part. She had preserved one priceless heirloom-she was free from nervousness and, with her, public spirit was a duty. She educated her children, managed her household, was a kind and attentive hostess, and performed all this as if obeying the simple instincts of her nature.

She honored her husband. Whatever he said was always of special weight, but still she held fast to her own judgment. Although she had been living in the capital for nearly twenty years, she had remained a stranger to the whole of the hodge-podge system of caste and the granting of favors by the grace of this or that one. She was not opposed to the system, but she left such matters to those in whose eyes they possessed value and importance; as for herself, she regarded them with absolute indifference.

She was pleased at the honors shown her husband, but that seemed, to her, a matter of course. He was a great man, and if the world had withheld its praise, he would, in her eyes, still have been the greatest and best of men. Her whole bearing expressed this feeling. She had never had the slightest desire to appear at court, and when her husband was obliged to be away from home by day or at night, and often for weeks at a time, she accepted his absence as unavoidably incident to his calling, and refrained from adding to his discomfort by complaining thereof.

When the doctor returned, it was always to a well-ordered home. Refreshed and invigorated by its influence, he would go back to the smooth and slippery precincts of the court.

Irma was now introduced to this home. In appearance, she was all beauty and dignity, and no one would have guessed how forlorn and homeless she felt within her heart. In her hand, she held the bouquet which had, as usual, been sent to her that day, by the king's orders. Gunther had told her that this was his daughter Paula's birthday, and she had brought the flowers for her. They were as lovely as she who brought them. And yet what was it that clung to them? It was almost sinful to use the bouquet as a birthday favor, for Irma felt mortified when she received it. But the flowers were as coin that might be passed on to another.

When Irma entered the house, she felt as if escaping from the noise and bustle of the market-place, or the restless life and cries of the highway, into a temple of domestic peace.

The house was on a little, narrow street, and was surrounded by a garden full of tall, fine trees. A portion of the yard had been fenced off and converted into an aviary. The hallway and rooms were adorned with statuettes and pictures; the furniture was simple and massive. The doctor's library, reception-room and study were in the upper story.

There had been no preparations of any kind for Irma's reception. The mother had carefully enjoined her daughters not to make any change in their dress on account of the countess's visit. They did not go out to meet her. She was conducted through the summer house, where the flowers and presents for Paula had been arranged, and there, on the steps, sat Madame Gunther and her daughters, busily engaged in needlework. The elder daughter, the wife of Professor Korn of the university, had her child with her. Paula, the younger of the two, who, like Irma, had just entered her twenty-first year, could not be termed beautiful, but had a bright and cheerful countenance and a fine figure.

Irma was warmly welcomed. As it was Gunther's hour for consultation, he soon retired and left her with the ladies. She was surprised, at first, to find herself repeatedly accosted as the daughter of an old friend. She was not here on her own merit, or as the most admired of all the ladies at court, but simply as Count Eberhard's daughter, who had been received into the house from an affectionate sense of duty. When asked about her father's health, she thanked them, although she felt sad at heart to think that she knew so little of him. How utterly different from hers was the life these children led.

Music soon afforded a convenient and agreeable change. On the piano, there lay a composition in manuscript. It was by a nephew of Madame Gunther's, who lived in northern Germany. Madame Gunther told her that he was a philologist by profession, but that, as he would, in all likelihood, lose his eyesight, he had determined to cultivate his decided musical gifts and to perfect himself as a musician.

Irma begged Madame Gunther to sing the song, but she replied that, while her voice was no longer equal to it, that of the countess was exactly suited to it. She gave the manuscript to Irma, who read it over and afterward sang it with rich, full voice, to Madame Gunther's accompaniment. The composition was pleasing, but full of suggestions of well-known masters.

Madame Gunther now showed what she meant by practical singing. Irma did not make the best use of the means at her command, and where there were faults showed them too plainly. The doctor's wife instructed her in a simple, unpretentious manner, and Irma remarked that the daughters ought to feel happy to think that they could hear such singing every day.

"And this is my son, the most grateful of all listeners," said Madame Gunther, introducing a handsome young man with a full, brown beard. He was technical director in a manufactory of chemicals, and had brought a student with him. Female friends who lived in the neighborhood joined them soon afterward, and there were merry times on the terrace and in the garden.

Irma remarked the attentive glances directed upon her. It seemed to her as if all knew the troubles that filled her soul; she had completely forgotten how beautiful she was.

"Pardon me, Madame Gunther, for looking at you so," said Irma, suddenly, "but I am somewhat of a dabbler in plastic art, and when I notice the contour and color of your head, it seems as if the Holbein Madonna, of the Dresden Gallery, had come to life and was standing before me."

"Can you really see the resemblance, at this late day?" asked Madame Gunther, blushing slightly; "in former days, it was often remarked and was almost the very first thing my husband said to me in Zurich, now well-nigh twenty-six years ago. On my mother's side I can trace my descent from the family of Burgomaster Maier, by whose orders the picture was originally painted."

Irma was delighted with all that she heard and saw, and especially with Madame Gunther's reminiscences. While speaking of her own efforts in the way of art, she looked at the doctor's wife earnestly, and only wished she were able to model a portrait, in which case Madame Gunther would have to sit to her. She could not help thinking, at the same time, that there was a culture which had been handed down from earliest times: a culture whose history, running through all ages, is entirely different from that of the nobility, and that the best results of human effort had been brought about, not by the nobles, but by civic liberty.

Madame Gunther asked Irma whether she had a picture of her mother.

Irma replied that her father had had a portrait taken of her mother when in the fullness of her beauty. The picture had been a failure, and almost seemed as if intended for some one else, and so her father had ordered it to be destroyed. He would rather have no picture than a false one.

"That, of itself, is enough to make one honor him for his love of truth," said Madame Gunther. "Most people are satisfied with what is false, and keep on saying: 'you can recognize this or that feature,' until they, at last, persuade themselves that it must once have been a true likeness."

The conversation now turned upon the fact that Irma had never known her mother, and Irma's glance often dwelt upon the two daughters sitting beside their mother.

Madame Gunther said:

"I trust that I've not awakened painful memories, but I regard it as a duty that we should often think of our beloved dead; calmly and peacefully, of course. I've always felt thus with regard to my departed mother, and I hope that, when the time comes, my children may have the same feelings toward me."

Irma pressed Madame Gunther's hand. All that she said was so full of truth, so satisfying.

Madame Gunther told her that it was long before she had acquired a taste for plastic art. Appreciation had, however, gradually dawned upon her; but it was for what related to the human figure, rather than for landscapes. The conversation continued in an easy and cheerful vein. The carriage had long ago been announced; the half-hour which Irma had meant to stay with Madame Gunther had been prolonged to more than an hour. At last, she took her leave with sincere requests to repeat her visit.

CHAPTER VIII

When Irma returned to the palace, she felt as if coming from another world—from a life far removed from her own.

Gunther was a deep student of the human heart.

In one respect, Irma's visit had had the result foreseen by him; but there was some unknown influence at work, and, perhaps, affecting previously existing conditions. Nothing unless it be the drop that falls from the cloud, is free from foreign admixture, and it is from pure thought alone that one can draw definite conclusions. The water in the spring, and the living human heart, both contain foreign elements within themselves, and no one can foretell how a new ingredient may affect the invisible atoms thus held in solution.

Irma's soul was deeply agitated. Her great power had been exercised and had sought some act in which to spend itself. She had felt happy in the possession of the king's friendship and in the thought that she could furnish so great a mind as his with the congenial companionship he would otherwise be obliged to forego; but the daily bouquet, trivial attention as it was, had aroused and offended her. "He isn't my ideal," said she to herself, and her heart felt lonely again, as it had been ever since she was old enough to think.

Although she had been lonely while at the cloister, she had there found a friend who, if she had little to impart, gratefully accepted all that Irma could give her. At the court, she felt lonely in spite of her wanton humors. She was always obliged to be doing something, be it playing, singing, painting or modeling; anything but this deathlike solitude. She was suffering the homesickness of the soul.

"Are not all in this world homeless?" she asked herself, and, while searching her mind for an answer, Gunther had introduced her to his household.

There, all seemed beautiful and complete. There was a home, and a mother who showed that she understood a young and ardent life; the daughters would never suffer as she did. The mother's glance fell upon her and seemed to say: "I shall understand you and will soothe all sorrows you may tell me of." But Irma could not complain, nor exclaim: "Help me!" – and where nothing was required of her, least of all. She could and must help herself.

Madame Gunther had touched her most tender chord: the memory of her mother, and, although Irma gently avoided the subject, her pain was so much the greater.

She wept, but did not know it until a tear dropped on her bosom.

There is so much comfort, so much of real and beautiful seclusion, in a world which is content with itself, and which, in its work and education, requires no favors from those above. How happy the lot of a daughter in such a home, until she, in turn, becomes the head of another household.

Irma felt humbled. All her pride had left her. Her thoughts were still in the garden, where the people moved about in careless unconstraint and where the men, returning from their professional labors, and the maidens, from their domestic duties, were enjoying themselves in common.

"One thing yet remains mine and it is the best," exclaimed Irma, suddenly rising: "solitude is mine. I can yet be lonely, strong, self-contained."

Her waiting-maid entered and announced a lackey sent by the queen.

"Does the queen want to see me at once?"

"Yes, gracious Countess."

"Very well, I'll be there directly."

"Walpurga was right, after all," said she to herself; "I, too, serve."

She felt vexed while she stood before the mirror to have her dress adjusted. She assumed a cheerful expression with which to appear before the queen. She was obliged to do so.

She hastened to obey the queen's orders. When she got near the door, she drew herself up and again fixed her features in the cheerful, smiling expression that she wished them to have, and then entered the room, which, as usual, was dimly lighted.

The queen was sitting in a large arm-chair. She was clad in a dress of snowy white, and a lace handkerchief had been twined about her golden hair.

"Come nearer, dear Countess," said the queen. "I am delighted to see you again. When I see my dear friends, it seems as if I'd been spending the last few weeks in another world. Unfortunately, I am somewhat indisposed again. I owe you special thanks, for I understand that you've kindly interested yourself in the nurse; by keeping her cheerful, you do the prince a service. The king quite agrees with me that you're a real treasure to us. I shall write as much to your father and tell him how happy we are to have you with us. That will surely put him in a better humor with you."

Irma was glad that the queen had so much to say, for she was thus enabled to recover her composure.

"Pray give me the letter that lies on the table," said the queen.

Irma brought it and the queen added:

"Just read these lines of the king's."

Irma read: "Pray tell Countess Irma to keep me constantly informed as to the condition of our son. Remember me to the dear fourth petal of our clover-leaf."

Irma returned the letter with thanks. She felt deeply humiliated to think that the king was trying to force her to write, and at the method he had chosen. Walpurga was right when she spoke of love-glances at the cradle.

Irma almost fainted with grief and shame.

"Won't you do us the favor to write, dear Countess?"

Irma bowed deeply, and the queen continued:

"Of course there will be very little to write about. Man is the highest object in creation and, for that very reason, develops far more slowly than all other creatures."

Irma was about to suggest that, at that rate, a prince would develop still more slowly, but she merely nodded and smiled assent.

She was not in a mood to enter into the queen's way of thinking. She could see nothing in her but nursery thoughts, with which, at present, she had no sympathy. Though they were vastly more important, what would it matter to me, thought she to herself. Here, just as in Gunther's house, there is a life separate from the world and contented with itself. Here is a mother and her child. Of what use am I? Merely to talk and take part in everything. All others are complete and possess a world of their own; and am I always only to take a part-there, the alms bestowed by friendship; here, those accorded me by royal grace? Am I complete in myself, or am I not?

And while Irma's mind was filled with these thoughts, the queen, in her agitated, soulful manner, went on to say:

"The miracle of life fills me with awe. Have you never thought of the world of meaning suggested by the idea of a child drawing its first breath and opening its eyes for the first time? Air and light are earth's first and last messengers; the first breath and the last; the first glance and the last. How wonderful!"

Irma now felt what it was to serve. Had she been free, and on an equal footing with the one who addressed her, she would have said: "My dear friend, I am not in the mood, just now, to enter into what you are saying. Within your soul, there is the calm of early morn; in mine, hot, burning noonday. I implore you, leave me to myself."

Irma was filled with a deep longing for boundless solitude, but she dared not show it. She would gladly have closed her eyes, but obsequious glances were required of her. She listened and answered, but her soul was far away. For the first time in her life, she felt indignant that there was a fellow-being who enjoyed rights of which she was deprived. She felt angry at the queen. She was, several times, on

the point of mentioning her visit to Gunther's house, but felt that life there had nothing in common with the constant gloom of the queen's apartment. It seemed to her, moreover, that it were wrong, even in thought, to bring hither the citizen-wife whose footsteps had never entered the palace; and then she thought of her father and his strong sense of independence.

And while such were her thoughts, she spoke of the prince and of Walpurga's amusing peculiarities.

The queen saw that Irma's thoughts were slightly tinged with sadness and, wishing to cheer her up, said:

"Ah, dear countess, I am really languishing for music. Friend Gunther has forbidden my listening to music, lest it might affect my nerves; but one of your little songs would do no harm. I hear that you've learned a beautiful one from the nurse. Won't you sing it for me? May I send for your zither?"

Irma felt more like crying, but she bowed assent and sent a servant for the zither. He brought it, and Irma sang:

"Ah, blissful is the tender tie
That binds me, love, to thee,
And swiftly speed the hours by
When thou art near to me.

"My heart doth bear a burden, love,
And thou hast placed it there;
And I would wager e'en my life
That none doth heavier bear."

Within Irma's soul there was a shrill, discordant accompaniment to this song, every word of which had a double meaning.

"And I must sing this to the queen," said the voice within her. "Yes, you two are united. All happy ones are. The unhappy one is always lonely."

Her song was full of gloomy despair; her heart, of anger. "You sing that with deep feeling," said the queen, "and my son hears it, too. One can scarcely say 'hears,' for all that he hears or sees is undefined. Pray repeat the song, so that I may sing it to myself."

Irma sang it again, but this time her mind was more at ease. The queen thanked her heartily. "The doctor has unfortunately forbidden my conversing for any length of time, even with those who are dear to me. I am delighted to think that we shall soon go to the summer palace. Then we will spend much of our time together and with the child. Adieu! dear Countess, write soon, and sing your lovely soul into the child's heart."

Irma went away. While passing through the long corridors, she stopped several times, as if to remember where she was. At last she reached her room, and gave orders that her horse be saddled at once and that a groom be in waiting.

Irma had just changed her dress when a servant brought her a letter. She broke the seal with a trembling hand and read:

"*My child:* You have now been at court for eighteen months. I have left you free and uncontrolled. There are many things which I would like to say to you, but cannot write. Writing estranges. Your rooms are ready, and flowers await you. It is now lovely summer and apples on your tree are getting ruddy cheeks like your own, and I should like to see yours again. Come to

"*Your Father.*"

Irma threw up her hands. "This is deliverance! Yes, I still have a home, and there is still a heart against which I can rest my head. I am coming, father! I am coming!"

Her brain whirled with excitement. She rang for her servant and sent word to the groom that she would not ride out. Then, after having ordered the waiting-maid to pack up enough clothes for several weeks, as quickly as possible she presented herself before the queen and asked for leave of absence.

"I am sorry that you, too, leave me," said the queen, "but I shall gladly part with you if it only helps, as I hope it will, to make you happy. Do all that lies in your power to be in full accord with your father. Believe me, Irma, in the various relations of life, be it as wife or as mother, one is sensible of a constant desire to grow and expand with each succeeding day; the child alone is perfectly satisfied with itself."

The queen and Irma were not in accord that day. Irma was restless and anxious to depart. Whatever detained her, though it were only for a second, excited her resentment.

What the queen was saying might have been interesting to one who was not in a hurry, but not to her whose foot was already on the carriage step.

The parting was, nevertheless, an affecting one, the queen kissing Irma.

All that now remained was to ask Countess Brinkenstein's formal assent. That, too, was obtained.

She had not yet said farewell to Doctor Gunther and his family. She wished to say good-by through Colonel Bronnen, or Baron Schoning, who had told her that he often visited the doctor's house. It was also necessary to take leave of these men and her companions at court. Now that she was about to go, she found out how many acquaintances she had. But where are they when you need them? They are here, simply that you may not need them. Such is the world; but stop! There's one to whom, of all others, you must say farewell. She hurried off to Walpurga.

"Walpurga," she exclaimed, "when you get up tomorrow, shout as loud as you can. By that time, I'll be at our mountain home, and I'll shout back to you until the whole world rings with laughter. I'm going to my father."

"I'm glad of it."

"And aren't you sorry to see me go?"

"Of course; but if your father's still alive you oughtn't miss looking into the eyes that are only once in the world for you. I'm glad, for your father's sake, that he's able to look on such a child as you are. Oh! if my Burgei were only as tall."

"Walpurga, I'll also go to see your husband, your child and your mother. I'll sit down at your table and remember you to your cow and your dog. I shall; depend upon it."

"Oh! how happy they'll be! If Hansei's only at home and not in the woods."

"If he is, I'll have them send for him; and now farewell! don't forget me!"

"You can rely on that," said Walpurga, while Irma hurried away.

She still found time to write to her friend Emma:

"Dearest Emma: Two hours ago, I received a letter from father. He calls me home to him. I have leave of absence for a fortnight. Do you know what that means? I was obliged to promise that I would surely return; I don't know whether I shall keep my promise. The earth trembles at my feet and my head swims. The world is all chaos, but there will be light! Any one can say: 'Let there be light!' If we only could always do our best. But I shall not write another word. It is enough; I shall see you soon. Come to Wildenort as soon as you can, to your

"Irma.

"P.S. – I shall take no excuse; you must come. In return, I promise to go to your wedding. Many greetings to all of yours, and, above all, to your Albrecht."

The sun was already sinking toward the horizon, when Irma, accompanied by her maid, departed for Wildenort.

CHAPTER IX

So one can go away, after all, and leave the motley monotony called "the world" behind. Farewell, thou palace, and furnish thy inmates with their daily pleasures. Farewell, ye streets, filled with shops and offices, towers and churches, theaters, music halls and barracks. May fashion be gracious and favor you with customers, clients, guests, applause, and fostering laws. Vanish, frail frippery! I feel like a bird flying from the housetop, out into the wide world. How foolish to remain in the cage when the door is always open. Thou, great bailiff who holds the world captive—thy name is custom!

Thus thought Irma to herself, while seated in the carriage and driving out into the open world.

Her thoughts again recurred to the great house which she had just left. It was the dinner hour and they were waiting for the queen to appear. What a pity that the lord steward had not been present at the creation of the world, for here every one has his fixed place and the service is simply perfect. The queen expresses her regrets at the departure of Countess Irma. All praise her.

"Oh, she's so very good," says one.

"And so merry," says another.

"Somewhat unmanageable, but very amiable," says still another.

But what is there new? It's a bore to be talking of one subject all the time. Help! Zaniel Schnabelsdorf!

"Away with it all!" exclaimed Irma, suddenly: "I shall not look back again, but forward to my father."

The horses stepped out bravely, as if they knew they were carrying a child to her father.

Irma was so impatient that she told the servant who was seated on the box, to give a double fee to the driver so that they might get on faster.

She could hardly wait until she saw her father, so anxious was she to rest her head upon his breast.

What did she desire? To complain to him? How could he help her? She knew not. All she knew was that, with him, there must be peace. She wished to be sheltered, protected; no longer alone. To obey him and anticipate his every wish would be her highest happiness. To be released from herself, and to desire nothing that did not minister to the joy of another—oh, how happy the thought! The whole earthly load is removed. Thus must it be with the blessed spirits above! Thus should we imagine angels to be! They want for nothing and need nothing, they never change and never grow, are neither young nor old. They are eternal, and are ever laboring for and through others. Their works bring joy to the world and to themselves. They are the undying rays of an eternal sun.

During the greater part of the journey, Irma's brain was filled with such unintelligible dreams, and the whole world seemed to be saying: "Father-Daughter."

She regained composure at last. It would not do to arrive at the castle in this state.

Agitation is weakness, and it had always been her father's aim to foster strength of mind and self-command.

Irma forced herself to observe what was going on about her.

It was twilight when they reached the first post-station. Irma fancied she could almost feel the air of her native mountains, although they were still far off.

They drove on at a rapid pace. The evening bells were ringing, and the air was filled with their sounds, carrying them out to the men and women in the fields, and measuring time and eternity for them.

What would the world be without its bells, whose pealing harmonies are to serve as a substitute for the beautiful creations of antique art?

But these thoughts failed to satisfy Irma. They lifted her out of the world, whilst she desired to occupy herself with what was present and established.

In the villages through which they drove, and the fields by which they passed, there was singing, interrupted, now and then, by the rattling of the carriage wheels, and Irma thought: We make too much noise in this world, and thus miss enjoying what the rest may have to tell us.

No thoughts were to her liking. No outlook pleased her.

The stars appeared in the heavens, but what were they to man? They shine for him who is free and has naught to seek on earth. She, however, was seeking, and, in the world's vast circle, could see nothing but two starry eyes directed upon her; and they were her father's.

They continued on their journey, disturbing lazy horses and sleepy postilions at every station.

It was long after midnight when they arrived at Wildenort.

Irma alighted at the manor-house and, accompanied by the servant, knocked at the door.

Her father had not expected her so soon. There were no lights in the large house, or its extensive outbuildings.

Dogs barked, for strangers were coming. There was not even a dumb beast that knew Irma, for she was a stranger in her father's house.

Two plowboys passed by. They were astonished to see the beautiful lady at that hour, and she was obliged to tell them who she was.

She ordered her rooms to be opened. Her father slept near by. She longed to see him, but controlled herself. He could sleep calmly and not know that she was breathing near him. She, too, soon fell asleep and did not wake till broad daylight.

Stepping softly, old Eberhard entered the ante-chamber where Irma's maid was already sitting.

"My lady the countess, is still sleeping. It was three o'clock, just about daybreak, when we arrived."

"What made you hurry so and take no rest?"

"I don't know; but the countess was quite excited on the way. They couldn't drive fast enough for her. When my lady wishes anything, it must be done at once."

"Who are you, dear child?"

"Her ladyship's maid."

"No, but who are your parents? What took you to court?"

"My father was riding-master to Prince Adolar, and her royal highness had me educated in the convent school."

A chain of dependents, from generation to generation, thought the old man to himself.

The maid looked at him wonderingly.

He was tall and broad-shouldered.

He wore the mountaineer's dress and a white horn whistle hung by a cord from his neck. His fine head bent slightly forward and rested on a massive neck; his gray hair and beard were thick and closely cropped; his brown eye still sparkled, as if in youth; his expressive countenance looked like embossed work, and his whole figure resembled that of a knight who has just laid aside his armor and put himself at ease.

"I wish to see my daughter," said the old man as he went into the adjoining room. It was dark. Eberhard stepped to the window, on tiptoe, and drew aside the green damask curtain. A broad ray of light streamed into the room. He stood before the bed and, with bated breath, watched the sleeping one.

Irma was beautiful to behold. Her head, encircled by the long, loosened, golden-brown tresses; the clear, arched brow, the delicately chiseled nose, the mouth with its exquisitely curved upper lip, the rosy chin, the full cheeks with their peach-like glow-over all there lay a calm and peaceful expression. The beautiful, small, white hands lay folded on her breast.

Irma was breathing heavily, and her lips moved as if with a sad smile. It is difficult to sleep with one's hands folded on the breast. The hands gently loosened themselves, but the left one still rested on her heart. The father lifted it carefully and laid it at her side. Irma slept on quietly. Silently, the father took a chair and sat down at her bedside. While he sat there, two doves alighted on the broad window-sill, where they remained cooing with each other. He would have liked to frighten them away, but he dared not stir. Irma slept on and heard nothing.

Suddenly the pigeons flew away, and Irma opened her eyes.

"Father!" she cried, throwing her arms around his neck and kissing him. "Home again! Oh, how happy it makes me! Do draw the other curtain, so that I can see you better, and pray open the window so that I may inhale my native air! Oh, father! I've been away and now I've come back to you, and you won't let me go away again. You will support me in your powerful arms. Oh, now I think of what you said to me in my dream. We were standing together up on the Chamois hill and you took me up in your arms and, while carrying me, said: 'See, my child; so long as one of your parents lives, there is some one to help you bear up in the world.' Oh, father! Where have I been? Where am I now?"

"Be calm, my child. You've been at court and now you're home again. You're excited. Calm yourself. I'll call the servant. Breakfast is ready in the arbor."

He kissed her forehead and said:

"I kiss all your good and pure thoughts, and now let us live together again, as plain and sensible beings."

"Oh, that voice! To be in my father's house and at home once more. Life elsewhere is just like sleeping in one's clothes. 'Tis only at home that one can rest; for there no bond oppresses us."

He was about to leave, but Irma detained him.

"I feel so happy," said she, "to be here and look at you; to see you and think of you, all the time."

The father passed his hand over her forehead, and she said:

"Let your hand rest there. I now believe in the laying on of hands; my own experience convinces me."

He remained at her bedside for some time, his hand still resting upon her forehead.

At last he said:

"And now arise, my child. I shall expect you at breakfast."

"I am glad there is some one who can command me to 'get up.'"

"I don't command, I simply advise you. But, my dear child, something strange must be going on with you, as you understand nothing in its literal sense."

"Yes, father, – very strange! but that's all over, now."

"Well then, follow me as soon as you can; I shall await you."

The father went out to the arbor, where he awaited her coming. He moved the two cups and the beautiful vase of flowers first to one position, and then to another, and arranged the white table-cloth. Shortly after, Irma entered, clad in a white morning dress.

"You're-you're taller than I thought you were," said the father, a bright color suffusing his face.

He stroked his daughter's cheek, while he said:

"This white spot on your rosy cheek, extending from the jaw to the cheek-bone, is just as your mother had it."

Irma smiled and, grasping both of her father's hands, looked into his eyes. Her glance was so full of happiness that the old man, who, at all times, preserved his equanimity, found his eyes filling with tears. He endeavored to conceal them, but Irma said:

"That won't in the least detract from your heroism. Oh, father, why are we such slaves to ourselves? Why should we be afraid to appear as we are? Your great rule is that we should follow out our natures. Why do we not always do so? Oh, father, let me send up a joyful shout to my native mountains, to the forests and the lakes! I'm with ye, again, my constant friends! Let us live together!"

Hold fast by me and I will be as faithful as ye are! I greet thee, sun; and yonder hill under which my mother rests-

She could not go on. After some time, the old man said:

"It would be well, my child, if we could live out our life in all its native purity; but it is neither fear of ourselves, nor self-imposed slavery that induces us to avoid such scenes, such violent agitation. It is a deep-seated feeling that, by contrast, the next moment must appear bald and commonplace. It would oblige us to plunge from a life of excessive sensibility into the every-day world. It is for this reason that we should, and do, exercise self-control; for such emotions should not exhaust themselves in what might be called a devout outburst, but should extend through all our acts and thoughts, even to the smallest and most insignificant. That is the source of our noblest aspiration. Yes, my child, the very ones who thus, as it were, divide their life in two, profane the one-half of it, while they secretly flatter themselves: We have had great and noble emotions and are still capable of feeling them."

The old housekeeper brought the coffee. Irma waited on her father and told him that she expected Emma and her betrothed. Eberhard said:

"When Emma was here, years ago, your thoughts ran in the same vein as at present. We were on the Chamois hill, where a fine view of the great lake can be obtained, and were waiting to see the sunrise. Emma, in her matter-of-fact and plain-spoken way, said: 'I don't think it worth while to lose one's sleep and go to so much trouble for this. I find the sunset fully as beautiful and far less troublesome.' What did you answer her at the time?"

"I can't remember, father, dear."

"But I do. You said: 'The sunrise is far more elevating, but I don't know what one can do to have the rest of the day in keeping with the lofty mood thus inspired. Sunset is better for us, because the world then veils itself and allows us to rest. After beholding the highest, there are only two things left us-sleep and music.'"

"But, father, I've ceased to think so. Yesterday, during the whole of my drive, I was haunted by the thought: What are we in the world for, after all? Without us the trees would still grow; the beasts, the birds and the fishes would still live without us. All these have a purpose in the world; man alone is obliged to seek one. Men paint, and build, and till the soil, and study how they may the better kill each other. The only difference, after all, between mankind and the beast is that man buries his dead."

"And have you ventured so far, my child? I am indeed glad that you're with me once again. You must have had much to contend with. I trust you will once more learn to believe that our proper destiny is, to live in accordance with nature and reason. Look at the world!" said he, with a smile. "A maiden twenty-one years of age, and a countess to boot, asks: 'Why am I in the world?' Ah, my child, to be beautiful, to be good, to be as lovely as possible in mind as well as in outward form. Conduct yourself so that you can afford to wish that every one might know you thoroughly. – But enough of this, for the present."

The hour that father and daughter thus spent together in the arbor was full of happiness for both, and Irma repeatedly expressed a wish that she could thus live forever.

Oblivious of all else, each seemed to constitute the other's world.

"You've become my great tall girl," said her father. He had intended to say: "You must have gone through a great deal, for you return to your father and have nothing to tell about matters trifling or personal to yourself." He had intended to say this, but simply repeated: "You've become my great girl."

"And, father! you order me to remain with you, do you not?"

"You know very well that I've never ordered you to do anything, since you were able to think for yourself," replied the father. "I'd have you act according to your own convictions, and not against your will or reason."

Irma was silent. She had not received the answer she had hoped for, and, feeling that she must herself bring about the desired result, determined to do so.

A forest-keeper came to receive instructions in regard to the woods. Eberhard replied that he would ride out there himself. Irma begged to be allowed to accompany him and, her father consenting, she soon appeared in a hunting-dress and rode off with him across the meadows and in the direction of the forest.

Her face glowed with animation while she felt herself moving along on the spirited steed, through the shady, dewy forest.

While her father was giving his orders to the forest-keepers, Irma was resting on a mossy bank under a broad spreading fir tree. Her father's dog had already made friends with her, and now came up and licked her hand. Thus awakened, she arose and walked over toward the field at the edge of the forest. The first object her eyes fell upon was a four-petaled clover-leaf. She quickly possessed herself of it. Her father now joined her and noticed her happy looks.

"How much good it has done me to rest on the earth," said she.

He made no reply. He did not think it necessary that every feeling, however deep, should find vent in words.

Irma looked up in surprise. In the world of conversation, small change is paid back for every remark.

They soon returned home.

During the afternoon they were seated together in the cool library. Cicero's words, "When I am alone, then am I least alone," were written in letters of gold, over the door.

The father was writing and would occasionally look at his daughter, who was engaged with a volume of Shakespeare. She was reading the noblest thoughts, taking them up into herself, and making them a part of her own soul.

Eberhard felt it a joy to detect his own glance in another's eye, to hear his own thoughts from other lips, and that eye and those lips his child's-to note that her soul reflected his, although native temperament and peculiar impressions had served to make hers different from and independent of his own. The ideal that had filled his youthful dreams now stood before him, incarnate.

Eberhard soon closed his book and smiled to himself. He was not so strong as he had imagined. Now that his child was with him, he could not keep on with his work, as he had done the day before. He sat down by Irma, and, pointing to Spinoza's and Shakespeare's works, that always lay on his work-table, he said:

"To them, the whole world was revealed. Although they lived centuries ago, they are my constant companions on these lonely mountains. I shall pass away and leave no trace of my thoughts behind me, but I've already lived the life eternal in the companionship of the noblest minds. The tree and the beast live only for themselves, and during the short period that ends with death. With life, we inherit the result of centuries of thought and he who, within himself, has become a true man fully embodies the idea of humanity. Thus you live on, with your father and with all that is true and beautiful in the history of the human race."

There was a long pause. It was, at last, broken by the father's saying:

"Didn't you come in a court carriage?"

"Certainly."

"And so you intend to return to court?"

"Father, don't let us speak of that, now. I've not, like you, strength enough to drop from the greatest heights down to the level of every-day life."

"My child, every-day affairs are the highest that can engage us."

"But I'd like to forget that there is such a thing as a court, or that I've ever been, or ever shall be, anything but part of your heart and soul."

"No, you're to live for yourself; but if you wish to remain with me, all you need do is to send the carriage back."

"I shall have to return, though it be but for a few days. I have only leave of absence, not a discharge. The best thing would be for you to go with me and bring me back again."

"I can't go to court, as you well know; and I give you credit for enough strength to take yourself away from there. I was watching you to-day while you lay asleep. There's nothing false in you; as yet, no evil passions cloud your brow. I know your brother is anxious to have you marry, and I, too, wish that you may become a good wife and mother. But I fear that you have become too much your own, ever to become another's. Be that as it may, my child, look at the scene spread out before you. Myriads of flowers are blooming silent and unknown. Should a wanderer pass by and feast his eyes upon them, or even pluck a flower, it has lived for him. Should it blossom and fade away unseen, it has lived for itself. But, my child, don't go out of your way to please me. How long is your leave?"

"A fortnight."

"Let us spend the time in truth and cheerfulness, and then act as your judgment dictates."

CHAPTER X

The days passed by quickly. Eberhard had little to do with his neighbors, but was always glad to see the burgomaster of the village, who was, also, a deputy to the Diet, and to consult with him regarding the affairs of the community.

Irma spent much of her time alone. She read, embroidered, painted and sang. After the first few days, a reaction set in.

"What is this life?" she asked herself, "of what use? I work for dress-dress for my soul and for my body. And to what purpose? The mirror sees me, the walls hear me, and I have my father for one hour at noon and another in the evening."

She endeavored to control her flights, and, although she succeeded in that, could not prevent herself from thinking of one who was distant. She would look around as if she could hear his footsteps and as if the air were filled with his presence; and that man was-the king.

She could not but think that he expected a letter from her, and what had he received? The news of her departure. Why should she insult and mortify him?

While at Wildenort, she was several times on the point of writing to him. She wanted to tell him that she had meant to flee from him; nay, from herself. Framing the sentences in her mind, she would say to herself: Flight is not cowardice. Indeed, it requires great strength thus to tear one's self away. She meant to make this clear to him. She did not wish him to think ill of humanity and, least of all, of her. His great and extended energy should not be weakened, or even disturbed, by the consciousness that mankind had no conception of the truly noble. She owed it, both to him and to herself, to explain this; but it is difficult to do it all in writing. She would, therefore, return and tell him all, and, after that, they would, although distant, be united in the noblest thoughts. She felt satisfied that she would find full compensation for a lonely life in the recollection of one moment of perfect communion with a noble mind, and the consciousness of truth and purity in thought and deed.

Irma was delighted to think that she had thus liberated herself.

She refrained, as far as possible, from speaking to her father about the court; but a remark would, now and then, involuntarily escape her, and she would tell how the king and the queen had praised this or that, or had uttered such and such a remark, and it was easily to be seen that she attached special importance to what they had said.

"That's the way with men," said Eberhard, smiling. "They know what they are, or, at least, ought to; and yet they give a prince the right to stamp them with a value. It is he who determines: you are worth so and so much; you a ducat, you a thaler, you a mere brass counter, you a privy councilor and you a colonel. The story of the creation of the world is thus ever renewed. There it says that the Creator led the beasts out before man so that he might give them names. Here the human animals come to the prince and say; 'Give us a name, or we shall feel as if naked and be afraid.'"

Irma started at these harsh words. Solitude had brought her father to this point. She could not refrain from saying:

"You do the king great injustice; he has a noble mind and is full of intelligence."

"Intelligence! I know all about that," replied Eberhard. "He can ask questions without number, propound problems and, for his dessert, would fain have an epitome of ecclesiastical history, physiology or any other interesting department of knowledge. But he never applies himself; never reads a work through. He requires excerpts and essences. I know all about it. And the courtly roudade singers place their thoughts at his service. Don't imagine, my child, that I underrate the king's efforts. They've always told him: 'You are a genius!' They are always persuading kings that they possess genius, either military, political or artistic. All who approach a monarch are obliged, even in an intellectual sense, to attire themselves in court dress. He never sees men and things in their true colors; they all drape themselves to please him. Nevertheless, I believe the king honestly endeavors to see

things as they are, and that's a great deal; but he can't shake off the magic spell of set forms and phrases."

Irma's lips trembled with emotion. She did not believe that her father meant to weaken her interest in the king, since he could not know of its existence; but his antagonism irritated her and she saw, with alarm, that no help was to be looked for in that quarter. She might have shared her father's solitude, if he had honored the exalted man as she did. He might have done homage to the noble mind, even though it was a monarch's, without doing violence to his republican feelings, or his sense of justice. But now he destroyed every bridge that had led to a better understanding and to justice. If another had spoken thus of the king, she would have made him feel her wrath, and now she felt that her silence was a sufficient sacrifice to filial duty. Her heart seemed to close up within itself, as if never again to be opened. She was a stranger in her father's house, and now doubly felt that she had never been at home there. She forced herself to appear cheerful and tranquil.

Eberhard observed that an inner conflict agitated her, and thought it was merely a struggle between court life and solitude. He did not aid her, for he thought that she could best gain peace if she fought the battle for herself.

On Sunday morning-Eberhard never went to church-he said:

"Have you time to listen to a long story?"

"Certainly."

"Then let me make my will while I am yet in health."

"Pray, father, don't do that. Spare me!"

"I don't mean as to my possessions, but as to myself. We have no picture of your dear mother, and none of you children have any idea of her appearance-so pure, so lovely, so full of sunshine; and, for that reason, I mean to give you a picture of my life. Treasure it. Who knows when I may again have a chance? If there's anything that you don't understand or that seems to you in danger of being misinterpreted, ask me about it. I don't find such objections an interruption. I pursue my life in its even tenor; nothing disturbs me. I've accustomed myself to improve my estate, to give orders to my servants and to answer their questions, and, afterward, to take up the train of thought just where it was broken off; and so you, too, may interrupt me whenever you care to.

"My father, who was a free count, was always proud of his direct relations to the empire. Unto his last day, he would never acknowledge the unity of the kingdom and would always ask; 'How goes it over there?' He regarded his domain as distinct from the rest, and his family as on an equality with all princely houses."

"And why, dear father," asked Irma, "would you destroy these beautiful memories that have been handed down from generation to generation?"

"Because history itself has destroyed them, and justly too. It is necessary for the preservation of mankind that new races should constantly ascend to the surface; but I didn't mean to tell you about my father. I spent a happy youth in this house. My preceptor, although an ecclesiastic, was a man of liberal opinions. I entered the military service a year before my father's death and, though I say it myself, presented no mean figure while there, for I possessed good looks and an iron frame. I was stationed with my regiment, in a fortress belonging to the confederation. While recklessly riding one day, I fell from my horse and dislocated my hip. It laid me up for a long time and thus afforded me an opportunity to become better acquainted with our regimental surgeon, Doctor Gunther. Has he never told you of the times we passed together?"

"He has merely mentioned them. It was only a few days ago that the king told me I was right in saying that Doctor Gunther would only furnish verbal prescriptions when they were demanded and were really necessary."

"Ah! and so the king said that you were right? 'You are right'-that is a real mark of grace and should make one happy for a whole day and perhaps even longer. Isn't it so?"

"Father-didn't you mean to tell me more about your life with Gunther?"

"Ah, my child, that was a wondrous time. As far as I was able, I dived, with him, into the study of philosophy. I can still remember, as if it were this very moment, the very hour and the very place by the fortress wall-it was a dull evening in autumn; I can still see the leaves as they fell from the trees-when Gunther for the first time, explained to me the great saying of the all-wise one: 'Self-preservation is the first law of nature.' I stood as if rooted to the spot; it dawned upon me like a revelation, and has never since left me. Although at times obscured by the events of life, 'preserve thyself,' has always been before my mind. I have faithfully lived up to the great precept, and alas, as I now see, too completely and selfishly. The man who lives only for himself does not live a complete life, but I can confess this to you, of all others, without fear. It was only later that I came thoroughly to know the great right of sovereignty that belongs to every human being. I had done much thinking before that, but never in logical connection. You cannot imagine what courage it requires, on the part of a favorite and respected officer, to venture on the study of philosophy; how opposed it is to the very idea of military service, how improper it seems to one's superiors, and how ridiculous to one's comrades. Military service so exhausts the body, by daily, and for the greater part, useless exercises, that it renders it difficult to cultivate one's mind. I often excused myself, as unwell, and remained in my room during the loveliest weather, simply on account of my studies. Our regiment was ordered to the capital, and Gunther accepted my offer of a discharge. He became a professor and I attended lectures. But I was painfully conscious of my deficiency in knowledge and ardently longed for a chance to devote my life to perfecting my education. An unforeseen event helped to bring about the desired end. I had become gentleman of the bedchamber and spent much of my time at court. At that early day, I observed the ineradicable, servile spirit that dwells in man. Every one rejoices that there are others lower down in the scale than himself, and is willing, on that account, to suffer some to stand above him. Princes are not to blame for this ladder of nonsense. One day while at the summer palace, the king had gone out hunting, and although it was long past the dinner hour, not a glimpse of him was to be seen. The chamberlains and the court ladies-I forget their titles-were walking in the park. They would sit down on the benches, look through their spy-glasses, and endeavor, unsuccessfully however, to keep up a sustained conversation; for the ladies and gentlemen, both young and old, were possessed of vulgar hunger. And still the herdsman who was to put fodder in the rack for them, did not make his appearance. Your uncle Willibald pacified his gnawing hunger with little biscuits, which did not destroy his appetite. Hours passed, while they walked about like Jews on the Day of Atonement. But they laughed and joked-at least they tried to-while their stomachs growled. And though your uncle had thirty horses in his stable at home, with oxen and cows and many broad acres besides, he was content to serve and wait there, because he took great pride in being lord chamberlain. At that time, my child, I was as old as you are now, and I swore to myself never more to be a servant to any man. At last, the king's hunting carriage arrived. All were profuse in their greetings and received him with smiling faces. And yet his majesty was in a bad humor, for while he had been unsuccessful, General Kont, who had been one of the hunting party, had committed the impropriety of shooting a deer with twelve antlers. The general felt very unhappy at his good luck, and his head hung as mournfully as that of the dead beast. He apologized again and expressed his regrets that his majesty had not killed the stag. With rueful countenance, the monarch congratulated him. The king looked at me and asked 'How are you?'

"'Very hungry. Your Majesty,' was my answer. The king smiled, but the rest of the court were horror-struck at my impertinence.

"We were obliged to wait another half-hour, while the king changed his dress and, at last, we went to dinner.

"My child, if you were to tell the story to a courtier, he would consider me intolerably stupid; but that meal was the last I ever ate at princely table.

"I know that I'm talkative-I'm an old man. I merely wanted to say: Look about you and see how many human sacrifices they are constantly requiring.

"The idea of princely dignity is a noble and beautiful one. The prince should embody the unity of the state; but, although the idea, in itself, is beautiful, the knowledge that its realization requires a pyramid of worn-out creatures, divested of human dignity, renders it repulsive to me.

"Irma, I feel as if I must impress the testament of my soul upon yours. The moment you feel that you've lost the smallest portion of your crown of human dignity, flee, without hatred or contempt; for he who carries such feelings in his soul is heavily laden and can never breathe freely. I don't hate the world; neither do I despise it. It simply appears to me strange, decayed, distant. Nor can I hate or despise any one, because his belief is different from mine.

"But as I don't wish to teach you, I will go on with my story. I applied for my discharge and entered the university as a student. I soon left, however, in order to continue my education in an agricultural school. After that, I traveled and, as you know, spent an entire year in America. I had a great desire to become acquainted with that new phase of history in which men are born to intellectual freedom and are not constantly looking back toward Palestine, Greece or Rome. I don't find the world of the future in America. All there is still, as it were, in a state of ferment suggestive of primeval processes; but whether a new civilization will be the result, is more than I know. I do know, however, that all mankind is patiently waiting for a new moral compact. But I, and many more of us, will never live to see it realized.

"Will the world of the future be governed by pure ideas, or will it again look up to some lofty personage as its exemplar? I should wish for the former, but its realization seems far off.

"Now to continue with the story of my life.

"I returned home and, meeting your mother, was unutterably happy. She was alone in the world. I have enjoyed the greatest of all happiness; there is none other like it. Three years after you were born, your mother died. I cannot give you particulars about her. Her whole appearance was one of strength and purity. The world regarded her as cold and reserved, but she was ardent and open-hearted, beautiful to her very heart, but only for me. I know that if she had been spared to me, I would have become one of the best and kindest of men. I dare not think of that.

"It was not to be.

"But I feel as if sanctified through her, for since that time no base thought has ever entered my soul; nor have I ever committed a deed that I should feel ashamed to confess to my daughter.

"She died, and I stood alone, my violent nature confronting the enigma of life.

"Although I could not give my children a stepmother, I became a stepfather to them. Yes, let me speak on: I am unsparing toward myself. I know that if others heard me, they would say that I am using too strong language. It is the fashion to be indulgent nowadays, but I am not in the mode. I put my children away from me. I placed you with your aunt, until you entered the convent, and Bruno remained with me until he went to the seminary. You were in fine institutions, with expensive fees, but you were nevertheless put away from me. You did not know your father; you merely knew that he was alive, but did not live with him. You grew up like orphaned children.

"It is only two years since I confessed this to myself. For weeks, it robbed me of sleep, of feeling and of thought, and still I adhered to it. The demon called sophistry was ever telling me: 'You could have been of no use to your children. You had still too much to do for yourself, and it is better for them that they should become free human agents through their own unaided efforts than through you.' There may be some truth in it, but nevertheless, I've put my children away from me."

The old man paused. Irma laid her hand upon his and gently stroked it.

"'Tis well. I've said it at last.

"I remained here, leading a solitary but not a lonely life. I communed with the greatest minds and, at the same time, easily managed our estate.

"I devoted myself to national affairs, but soon withdrew. I can't belong to a party, not even to the one that calls itself the party of freedom. It includes many noble-hearted men whom I honor and respect, but they put up with too many frivolous comrades who, while they prate of equality and of

the highest good of man, do not hesitate to sacrifice their fellow-beings to themselves. Aristocratic triflers are simply vicious, but democratic triflers are corrupters of ideas. He who dare not wish that the whole people should think and act as he does, has no right to term himself a free and honest man.

"If liberty does not rest on morality, what is there to distinguish it from tyranny? What is tyranny? The egotistical abuse of beings endowed with equal rights to ourselves. A tyrant, in effect, denies his God. A frivolous democrat blasphemes Him. By the term God, I mean the full conception of the world's moral law. I was a hermit in the midst of the crowd, and am happier and more consistent, when away from the world.

"And now I am here leading a solitary life."

"Isn't it sad to be so lonely?" asked Irma.

"If I felt lonely, it would be very hard," replied Eberhard; "but man should not feel lonely, though he be alone. *Ennui* and loneliness have no resting-place here. Men who are nothing to themselves are lonely wherever they be; but let me continue my story.

"Gunther's defection caused me the greatest sorrow, but I was unjust toward him. He always was a friend of court life and regarded it as the culmination of culture. He was always too æsthetic and would often say: 'I, too, have a claim on the luxuries, the comforts, the pleasures of life and am determined to have my share of them.' That led him to court and caused him to desert free science and, at the same time, to lose both himself and me.

"You have probably been told, and have perhaps even yourself thought, that I am a misanthrope. He who hates mankind is a vain fool. In what respect is he better than the rest, or different from them? I don't hate mankind. I only know that most of them, either by their own efforts or through those of others, appear in false colors. They affect an interest in things that do not concern them and, in most instances, do not even know that it is affectation. I have often been deceived and cheated, but, I frankly confess, it was because I deceived myself. I gave forth what was best in me, and imagined that others were with me, but it was mere politeness that induced them to assent. They were not hypocrites; it was I who deceived myself. I imagined myself in a world in which all was peace and harmony, while, in fact, I was alone, completely alone. Every one who has a character of his own, is alone. There is no such thing as perfect accord; to live out one's self is all that remains. But most men do not care to do this, and they are best off. They live as custom and morals require, and do not greatly concern themselves about the present or the past. They jump or dawdle as the case may be from mood to mood, from enjoyment to enjoyment, and as long as they can always see the same face when they look in the glass, are perfectly content. Such faces never change. If the human countenance always expressed the thoughts that fill the soul, you would not be able to recognize any one from day to day, or even from hour to hour. I do not know, my child, where I am leading you to; I only meant to tell you that I am not a misanthrope. I love all men. I know that, at bottom, they cannot be different from what they are, and that honest nature still lies concealed beneath their frizzled, overloaded, glittering masks. They cannot reveal it, however, and in spite of their false, cunning ways, there still remains a great and wise precept: 'Forgive them, for they know not what they do.' And now let me add that I forgive your brother, too. He has deeply mortified me, for the deepest mortification that one can suffer is at the hands of one's child.

"I cannot force Bruno to act against his will, nor do I wish to. It is a strange world. The struggle between father and son drags on through all ages. My son defends the old, and I the new; but I must bear with it all.

"Freedom alone accords with the dictates of nature and reason. But you cannot force one to be free; nor do I wish to force you, in any way. Most women would rather yield to nature than affection, but I do not regard you as an ordinary woman, nor do I wish you to be one. You should-"

Although Eberhard had said that he did not wish to be interrupted, something now came which did interrupt him.

It was a messenger with a letter for Irma. She recognized the handwriting of her friend Emma, and hurriedly opening the letter, read as follows:

"Irma: I cannot come to thee. I have said farewell to the world. Three weeks ago to-day, my Albrecht lost his life through the bite of a mad dog. My life for this world is also at an end. I humbly submit to the inscrutable will of the Almighty. I have vowed to take the veil. I am here now, and shall never again leave this spot. Come, as soon as thou canst, to thy

*"Sister Euphrosyne,
"In the convent of Frauenwörth."*

Irma handed the letter to her father to read.

"And so the bite of a mad dog has destroyed two human lives. Who will explain this?" exclaimed Irma.

"In that respect, religion is just as impotent as we are. Like reason, she commands us to obey nature's law."

The messenger waited, and Irma went off to write an answer in which she promised to come.

Meanwhile, Eberhard sat alone. He had confided the story of his life to his child-and what would it avail? How often had he realized that no teaching, be it ever so noble, can change the human mind. Life, observation and experience can alone produce conviction. The weak point of dogmatism is that it attempts to teach that which can only be learned from life itself. His children had not shared in his life, and it was now of little avail to recount it to them, in all its details, or to explain the motives that directed it. There was enough of contradiction implied in the fact that the father was obliged to tell what his life had been.

In his own mind, Eberhard acknowledged that his own conduct had borne its legitimate results. He had no real claim to filial affection; at all events, not to the degree in which he craved it, for he had lived for himself alone. When Irma returned and asked permission to visit her friend Emma, he nodded assent. He had boasted that nothing could interrupt him. He might use the rule for himself, but not for others. He had told his child the story of his life-who knew but what this untoward interruption would efface it all from her memory?

CHAPTER XI

Seated in the open court carriage, Irma rode over hill and dale. She lay back on the cushions; the waiting-maid and the lackey sat on the back seat.

Emma's sad and sudden message had almost paralyzed her; but, now that she was in the carriage, her strength returned. Travel and change of air always exerted a magic influence over her.

The echo of her father's story followed her during a great part of the journey. She had listened with great interest, although the story itself had made but a faint impression upon her. An inner voice told her: These matters are not so serious or important as he takes them. It is his peculiar temperament that causes them to affect his course in life. It would not be so with another. It was enough that she was able to do justice to his eccentricity. He could hardly expect it to exert any decided influence upon her. Emma's fate was horrible, maddening; but her father's was not. Much of his life-trouble was mere self-torment. He spoke of repose, and yet knew it not.

With all Irma's affection for her father, she had really so little in common with him, that the painful expression that played about his mouth, while he told her his story, simply served to remind her of the Laocoön.

Irma shook her head quite petulantly.

What a chaos is the world!

A mad dog destroys a life and, here and there, solitary beings are tormenting themselves to death. Every one is conscious of some fault or weakness; all seek the unattainable and, in unending attempts and trials, life is spent. In the midst of this chaos, a single figure appears. It is full, beautiful, great, sure of life and, in truth, controls life. Irma turned back as if to say: "Alas! it is not you, father, although you could and ought to be the one. The king alone is the one free being on the pinnacle of life."

A smile played about her lips while she thought of him. She looked up at the blue heavens and, forgetting whither she was going, felt as if gentle arms were carrying her away over hill and dale.

An eagle was winging its flight far above the mountain tops. Irma's eyes followed it for a long while. She ordered the driver to stop the carriage, and the servant alighted in order to receive her ladyship's order. She motioned him to mount the box again, and, though all the comforts wealth affords were hers, stopped in the midst of wild nature to watch the eagle hovering in the air, until it at last disappeared in the clouds.

"If one must die, I'd like to die thus," said an inner voice, "fly into heaven and be no more."

They drove on. For the rest of the journey, Irma did not utter a word. It was toward evening when the lackey said: "We've reached the place."

The road descended toward the lake, by the shore of which the carriage stopped. The convent was on an island in the center of the lake, and the sounds of the curfew bells filled the air. The sun was still visible over the mountain tops, its rays were almost horizontal, and the dancing, sparkling waves looked like so many lights swimming to and fro. The surface of the lake was rapidly assuming a golden hue.

At the sound of the evening bells, the lackey and the postilion lifted their hats and the waiting-maid folded her hands. Irma also folded her hands, but did not pray. She thought to herself: The sound of the bells is pleasant enough, if one can listen to them from without, and then return to the happy world; but to those who are within the convent, it is a daily death-knell; for life such as theirs, is death.

Irma's mood was not in sympathy with that of her friend, and she did her best to feel as befitted the occasion.

While they were getting the boat ready, she overheard the lackey speaking with another servant whose face she remembered to have seen at court.

She heard the court lackey saying:

"My master's been here for some days and has been waiting for something; I don't know what."

Irma would have liked to ask with whom he had come, but a sudden fear overpowered her and she was unable to speak a word.

Accompanied by the waiting-maid, she stepped into the boat. An old boatman and his daughter rowed the rudderless skiff. The waters of the lake were deep and dark. The sun was setting, and the shadows of the western mountains were reflected in dark outlines on the hills along the shore. The fresh-fallen snow lay on the glaciers, whose white crests contrasted sharply with the wooded hills of the foreground and the clear blue sky. Below, all was as silent and dusky as though they were sailing into the realm of shadows.

"Is this your daughter?" asked Irma, addressing the old boatman.

He nodded a glad assent, delighted to find her conversant with the dialect of that portion of the country. Her intercourse with Walpurga had kept her in practice.

"Yes," replied the boatman, "and she'd like to go into service with some good family. She can sew well and—"

"Remain with your father; that's the best thing you can do," said Irma to the girl.

They rowed on in silence. "How deep is the lake here?" inquired Irma.

"Sixty fathoms, at least." Irma's hand played with the water, and she was pleased with the thought that human beings could so easily and boldly move along over a threatening, watery grave. She leaned a little way over the side of the boat, and the boatman called out:

"Take care, miss!"

"I can swim," replied Irma, splashing the waves.

"That's all very well," said the old man, laughing. "They can all swim until they have to, and then all's over; and if they happen to have clothes hanging to them, mighty few can swim."

"You're right there. Our gay frippery would drag us down."

The old man did not understand her and made no reply.

She was quite excited and asked: "Have many persons been drowned in this lake?"

"Very few; but just below us, there's the body of a young man, twenty-one years old."

"How was he lost?"

"They say he'd been drinking too freely, but I think that he had a sweetheart in the convent over there. It's a good thing she don't know of it."

Irma looked down into the waves, while the old man continued:

"And over there by the rock the trunk of a tree struck a woodcutter and hurled him into the lake. Over there by the flood-gate, a milkmaid, fifteen years old, happened to get into the current where the drift logs were whirling along, and by the time her body reached the lake, every bit of clothing had been torn from it by the logs."

"Don't tell such frightful stories," said the waiting-maid to the man.

Irma looked up at the steep mountains and asked:

"Could one climb up there?"

"Yes, but they'd find it mighty hard work; still, wherever there are trees, man can climb."

Irma looked down into the lake, and then up at the mountains. One can lose one's-self in the world. "How would it be if one were to do so?" said the voice within her.

She stood up in the boat. The old man exclaimed:

"Sit down! there's danger if you stir one way or the other."

"I shall not move," said Irma, and she really stood erect in the unsteady little boat.

"By your leave, the beautiful young lady surely doesn't mean to enter the convent?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I'd be sorry."

"Why would you be sorry? Don't the nuns lead a pleasant, peaceful life?"

"Oh, yes, they do; but it is a life in which nothing happens."

As if obeying a higher summons, Irma sat down and immediately stood up again. The boat reeled.

"A life in which nothing happens" – the words touched a chord in her own heart. With her, the pride and strength of youth rebelled against sacrificing one's life in such a manner. It is a life in which nothing happens: whether it be, like her father's, spent in solitary thought, or, like that of the nun's, in common devotion. Are we not placed upon earth so that we may call all our own-come joy, come grief; come mirth, come sadness—a life in which nothing happens is not for me.

Filled with such thoughts she stepped ashore and, while walking up the avenue of lindens that led to the convent, heard the boatman fastening his skiff by the chain.

She inquired for Sister Euphrosyne. The nuns were all at vespers. Irma also repaired to the chapel, in which the everlasting lamp was the only light. Although the service was over, the sisters were still kneeling on the floor. At last they arose, looking like so many ghostly figures stepping out from chaotic darkness.

Irma returned to the parlor, where the portress told her that she would not be allowed to speak to Emma that day, as the sisters were not permitted to receive any communication, or converse with any one, after vespers. Irma, in the mean while, was lodged in the convent.

It was a mild September night. Wrapped in her plaid, Irma sat out on the landing until a late hour. Her thoughts were lost in the illimitable. She scarcely knew what she was thinking of, and yet, as if wafted toward her on the air, she would now and then seem to hear the words: "A life in which nothing happens."

On the following morning, after early mass, Irma was permitted to visit her friend. She was frightened when she saw Emma, and yet it was the same mild countenance, only terribly disfigured by the closely fitting hood that completely covered the hair and gave her face greater prominence.

After the first outburst of grief and sympathy that followed the recital of her sad affliction, Emma at last said to Irma, who had again and again pressed her to her heart:

"Your embraces are so passionate. I know you will never be able to learn humility. You cannot; it is not your nature. But you should acquire equanimity. You could never enter a convent, Irma, and never ought to; or you would long to return to the world. You must become a good wife, but do not imagine that your ideal will ever be realized. Our existence here is fragmentary and full of misery. Life here below is not intended to be beautiful and complete. But, Irma, take heed you do not attempt to loosen a barrier, or to overstep it. Draw back while you are still on this side!"

Emma did not mention the king's name. There was a long pause. Irma felt as if their present surroundings must stifle her.

Emma spoke of what had happened but a few weeks ago, as if decades had passed in the mean while. She discoursed to her friend the strength that lay in continuous devotion; how it lengthened the hours into years full of placid victory over the world. She felt happy that it was possible, even on earth, to lay aside one's name and memories, and lead an existence which, without one steep step, gradually led one to eternal bliss. Emma, however, complained that they would not allow her to take the veil, and resented it as tyranny that she was only permitted to remain as a serving sister without vows.

"It is right that you should not," exclaimed Irma; "I think Bronnen loves you, but he's a man who respects existing facts. His moral character would lead him to repress, rather than manifest, warm feeling toward an affianced bride. He deserves you. I don't say that you should now—How could you? How would he dare? You should remain your own mistress and, after you've spent a year or more in the convent, you may, with that excellent man, lead a life which, if void of transports, will be none the less true and beautiful. All I can say to you now is: Don't fetter your future. No one should take a vow that binds him for life, that, on the very morrow, might seal his lips and make him a slave, a liar, a hypocrite or a deceiver, in his own eyes."

"Irma," exclaimed Emma, "what bad advice are you giving me. Is that the language used at court? Oh, forgive me for speaking to you so! It was the old Emma that did it; not I. Forgive me, I pray you, forgive me!"

She threw herself on her knees at Irma's feet.

"Stand up," said Irma, "I've nothing to forgive. I will speak more calmly. You see, dear Emma, it is fortunate for you that you cannot take the vow. A fearful blow has prostrated you; but if you remain free in your seclusion, your load will gradually lighten and your wounds will heal. Then, should the world call you, you are free to return to it. This should be a place of refuge for you, and not a prison."

"Ah yes," said Emma, with a smile, "you must of course think so, but I-I do not care to see the world again which no longer contains him who was dearer to me than life. You cannot realize what it is to be betrothed on earth, and be obliged to wait for eternal union in heaven. I have prayed God to take my heart from me and banish every selfish desire, and He has hearkened unto me. It is tyrannical to attempt to force our opinions upon others. Do you still remember, Irma, the first time we read the story of Odysseus, and how he had them bind him to the mast so that he might listen to the songs of the syrens and yet not be able to follow them? Do you still remember the remark you then made?"

"I've quite forgotten it."

"'Much-bepraised Odysseus,' said you, 'was a weakling, not a hero. A hero must not suffer himself to be bound by external fetters; he must resist everything by his inner strength.' Even then, I felt how strong you were. Odysseus was only a heathen and knew nothing of the eternal law. I rejoice in that law; I cling to that rock. I long for the divine, the eternal bond; it will support me if I sink. I do not wish to return to the world. I wish to fetter myself, and can it be that men who claim to be free dare forbid others to tread the path that leads to perfection-to the true eternal life? Is not that tyrannical and godless?"

"Yes; but who forbids you?"

"The law of the state. It has ordered this convent to be closed and forbids its taking any more young nuns."

"And does the law say that?"

"Yes."

"The king shall not allow it."

Irma spoke so loudly that her words were echoed back from the vaulted ceiling of the cell.

Emma's glance was fastened on Irma-if it only could be brought about!

The two maidens had no time to exchange a word on the subject, for, at that moment, the abbess sent for them.

The abbess addressed Irma, just as if she had overheard the last words of the latter. With gentle voice, but positive manner, she complained of the tyranny of the free-thinkers-whom she did not judge, but simply pitied-and maintained that the attempt to destroy ancient and holy institutions was revolting.

Irma's countenance glowed with excitement. She again said that the law must be repealed, and that she would exert all her influence to bring about that end. She offered to write to the king at once. The abbess gladly accepted the proffered service and Irma wrote:

Your Majesty: I write to you from the convent, but I am not a nun. I believe my talent does not lie in that way. But what laws are these that forbid a maiden from taking the eternal vow? Is that freedom? Is it justice? What is it? Your Majesty will, I trust, pardon my agitation. I am writing with convent ink on convent paper, and it is not the first time that such ink and such paper have been used in the service of freedom.

"Is it possible that one set of human beings can forbid others to live together in seclusion?"

"Quacks cannot create life or happiness; should they, therefore, be allowed to forbid unhappiness from effecting its own cure?"

"Your Majesty's great mind cannot suffer such barbarism, and it is barbarous, although hedged about by culture.

"I am aware, Your Majesty, that I have not yet made my meaning clear. I shall endeavor to do so.

"I am here in the convent.

"Emma, the woman whom I love above all others-I believe I have already spoken of her to Your Majesty-wishes to take the veil. From her point of view, she is in the right. Dogs will go mad, although the dog-tax be paid. A mad dog killed her affianced and she now desires to renounce the world. Who dare prevent it? And yet the law of the state commands that this convent shall die out, and forbids its receiving nuns.

"Your Majesty dare not permit this. Your eye takes in all at a glance; your life is the nation's history. You must teach these journeymen to be greater-minded than they now are. They must abolish this law; indeed, they must.

"Pardon my language. Your Majesty; but I cannot help myself. I feel as if I were your deputy. I feel that your great mind resents such pettiness as an insult.

"I hope to see Your Majesty soon again, and, meanwhile, send my most respectful greetings.

"Irma von Wildenort."

Without being observed, Irma inclosed the four-petaled clover-leaf with the letter.

While Irma sat in the boat that took her back to the shore, she was filled with pride. She felt that she had instigated, if not accomplished, a beautiful and noble act in the service of freedom and was determined that it should be carried out.

The old boatman was glad to see her again. He rowed lustily, but did not speak a word. Now and then, he would smile to himself, as if happy in the thought that he was carrying a young soul away from the realm of shadows.

In the distance there was a skiff and, in it, a man clad in a green hunting dress. He waved his hat and bowed.

Absorbed in thought, Irma was gazing into the lake, when her maid drew her attention to the other boat.

Irma started.

"Is it not the king?"

Thinking that he had not yet been observed, the hunter fired off his gun, the report of which was echoed again and again from the hills. He then waved his hat once more. With trembling hand, Irma waved her white handkerchief as a token of recognition.

The skiff approached. Irma's expression rapidly changed from one of joy to that of disappointment.

It was not the king. It was Baron Schoning who greeted her.

He sprang into the boat, kissed her trembling hand and told her how happy he was to meet her there.

They alighted. The baron offered his arm to Irma and they walked along the bank, the maid going before. In the distance, Irma could see the lackey who, on the previous day, had been speaking to hers. Had not the servant said that his master had been waiting here for a long time? Had not Baron Schoning, before this, been open in his attentions to her? His words soon relieved her of all doubt on that score.

"We are alone here, in the presence only of the mountains, the lake and the heavens. Dearest Countess! May I speak of something that lies near my heart and which I have for a long while desired to tell you?"

She silently nodded assent.

"Well then, permit me to tell you that the court is not the right place for you."

"I am not quite sure that I shall return there; but why do you think me out of place there?"

"Because there is something in you which will always prevent you from feeling at home there. You are surprised to hear me, the jester, the court warbler, speak thus. I know very well I bear that title; but believe me, Countess, while they imagine they are playing with me, I am amusing myself at their expense. You, Countess, will never feel at home at court. You do not accept that life and its customs, as fixed and settled. You interpret it according to your own peculiar views; your mind cannot wear a uniform; your soul utters its deepest feelings in its own dialect, and when your utterances get abroad in the liveried world, they find it exceedingly original, but strange and-no one knows it better than I-you have not, and never will have aught in common with those who surround you."

"I should not have believed that you could thus look into my heart; but I thank you."

"I am not looking into your heart; I live in it. Oh, Countess! Oh! thou child-like and all-loving heart, tremble not! Suffer me to clasp this hand in mine, while I tell you that I, too, am a stranger there, and have resolved to retire from court and live for myself on yonder patrimonial estate of mine. Irma, will you render my life a thousand-fold happier than it can otherwise be? Will you be my wife?"

It was long before Irma could answer him. At last she said:

"My friend-yes, my friend-on yonder island there lives a friend of mine who is dead, both to herself and me. Fate deals kindly with me and sends me another in her stead. I thank you-but-I am so confused-perhaps more than- But look, dear baron, at the little cottage half-way up the mountain. I would be content to live there-to grow my cabbages, milk my goats, plant my hemp, make my clothes-and could be happy, desiring nothing, forgetting the world and forgotten by it."

"You jest, dear Countess; you are creating an idea whose bright colors will soon grow dim."

"I do not jest. I could live alone while laboring for my daily bread, but not as the mistress of a castle and surrounded by the trifles and frippery of the fashionable world. To dress for the mere sake of seeing one's self in the glass, is not to my taste. In yonder cottage, I could live without a mirror. I need not look at myself, nor need another look at me; but if I am to live with the world, I must be wholly with it; at the reigning center, in the metropolis, or traveling. I must have all or nothing. Nothing else will make me happy. Nothing half-and-half or intermediate will satisfy me."

Irma's tone was so determined that the baron saw how thoroughly in earnest she was, and that her words meant more than mere caprice or sport.

"I must either subject myself to the world," said she, "or, despising it, put it beneath me. I must either be perfectly indifferent and regardless of the impression I produce upon others, or else afraid of every glance, even my own."

The baron was silent, and evidently at a loss for words.

At last he said:

"I would gladly have gone to your father's house, but I know that he dislikes men of my class. I waited for you here, knowing that you would come to your friend. Pray answer me another question: Do you intend to return to court?"

"Yes," said Irma, now, for the first time, firmly resolved upon returning. "It were ungrateful to act otherwise. Ungrateful to the queen and to-the king and all my friends. I feel sure, my friend, that I am not yet mature enough to lead a life in which nothing happens."

They came to a seat.

"Will you not sit down with me?" said Irma to the baron.

They seated themselves.

"When did you leave the capital?"

"Five days ago."

"And was everything going on as usual?"

"Alas, not everything. Doctor Gunther has met with a sad affliction. Professor Korn, his son-in-law, died suddenly, having poisoned himself while dissecting a corpse."

"While dissecting a corpse?" exclaimed Irma. "We all die of the poison of decay, but not so suddenly; those on yonder island and we-all of us."

"You are very bitter."

"Not at all. My head is filled with the strangest fancies. I became acquainted with a great law over there.

"The law of renunciation?"

"Oh, no; the justification of fashion."

"You are mocking."

"By no means. Fashion is the charter of human liberty and the journal of fashion is humanity's greatest boon."

"What an odd conceit!"

"Not at all. It is the simple truth. The frequency with which a man changes the material, cut and color of his clothes, proves his claim to culture. It is man alone who constantly clothes himself differently and anew. The tree retains its bark, the animal its hide, and, as the national and clerical costumes are both stereotyped, as it were, those who use them are regarded as belonging to an inferior, or less civilized class."

The baron looked at Irma, wonderingly. He was glad at heart, that she had candidly given him the mitten. He could not have satisfied so restless and exacting a nature that constantly required intellectual fireworks for its amusement; and she, moreover, took delight in her absurd ways. All at once, he saw nothing but the shadows in Irma's character. An hour ago, he had seen only the bright side and had regarded her as a vision of light itself. She had just visited a friend about to take the veil, had just listened to a proposal of marriage-how could she possibly indulge in such strange notions immediately afterward?

Baron Schoning told her that he had ordered photographs of Walpurga and the prince.

"Ah, Walpurga," said Irma, as if suddenly remembering something.

The baron politely took his leave and rowed back across the lake.

Irma took the road that led homeward. She wished to visit Walpurga's relatives and inquired as to the route toward the lake on the other side of the mountains. They told her that a carriage could not get there, and that the only way to reach the point was on horseback. Irma took the direct road for home.

CHAPTER XII

"Something ails me! It always seems as if some one were calling me, and I can't help looking round to see who it is. The countess must be thinking of us all the time. Ah me, she's the best creature in the world."

Whilst Walpurga, for many days, thus lamented Irma's departure, the others at the palace rarely thought of her. The place we leave, be it to journey in this or to the other world, is speedily filled. In the palace, they tolerate neither vacancies nor sentiment. There, life is a part of history; and history, as we all know, never stands still.

Mademoiselle Kramer continued to teach Walpurga how to write, and the latter did not understand her, when she said: "The quality are fond of taking up all sorts of things, but we must finish what we begin. I've finished many a piece of embroidery, of which the hand that was kissed for it scarcely worked a couple of stitches; but that's in the order of things."

Although Mademoiselle Kramer found everything in order that was done by the quality, she, nevertheless, had a habit of speaking of such things to her inferiors, not with the hope of being understood by them, but merely to relieve her mind.

The child was well and hearty. Day after day passed in quiet routine, and now Walpurga was richly recompensed for the absence of Countess Irma. The queen was permitted to have the nurse and child about her for several hours every day.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.