RIVEN BONDS.

A Novel,

IN TWO VOLUMES.

TRANSLATED BY

BERTHA NESS,

\_FROM THE ORIGINAL OF E. WERNER\_,

Author of "SUCCESS AND HOW HE WON IT,"

"UNDER A CHARM," &c.

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RIVEN BONDS.

CHAPTER I.

The curtain fell amid thunders of applause from the whole house. Boxes,

pit, and gallery unanimously demanded the reappearance of the singer,

who, in the finale of the act just concluded, had carried all away with

her. The whole audience became excited, and would not be calmed, until,

greeted with applause, which broke forth with renewed vigour,

overwhelmed with flowers, wreaths, and homage of all kinds, the object

of this ovation showed herself, in order to thank the public.

"This is quite like an evening in an Italian theatre," said an elderly

gentleman, entering one of the boxes in the first tier. "Signora

Biancona seems to understand the art of filling the otherwise quiet and

smoothly-flowing patrician blood of our noble Hanseatic town with the

fire of her Southern home. The infatuation for her begins to be quite

an epidemic. If it continue to increase in this way, we shall see the

Exchange voting her a torchlight procession, and the Senate of this

free town, appearing before her \_in corpore\_, to lay their homage at

her feet. Were I in your place, Herr Consul, I should make this

proposition to both these Corporations. I am sure it would meet with an

enthusiastic reception."

The gentleman to whom these words were addressed, and who was sitting

by a lady, apparently his wife, in the front of the box, seemed unable

to withdraw himself from the universal excitement. He had applauded

with an energy and perseverance worthy of a better cause, and turned

round now, half-laughing, half-annoyed.

"I was sure of it; the critic must place himself in opposition to the

general voice. Certainly, Herr Doctor, in your abominable morning

paper, you spare neither Exchange nor Senate; how, then, could Signora

Biancona hope to find mercy?"

The Doctor smiled a little maliciously, and drew near to the lady's

chair, when a young man, who had been sitting beside her, rose politely

to make way for him.

"Herr Almbach," said the lady, introducing them, "Herr Dr. Welding, the

editor of our morning paper, whose pen--"

"For Heaven's sake, my dear madam," interrupted Welding, "do not throw

discredit on me, at once, in the gentleman's eyes. One has only to be

introduced as critic to a young artist, and immediately one gains his

deepest antipathy."

"Possibly," laughed the Consul, "but this time your keenness has failed

you. Herr Almbach, thank goodness, can never be in a position to come

before your judgment seat. He is a merchant."

"Merchant!" a look of astonishment was turned towards the young man,

"then I certainly apologise for my mistake. I should have taken you for

an artist."

"There, you see, dear Almbach, your forehead and eyes do you a bad turn

again," said the Consul, playfully. "What would your people at home say

to the exchange? I almost fear they would look upon it as an insult."

"Perhaps. I do not consider it as such," said Almbach, bowing slightly

to Welding. The words were intended to carry on the joking tone that

was begun, but there lay in them a half-concealed bitterness, which did

not escape Dr. Welding. He fixed his eyes searchingly on the young

stranger's features; but just at that moment the lady turned towards

him, and resumed the interrupted topic.

"You must allow, Herr Doctor, that Biancona was quite ravishing

to-night. This young, dawning talent is indeed, a new star in our

theatrical firmament."

"Which will some time become a shining sun, if it carry out what to-day

it promises. Certainly, dear madam; I do not deny it at all, even

although this future sun shows a few spots and imperfections at

present, which naturally escape so enthusiastic a public."

"Well then, I advise you not to lay too much stress on these

imperfections," said the Consul, pointing to the pit. "There, below,

sits an army of knights, infatuated about the Signora. Take care, Herr

Doctor, or you will receive at least six challenges."

The malicious smile played round Welding's lips again, as he cast a

glance of irony towards young Almbach, who had listened silently, but

with darkly lowering brow, to the conversation.

"And perhaps a seventh, also! Herr Almbach, for instance, seems to look

upon the opinion which I have just expressed as a species of high

treason."

"I regret, sir, to be so much behind you as regards criticism," coolly

replied the one addressed. "I--" hereupon his eyes flashed almost

passionately, "I am accustomed to worship genius unconditionally."

"A very poetical style of criticism," sneered Welding. "If you were to

repeat that in person to our beautiful Signora, and in the same tone, I

could promise you her most complete favour. Besides, I am this time in

the pleasant position of being able to tell her in the article which

will appear to-morrow, that hers is indeed a talent of the first order,

that her faults and failings are only those of a beginner, and that it

lies in her power to become eventually, a musical celebrity. She is not

one at present."

"In the meanwhile, that is praise enough from your lips," said the

Consul; "but I think we must retire now; the brilliant part of Biancona

is over, the last act offers nothing for her \_rôle\_, she hardly appears

again upon the stage, and our duties as hosts call us to our reception

evening. May I offer you a seat in our carriage, Herr Doctor? Your

critic's duty is also about at an end; and you, dear Almbach, will you

accompany us, or shall you remain to the last?"

The young man had also risen. "If you and your gracious lady will allow

it--the opera is new to me--I should like--"

"Very well then, remain without ceremony," interrupted the other in a

friendly manner, "but be punctual to-night. We count positively upon

your coming."

He gave his arm to his wife, to lead her away. Dr. Welding followed

them.

"How could you think," scoffed he, when in the corridor, "that your

young guest would move from the spot so long as Biancona had only one

more note to sing, or that he would be debarred from helping to form a

guard to her carriage with the rest of our gentlemen? The beautiful

eyes of the Signora have done much harm already--he has caught fire

worse than the others."

"We must hope not," said the lady, with a touch of concern in her

voice. "What would his father and mother-in-law, and, above all, his

young wife say?"

"Is Herr Almbach married already?" asked Welding, astonished.

"Two years since," replied the Consul. "He is nephew and son-in-law of

my business correspondents. The firm is Almbach and Co., not a very

important, but a most substantial, respectable house. Besides, you do

the young man injustice with your suspicions; at his age one is easily

carried away, particularly when, as here, one so seldom enjoys a

musical treat. Between ourselves, Almbach has rather middle-class

views, and keeps his son-in-law tightly by the head. He will take care

that any harm which those eyes could do, shall be kept far from his

house. I know him well enough on that point."

"All the better for him," said the Doctor, laconically, as he seated

himself by the married pair in the carriage, which took the direction

of the harbour, where the palaces of the rich business men were

situated.

An hour later, a numerous company was assembled in the merchant's

drawing-rooms. Consul Erlau was one of the richest, most influential

men in this wealthy commercial town, and even although this

circumstance was sufficient to ensure him an undisputed position, he

made it, in addition, a point of honour, to hear his house called the

most brilliant and hospitable in H----. His reception evenings gathered

together every notability which the town had to offer. There was never

a celebrity who did not appear several times, and even the star of the

present season--\_prima donna\_ Biancona, who was here with the temporary

Italian Opera Company, had accepted the invitation which she had

received, and appeared after the end of the performance. The young

actress, after her evening's triumph in the theatre, was of course the

centre of attraction for all the company. Besieged by the gentlemen

with every species of homage, overwhelmed with compliments from the

ladies, distinguished by the host and his wife with most flattering

attentions, she was unable to escape from the stream of admiration

which flowed towards her from all sides, and which, perhaps, was due as

much to her beauty as her genius.

Both were indeed united here. Even without her highly-worshipped

talent, Signora Biancona was not likely ever to be overlooked. She was

one of those women, who, wherever they appear, know how to attract,

and, oft to a dangerous degree, retain eye and senses; whose entrancing

charms do not lie only in their beauty, but far more in the singular,

almost witch-like magic, which certain natures exercise, without any

one being able to account for its cause.

It seemed as if a breath of the glowing South, full of colour, lay upon

this apparition, who, with her dark hair and complexion, her large,

deep, black eyes, out of which shone such an ardent, full life,

contrasted go strangely with these Northern surroundings. Her manner of

speaking and moving was, perhaps livelier, less constrained than the

rules of '\_convenance\_' demanded, but the fire of a Southern nature,

which broke forth with every emotion, had an entrancing grace. Her

light ethereal-looking costume was not at all conformed to the reigning

fashion, but it appeared to be especially invented to display the

advantages of her figure in the best light, and held its own

triumphantly amongst the more magnificent toilets of the ladies around

her.

The Italian was a being who seemed to stand above all the forms and

trammels of everyday life, and there was no one in the company who did

not willingly accord her this distinction.

Almbach, too, had found his way here after the close of the theatre,

but he was quite a stranger to the circle, and evidently remained so,

notwithstanding the well-meant attempts of the Consul to make him

acquainted with one or another of the guests. All fell through, partly

on account of the young man's almost moody silence, partly on account

of the gentlemen's manners to whom he was introduced, and who,

belonging almost entirely to the circles of the Exchange and Finance,

did not think it worth while to take much trouble about the

representative of a small firm. He was standing quite isolated at the

lower end of the room, looking apparently indifferently at the

brilliant crowd, but his eyes always turned to one point, which

to-night was the magnet for all the assembled gentlemen.

"Now, Herr Almbach, you make no attempt to approach the circle of the

sun of the drawing-room," said Dr. Welding, coming up to him, "shall I

introduce you there?"

A slight uncomfortable blush, at his secret wish having been divined,

covered the young man's face.

"The Signora is so occupied on all sides that I did not venture to

trouble her also."

Welding laughed, "Yes, the gentlemen all seem to follow your method of

criticism, and equally to admire genius unconditionally. Well, art has

the privilege of inspiring all with enthusiasm. Come, I will present

you to the Signora."

They crossed to the other side of the drawing-room where, the young

Italian was, but it really gave them some trouble to penetrate the

circle of admirers surrounding the honoured guest, and to approach her.

The Doctor undertook the introduction; he named his companion, who,

to-day, had for the first time the pleasure of admiring the Signora on

the stage, and then left him to set himself at ease in the "sun's

circle." This designation was not so badly chosen; there really was

something of the scorching glow of this planet, at its midday height,

in the glance which she now turned upon Almbach.

"Then you were also in the theatre this evening?" asked the Signora,

lightly.

"Yes, Signora."

Tie answer sounded curt and gloomy; no other word, none of those

compliments which the actress had heard so plentifully to-day, but the

look in the young man's eyes must have made up for his monosyllabic

reply. It is true that he only met Signora Biancona's for a moment, but

their lighting-up was seen and understood; it said much more than all

spoken flatteries.

The other gentlemen might receive no high opinion of the new arrival's

social talents; who did not even understand how to make a pretty speech

to a lady. They ignored him thoroughly. The conversation, in which the

Consul now took part, became more general; they spoke of music, of a

known composer and his new work, just now causing great sensation, as

to whose conception Signora Biancona and Dr. Welding had a difference

of opinion. The former was full of enthusiasm for it, while the latter

accorded it very little value. The Signora defended her opinion with

Southern vivacity and was supported therein by all the gentlemen, who

took her side from the commencement, while the Doctor persisted coolly

in his own. The battle grew more determined, until at last the Signora

became somewhat annoyed, and turned away from her opponent.

"I regret very much that our Conductor was prevented from accepting

to-day's invitation. He plays this composition perfectly, and I fear it

requires a performance to enable the company to judge which of us two

is right."

The guests were of the same opinion, and regretted the Conductor

exceedingly, none offered to replace him. The playing of this music did

not appear to keep pace with the very remarkable enthusiasm for it,

until Almbach came forward suddenly and said, "I am at your disposal,

Signora."

She turned quickly towards him and said with evident appreciation, "You

are musical, Signor?"

"If you and the rest of the company will bear with the attempt of an

'amateur,'" he made a gesture of enquiry to the master of the house,

and as the latter agreed eagerly, he went to the piano.

The composition under discussion, a modern show-piece in the fullest

sense of the word, owed its general popularity less to its real

worth--of which it had indeed very little--than to its great difficulty

of execution. Even the simple possibility of playing it at all,

required a masterly power over the instrument. People were accustomed

only to hear it performed by high-standing professionals, and therefore

looked half-astonished, half-contemptuously at the young man who

volunteered his services with so little concern. He had certainly

apologised for being an amateur, but still it was presumptuous to

attempt this in Consul Erlau's house, where the playing of so many

celebrities had been heard and admired.

The guests were so much the more astonished that Almbach showed himself

perfectly equal to all these difficulties, as, without even a note of

music before him, he overcame them by playing at once, with an ease and

certainty which would have done honour to a regular artist. At the same

time he understood to put such fire into his performance as carried

away even the older and more expectant hearers. The piece of music

under his hands seemed to acquire quite a different form; he gave it a

meaning, which no one, perhaps not even the composer himself, had

attached to it, and especially the finale, rendered in a somewhat

stormy \_tempo\_, brought him most plenteous applause from all sides.

"Bravo, bravissimo, Herr Almbach!" cried the Consul, who was the first

to come up, and who shook him heartily by the hand, "we must really be

grateful to the Signora and Doctor, whose musical dispute assisted us

to the discovery of such a talent. You modestly announce an attempt,

and give us a performance of which the most finished artist need not be

ashamed. You have helped our Signora to a brilliant victory; she is

right--unconditionally right, and the Doctor this time remains, with

his attack, decidedly in the minority."

The singer had also approached the piano.

"I, too, am grateful to you for having responded to my wish in so

knightly a manner," she said, smiling; now lowering her voice, "but

take care; I fear my critical enemy will still fight with you as to the

mode in which you proved my opinion. Was the playing, above all the

finale, quite correct?"

A treacherous gleam shot across the young man's countenance, but he

also smiled.

"It accorded with your views, and received your applause, Signora--that

is enough for me."

"We will speak of it later," whispered the Signora quickly, as now the

lady of the house drew near to pay some civilities to her young guest,

and the greater part of the company followed her example. A stream of

phrases and compliments swept over Almbach, his playing was charming;

his execution--where had he studied music? The less he had been noticed

before--the less he was known to them, the more he had astonished all

by suddenly coming forward, added to the young man's modesty, which

hardly permitted him to reply to all the questions addressed to him;

every one present felt himself involuntarily to be a sort of Mecænas,

and was prepared to give the young genius his complete protection. Was

it really modesty that closed Almbach's lips? Sometimes a species of

mockery flashed in his eyes, as again and again this exquisite

performance was extolled; and it was declared that this composition had

never been heard in perfection before. He seized the first opportunity

to escape from the attention paid him, and in this attempt was taken

possession of by Dr. Welding.

"Is it possible to reach you at last? You are regularly besieged with

compliments. Just one word, Herr Almbach; shall we go in here?"

He pointed to an adjoining room, into which both had scarcely entered,

before the Doctor continued in a somewhat sharp tone--

"Signora Biancona was right: that is, according to your performance. My

attack was directed against the composition as it exists in the

original. May I ask where you found this very peculiar arrangement of

it? Until this moment it was quite unknown to me."

"How do you mean, Herr Doctor?" asked the young man, coolly. "I only

know the piece of music in that form."

Welding looked him up and down, an expression of annoyance struggled

with one of undisguised interest in his face, as he replied--

"You appear to gauge the musical knowledge of your audience quite

correctly, if you venture to offer them such things. They hear the air,

and are contented; but sometimes there are exceptions. For instance, it

would interest me very much to know from whom certain variations

emanate, which utterly change the character of the whole; and as

regards the finale, entirely; was this daring improvisation, perhaps,

the attempt of an amateur also?"

Almbach raised his head somewhat defiantly, "And if it were, what

should you say to it?"

"That it was a great mistake of your people to make you a merchant."

"Herr Doctor, we are in a merchant's house."

"Certainly," answered Welding, calmly, "and I am the last to depreciate

that class, especially when, like our host, it begins with earnest,

ceaseless work, and ends in reposing on millions; but it does not suit

all. Above everything, it requires a clear, cool head, and yours does

not appear to me to be quite made to devote itself to the grasping

debit and credit. Excuse me, Herr Almbach! that is only my candid

opinion; besides, I do not blame you at all for your daring. What would

one not do to make a beautiful woman's obstinacy appear right! In this

case, the man[oe]uvre was even \_most agreeable\_, any other person with

the best will could not have carried it out; I congratulate you upon

it."

He made a half-ironical bow, and left the room; it adjoined the

drawing-room, but the half-closed \_portières\_ divided it from the

former; quite lonely and dimly-lighted, it offered a momentary solitude

to whomsoever desired it. The young man had thrown himself upon a seat,

and gazed dreamily before him. Of what he was thinking, perhaps he did

not dare to confess to himself, and yet it was betrayed by his starting

up at the sound of a voice, which said in a tone of slight

astonishment--

"Ah, Signor Almbach, you here!"

It was Signora Biancona; whether, on entering, she had really not

perceived who was already there, could not be decided, as she continued

with perfect ease--

"I was seeking relief for a moment from the heat and whirl of the

drawing-room. You, too, have soon withdrawn from the company after your

triumph."

Almbach had risen, quickly. "If it is a question of triumph, there is

certainly no doubt who gained it to-day. My improvised performance

cannot be compared, in ever so slight a degree, with that which you

offered to the public."

The Signora smiled. "I only produced sounds, like you, but I confess,

candidly, it has surprised me, never, until to-night, and here, to meet

an artist who surely long since--"

"Excuse me, Signora," interrupted the young man, coldly, "I have

already declared in the drawing-room that I only lay claim to being a

\_dilettante\_. I belong to the commercial world."

The same look of astonishment which he had seen on Welding's

countenance in the theatre, was turned towards Almbach's face for the

second time.

"Impossible! you are joking."

"Why impossible, Signora? Because I could play a difficult \_bravura\_

piece with facility?"

"Because you could play it so, and because--" she looked at him fixedly

for a moment, and then added, with great decision--"because your face

bears the stamp one always imagines genius must carry on its brow."

"You see how deceptive appearances sometimes are."

Signora Biancona did not seem to agree with this; she sat down on the

couch, her pale-coloured dress lay airily and lightly, as a cloud, on

the dark velvet.

"I admire you," she began again, "that you are able, with such artistic

qualities, to devote yourself to an every-day calling. It would be

impossible for me; I have grown up in a world of sounds and tones, and

cannot understand how there is room in it for any other duties."

This time there lay an undisguised bitterness in the young man's voice

as he answered----"Also, your home is Italy; mine, a North-German

business town! In our every-day life, poetry is a rare, fleeting guest,

to whom a place is often refused. Work, striving after gain, stands

ever in the foreground."

"With you, also, Signor?"

"It should, at least, stand there; that it is not always the case, my

musical attempt will have shown you."

The singer shook her head doubtfully. "Your attempt! I should like to

become acquainted with your finished work. But surely it cannot be your

intention to withdraw this talent entirely from the public, and only

exercise it in your home circle?"

"In my home circle!" repeated Almbach, with singular emphasis, "I do

not touch a note there--least of all in my wife's presence."

"You are married already?" asked the Italian quickly, as a momentary

pallor spread over her face.

"Yes, Signora."

This "yes," sounded dull and cold, and the half-mocking expression

which played for a moment on the singer's lips, as she looked at the

man of barely four-and-twenty years, disappeared at this tone.

"People marry very young in Germany, it appears," she remarked,

quietly.

"Sometimes."

The young Italian seemed to find the pause which followed these words

somewhat painful; she changed rapidly to another topic--

"I fear you have already been subjected to the examination of which I

warned you. All the same, the company was charmed with your

performance."

"Perhaps!" said the young man, half-contemptuously, "and yet it

certainly was not intended for the company."

"Not! and for whom, then?" asked Signora Biancona, directing her glance

firmly towards him. And he looked at her; there seemed to be something

alike in both pairs of eyes which now met one another--both large,

dark, and mysterious. In Almbach's glance, too, shone the same light as

in the actress'; here also burned an ardent, passionate soul; also

here, in the depths, slumbered the demonlike spark which is so often

the heritage of genial natures, and becomes their curse when no

protecting hand restrains it, and when it is fanned into flame, then no

more brings light, but only destruction.

He came a step nearer and lowered his voice; its great excitement,

however, still betrayed itself.

"Only for her, who, for me and for us all, a few hours since, embodied

the highest beauty and the highest poetry, borne by the notes of an

undying master-work. You have been worshipped a thousand-fold to-day,

Signora. All that enthusiasm could offer was laid at your feet. The

stranger, the unknown, also wished to tell you how much he admired you,

and he did it in the language which alone is worthy of you. It is not

quite strange to me either."

In his admiration there lay something that raised it above all

flattery, the tone of real true enthusiasm, and Signora Biancona was

actress enough to recognise this tone, woman enough to suspect what was

hidden beneath it; she smiled with enchanting grace.

"I have seen, indeed, how very fluent you are in this language. Shall I

not often hear it from you?"

"Hardly," said the young man, gloomily. "You return, as I hear, to

Italy shortly, I--remain here in the North. Who knows if we shall ever

meet again."

"Our manager intends to remain here until May," interrupted the

Signora, quickly. "So our meeting to-day will surely not be our last?

Certainly not--I count positively on seeing you again."

"Signora!" This passionate outbreak of Almbach's lasted only for a

second. Suddenly a recollection or warning seemed to shoot through him;

he drew back and bowed low and distantly.

"I fear it must be the last--farewell, Signora."

He was gone before it was possible for the singer to utter one word

regarding this strange adieu, and he seemed to be in earnest about it,

as not once during the whole evening did he approach the dangerous

"circle of the sun."

CHAPTER II.

"That is too bad. This mania really begins to surpass all limits. I

must forbid Reinhold all cultivation of music if he continues to pursue

it in so senseless a manner."

With these words, the merchant Almbach opened a family council, which

took place in the parlour, in his wife's and daughter's presence, and

at which, fortunately, the special object of the same did not assist.

Herr Almbach, a man about fifty, whose quiet, measured, almost pedantic

manner, generally served as a pattern for all the office people,

appeared to have quite lost his equilibrium to-day, by the above-named

mania, as he continued, in great excitement--

"The bookkeeper came home this morning about four o'clock from the

jubilee, which I had left directly after midnight. From the bridge he

sees the garden house lighted up, and hears Reinhold raving over the

notes, and lost to all sense of sight and hearing. Of course he could

not accompany me to the feast! he declared himself to be ill; but his

'unbearable headache' did not hinder him from maltreating the piano in

the icy-cold garden-room until morning's dawn. I shall be hearing again

from my partners that my son-in-law has been doing his utmost in

uselessness as well as in carelessness. It is hardly credible! The

youngest clerk understands the books better, and has more interest in

the business, than the partner and future head of the house of 'Almbach

& Co.' My whole life long have I worked and toiled to make my firm

secure and respected, and now I have the prospect of leaving it, at

last, in such hands."

"I always told you that you should have forbidden his associating with

the Music-Director, Wilkins," interrupted Frau Almbach, "he is to blame

for it all; no one could get on with that misanthropical, musical fool.

Everyone hated and avoided him, but with Reinhold that was all the more

reason to form the most intimate friendship with him. Day after day he

was there, and there alone was laid the foundation of all this musical

nonsense, which his master seems to have bequeathed to him at his

death. It is hardly bearable since he had the old man's legacy--the

piano--in the house. Ella, what do you say, then, to this behaviour of

your husband?"

The young wife, to whom the last words were addressed, had so far not

spoken a syllable. She sat in the window, her head bent over her

sewing, and only looked up as this direct question was addressed to

her.

"I, dear mother?"

"Yes, you, my child, as the affair affects you most. Or do you really

not feel the irresponsible manner in which Reinhold neglects you and

your child?"

"He is so fond of music," said Ella, softly.

"Do you excuse him also?" said her mother, excitedly. "That is just the

misfortune, he cares for it more than for wife or child; he never asks

for either of you if he can only sit at his piano and improvise. Have

you no idea of what a wife can and must demand from her husband, and

that, above all, it is her duty to bring him to reason? But to be sure,

nothing is ever to be expected of you."

The young wife certainly did not look as if much were to be expected of

her. She had little that was attractive in her appearance, and the one

thing about her that could perhaps be called pretty, the delicate,

still girlishly slender figure, was entirely hidden under a most

unbecoming house dress, which in its boundless plainness was more

suggestive of a servant than of the daughter of the house, and was made

so as to disguise any possible advantages which there might be. Only a

narrow strip of the fair hair, which lay smoothly parted on her brow,

was visible, the rest disappeared entirely under a cap more suited to

her mother's years, and offering a peculiar contrast to the face of the

barely twenty-years-old wife. This pale face with its downcast eyes,

was not adapted to arouse any interest; it had no expression, there lay

in it something stolid, vacant, that nearly approached to stupidity,

and at this moment, when she let her sewing drop and looked at her

mother, it betrayed such helpless nervousness and senselessness, that

Almbach felt obliged to come to his daughter's assistance.

"Leave Ella alone!" said he in that half-angry, half-compassionate tone

with which one rejects the interference of a child, "you know nothing

is to be done with her, and what could she effect here?"

He shrugged his shoulders and continued bitterly; "That is the reward

for the sacrifice of adopting my brother's orphan children! Hugo throws

all gratitude, all reason and education in my face, and runs away

secretly; and Reinhold, who has grown up in my house, under my eyes,

causes me the greatest anxiety, with his good-for-nothing hankering

after all fancies. But with him, at all events, I have kept the reins

in my hand, and I shall draw them so tightly now, that he shall lose

all inclination to chafe against them any more."

"Yes, Hugo's ingratitude was really outrageous!" Frau Almbach joined

in. "To fly from our house at night, in a fog, and go to sea, 'to try

his luck alone in the world,' as he said in the impudent letter of

farewell which he left behind him! Two years since there actually came

a letter to Reinhold from the Captain; and the former hinted only

lately, quite openly, about his probable return. I fear he knows

something positive about it."

"Hugo shall not cross my threshold," declared the merchant, with a

solemn motion of his hand. "I know nothing of this interchange of

letters with Reinhold, and will know nothing. Let them correspond

behind my back, but if the unadvised youth should have the audacity to

appear before me, he will learn what the anger of an offended uncle and

guardian is."

While the parents prepared to discuss this apparently often-treated

theme, with the wonted details and ire, Ella had left the room

unnoticed and now descended the staircase leading to the office,

situated on the ground floor. The young wife knew that now, at midday,

all the people would be absent, and this probably lent her courage to

enter.

It was a large gloomy room; whose bare walls and barred windows caused

it somewhat to resemble a prison. No trouble had been taken to impart

any comfort or even a pleasant appearance to the office. And what for?

What belonged to work was there; the rest was luxury, and luxury was a

thing that the house of Almbach and Co., notwithstanding its

notoriously not inconsiderable wealth, did not allow itself.

At present no one was to be found in the room, excepting the young man,

who sat at a desk with a big ledger open before him. He looked pale and

as if he had been up late; his eyes, which should have been busy with

figures, were fixed on the narrow strip of the sun's rays which fell

slantingly across the room. In his gaze was something of the longing

and bitterness of a prisoner, to whom the sunshine, penetrating into

his cell, brings news of life and freedom from without. He hardly

turned his head at the opening of the door, and asked indifferently--

"What is it? What do you want, Ella?"

Every other wife at the second question would have gone to her husband

and put her arm round his shoulder. Ella remained standing close to the

doorway. It sounded far too icily cold, this "What do you want?" she

evidently was not welcome.

"I wished to ask how your headache is?" she began, shyly.

"My headache?" Reinhold recollected himself suddenly. "Ah, yes, I think

it has gone."

The young wife closed the door and came a step or two nearer.

"My parents are very furious again, that you were not at the feast

yesterday, and were playing, instead, the whole night long," she told

him hesitatingly.

Reinhold knitted his brows. "Who told them? you perhaps?"

"I?" her voice sounded half like a reproach. "The bookkeeper saw the

garden house lighted up, and heard you playing as he returned this

morning."

An expression of contemptuous scorn played around the young man's lips,

"Ah! I certainly had not thought of that. I did not believe that those

gentlemen, after their jubilee, would have time or inclination left for

observations. To be sure for spying they are always ready enough."

"My father thinks--" began Ella, again.

"What does he think?" shouted Reinhold. "Is it not enough for him that

from morning to evening I am bound to this office; does he even grudge

me the refreshment I seek at night in music? I thought that I and my

piano had been banished far enough; that the garden house lay so

distant and so isolated, that I could run no risk of disturbing the

sleep of the righteous in the house. Fortunately no one can hear a

sound."

"Not so," said the young wife, softly, "I hear every note when all is

still around, and I alone lie awake."

Reinhold turned round and looked at his wife. She stood with downcast

eyes and thoroughly expressionless face before him. His glance swept

slowly down her figure as though he were unconsciously drawing some

comparison, and the bitterness in his features became more plainly

displayed.

"I am sorry for it," he replied coldly, "but I cannot help your windows

looking into the garden. Close your shutters in future, then it is to

be hoped that my musical extravagances will not disturb your sleep any

more."

He turned over the pages of his book, and appeared to lose himself

again in his calculations. Ella waited about a minute longer, but as

she saw that not the least notice was taken of her presence, she went

away as noiselessly as she came.

She had hardly left before Reinhold flung the ledger from him

with a passionate movement. His glance, which fell upon the

contemptuously-treated object, and was cast around the office, showed

the most bitter hatred; then he laid his head on both arms and closed

his eyes, as if he wished to see and hear no more of the whole

surroundings.

"God greet you, Reinhold!" said a strange voice suddenly, quite close

to him.

He started up, and looked bewildered and inquiringly at the stranger in

sailor's clothes, who had entered unnoticed and now stood before him.

Suddenly, however, a recollection seemed to shoot through him, as with

a cry of joy, he threw himself on the new-comer's breast.

"Is it possible, Hugo!--you here already?"

Two powerful arms embraced him firmly, and a pair of warm lips were

pressed again and again upon his.

"Do you really know me still? I should have picked you out from amongst

hundreds. Certainly you do look rather different from the little

Reinhold I left behind here. Well, with me I suppose it is not much

better."

The first words still sounded full of deep emotion; but the latter

already bore a somewhat merrier tone. Reinhold's arm still lay fondly

round his brother's neck.

"And you come so suddenly, so completely unannounced? I only expected

you in a few weeks' time."

"We have had an unusually quick voyage," said the young captain,

cheerfully, "and once I was in the harbour, I could not stay a minute

longer on board, I must come to you. Thank God, I found you alone! I

was afraid I should have to pass the purgatorial fire of domestic anger

and to fight my way through the united relatives in order to reach

you."

Reinhold's face, still beaming with the pleasure of meeting again,

became overcast at this recollection, and his arm fell slowly down.

"No one has seen you surely?" he asked, "you know how my uncle feels

towards you, since--"

"Since I withdrew myself from his \_all-wise\_ rule, which wished to

screw me absolutely to the office table, and ran away?" interrupted

Hugo. "Yes, I know; and I should have liked to look on at the row that

broke loose in the house when they discovered I had fled. But the story

is nearly ten years old. The 'good-for-nothing' is not dead and ruined,

as the family have, no doubt, prophecied hundreds of times, and wished

oftener; he returns as a most respected captain of a most splendid

ship, with all possible recommendations to your principal houses of

business. Should these mercantile and maritime advantages not at last

soften the heart of the angry house of Almbach and Co.?"

Reinhold suppressed a sigh, "Do not joke, Hugo! you do not know my

uncle--do not know the life in his house."

"No, I went away at the night time," asserted the Captain, "and that

was most sensible; you should do the same."

"What are you thinking about? My wife--my child?"

"Ah yes!" said Hugo, somewhat confused. "I always forget you are

married. Poor boy! they chained you fast by times. Such a betrothal

altar is the safest bolt to thrust before all possible longing for

freedom. There, do not fly out at once! I am quite willing to believe

they did not regularly force you to say 'yes.' But how you came to do

it, my uncle will probably have to answer for; and the melancholy

attitude in which I found you, does not say much for the happiness of a

young husband. Let me look into your eyes, that I may see how it really

is."

He seized him unceremoniously by his arm, and drew him towards the

window. Here in broad daylight, one could see, for the first time, how

very unlike the brothers were, notwithstanding an undeniable

resemblance in their features. The Captain, the elder of the two, was

strongly, and yet gracefully built, his handsome, open countenance was

browned by sun and air; his hair curled lightly, and his brown eyes

sparkled with love of life and courage; his carriage was easy and

firm, like that of a man accustomed to move in the most varied

surroundings and circumstances, and his whole bearing had a species of

self-confidence which broke forth at every opportunity, with, at the

same time, such a fresh, open kindliness, that it was difficult to

resist him.

Reinhold, his junior by a few years, made a totally different

impression. He was slighter, paler than his brother; his hair and eyes

were darker, and the latter had a serious, even gloomy expression. But

there lay on this brow, and in those eyes, something which attracted

all the more, as they did not disclose all which lay behind them. Hugo

was, perhaps, the handsomer of the two, and yet a comparison was sure

to be drawn unconditionally in favour of the younger brother, who

possessed, in the highest degree, that rare and dangerous charm of

being interesting, to which, often the most perfect beauty must give

way.

The young man made a hasty attempt to withdraw from the threatened

inspection. "You cannot remain here," he said, decidedly, "uncle may

enter at any moment, and then there would be a terrible scene. I will

take you to the garden house for the present, which I have had fitted

up for my sole use. You will hardly dare to appear before the family,

and your arrival must be known. I will tell them."

"And bear all the storm alone?" interrupted the Captain. "I beg your

pardon, but that is my affair! I am going up at once to my uncle and

aunt, and shall introduce myself as their obedient nephew!"

"But Hugo! are you out of your senses? You have no idea of the state of

affairs here."

"Exactly! The strongest fortresses are taken by surprise, and I have

long looked forward to one day entering like a bomb amongst the stormy

relations, and to seeing what sort of a grimace they would make. But

one thing more. Reinhold, you must give me your promise to remain

quietly below until I return. You shall not be placed in the painful

position of witnessing how the weight of the family wrath is poured

upon my erring head. You might wish to catch some of it out of

brotherly self-sacrifice, and that would disturb all my plans of

campaign. Jonas, come in!"

He opened the door and admitted a man, who, until now, had waited

outside in the passage. "That is my brother. Look well at him! You have

to report yourself to him, and pay him your respects. Once more,

Reinhold, promise me not to enter the family parlour for the next

half-hour. I shall bring all to order up there by myself, if I have

even to take the whole barrack by storm."

He was out of the door before his brother could make any remonstrance.

Still half-bewildered by the rapid changes of the last ten minutes, he

looked at the broad, square figure of the new arrival, who set a

good-sized portmanteau down on the floor, and planted himself close

beside it.

"Seaman Wilhelm Jonas, of the 'Ellida,' now in the service of Herr

Captain Almbach!" reported he, systematically, and attempted a movement

at the same time, probably intended to be a bow, but which did not bear

the least similarity to the desired courtesy.

"All right," said Reinhold, abruptly, "you can leave the luggage here

at present! I must first hear how long my brother proposes remaining."

"We are to stay here a few days with his uncle," assured Jonas, very

quietly.

"Oh! is that decided already?"

"Quite positively."

"I do not understand Hugo," murmured Reinhold. "He appears to have no

idea of what is before him, and yet my letters must have prepared him

for it. I cannot possibly let him bear the storm alone."

He made a movement towards the door, but this was quite blocked up by

the sailor's broad figure, who, even at the young man's displeased

glance of enquiry, did not move from his position.

"The Captain said that he would bring all to order up yonder by

himself," he explained laconically, "so he will do it. He succeeds in

everything."

"Really?" asked Reinhold, somewhat struck by the insuperable confidence

of the words, "You seem to know my brother well."

"Very well."

Hesitating whether he should accede to Hugo's wish, Reinhold went to

the window which looked into the court, and became aware of three or

four faces, expressive of boundless curiosity, belonging to the

servants, who were trying to obtain a peep into the office. The young

man allowed a sound of suppressed annoyance to escape him, and turned

again to the sailor.

"My brother's arrival seems to be known in the house already, said he

hastily. Strangers are not such a rarity in the office, and the

curiosity is evidently directed to you."

"It does not matter," muttered Jonas, "even if the whole nest becomes

rebellious and stares at us. That sort of thing is nothing new. The

savages in the South Sea Islands do just the same when our 'Ellida'

lies-to."

The question may remain undecided, as to whether the comparison just

drawn was exactly flattering to the inhabitants of the house.

Fortunately no one but Reinhold heard it, and he considered it

necessary to remove the object of this curiosity. He desired him to

enter the adjoining room and wait there; he himself remained behind and

listened uneasily if quarrelling voices were to be heard, but to be

sure the family parlour lay in the upper story and at the other side of

the house. The young man debated with himself as to whether he should

remain true to the half-promise which he had made to Hugo, and leave

him to manage alone, or if he should not, at least, attempt to cover

the unavoidable retreat, as, that such lay before Hugo, he believed to

be certain. He had too often heard the condemning verdict accorded to

his brother by the family, not to dread a scene, in which even the

former would be unable to hold his own, but he also knew his own

position towards his uncle too well, not to say to himself that his

interference would merely make matters worse.

More than half-an-hour had passed in this painful anxiety, when at last

steps were heard and the Captain entered.

"Here I am, the affair is settled."

"What is settled?" asked Reinhold, hastily.

"Well, the pardon of course. As much-beloved nephew, I have this moment

lain alternately in the arms of my uncle and aunt. Come upstairs with

me, Reinhold! you are missing in the reconciliation \_tableau\_, but you

must be prepared for endless emotion; they are all crying together."

His brother looked at him doubtfully. "I do not know, Hugo, if this be

meant for fun, or--"

The young Captain laughed mischievously. "You seem to have little

confidence in my diplomatic talents. But all the same, do not think

that the affair was easily settled. I was certainly prepared for a

storm. But here raged a regular tornado--bah, we sailors are accustomed

to such things--and when at last I could obtain speech, which

certainly was not for some time, the victory was already decided. I

represented the return of the lost son with a masterly hand; I called

heaven and earth as witnesses of my reformation. I ventured upon

falling at their feet--that took, at least with my aunt--I now made

sure of the hesitating female flank, in order to storm the centre in

conjunction with it, and the victory was brilliant. Forgiveness in due

form--general emotion and embraces--group of reconciliation--my Heaven,

do not look so incredulous. I assure you I am speaking in all

seriousness."

Reinhold shook his head, yet unconsciously he drew a breath of relief.

"Comprehend it, who can! I should have thought it impossible! Have

you"--the question sounded peculiarly uncertain--"have you seen my

wife?"

"To be sure," said Hugo, slyly. "That is to say, I have certainly not

seen much of her, and heard even less, as she remained quite passive

during the scene, and did not even cry like the rest. The same little

cousin Eleonore still, who always sat so quietly and shyly in her

corner, out of which even our wildest boyish teasings did not drive

her--and she has become your wife! But now, above all, I must admire

the representative of the house of Almbach! Where is he?"

Reinhold looked up, and for a moment a bright gleam drove all the

gloominess away from his face. "My boy? I will show him to you. Come,

we will go up to him."

"Thank God, at last a sign of happiness in your face," said the

Captain, with a seriousness of which one would hardly have deemed his

merry nature capable, and he added in a lowered voice, "I have sought

for it in vain so far."

\* \* \* \* \*

The firm of Almbach and Co. belonged to that class whose names on the

Exchange, as well as in the commercial world generally, were of some

position, without being of conspicuous importance. The relations

between its head and Consul Erlau were not only of a business nature;

they dated from earlier times, when both, equally young and meanless,

were apprenticed in the same office, the one to raise himself until he

became a rich merchant, whose ships sailed on every ocean and whose

connections extended to every quarter of the globe--the other to found

a modest business, which never reached beyond certain bounds. Almbach

avoided all more daring speculations, all greater undertakings, which

he was by no means the man to superintend or guide; he preferred a

moderate, but steady gain, which also fell to his share to the fullest

extent. His social position was certainly as different from that of

Consul Erlau as was his old-fashioned gloomy house in Canal Street,

with its high gables and barred office windows, from the princely

furnished palace at the Harbour. The friendship between the former

youthful companions had gradually diminished, but it was certainly

Almbach who was principally to blame for it. He could not be reconciled

to the Consul after the latter had become a millionaire, living in the

style suited to that position. Perhaps he could not forgive him for

occupying the first place, while he himself only stood in the third or

fourth rank, and well as he knew how to utilise the advantages which

the intimate acquaintance with the great firm of Erlau opened to him,

yet he held, all the more, to his strictly middle-class, and somewhat

old-frankish household, and kept aloof from all communication with that

of the Consul. The latter's invitations had ceased when he saw that

they were never accepted; for years the mutual meetings had been

restricted to those occasional ones on Exchange or some chance place,

and lately Almbach had even, when any business matters required a

personal interview, let his son-in-law represent him. It was decidedly

disagreeable to him, that on this occasion the young man had received

the invitation to the opera and the succeeding evening party, and

impossible as it was to refuse this civility, the merchant did not

attempt to disguise from his family his dissatisfaction at Reinhold's

introduction into the "nabob's life," the designation with which he

usually honoured his old friend's household.

Notwithstanding all this, Almbach was a well-to-do, even, as was

maintained by many, a very rich man, and on this account the centre and

support of numerous relations not blessed with over-much fortune. In

this manner the care of his two orphaned nephews, whom their father, a

ship's captain, had left quite without resources, fell to his charge.

Almbach had only one child, to whose existence he had never attached

very much importance, as she was a girl. The Consul and his wife were

the little one's god-parents, and it might always be considered as an

act of self-conquest, that Almbach gave his daughter Frau Erlau's name,

as he particularly hated the aristocratic, romantic-sounding "Eleonore"

and soon changed it for the much simpler "Ella." This designation was

also more suitable, as Ella Almbach was considered by every one to be,

not only a simple, but even a very contracted-minded being, whose

horizon never was extended beyond the trifling domestic events of

housekeeping. The child had formerly been very sickly, and this may

have had a crippling effect upon the development of her mental

faculties. They were indeed of a very inferior order, and the very

prejudiced, strictly domestic education in her father's house,

excluding every other circle of ideas and thought, did not appear

adapted to give them a higher direction. Thus, then, the girl had

grown up quiet and shy, always overlooked, everywhere set aside, and

without the least value, even amongst her nearest relations. They

were wont to consider her quite incapable of self-dependence, even

half-irresponsible, and her eventual marriage did not change things at

all.

Neither of the young people raised any objection to the long-cherished,

and to them long-known, plan of a union. A girl of seventeen and a man

of twenty-two have certainly not much self-decision, least of all when

they have grown up under such repressed circumstances. Besides, in this

case, there was also the habit of always living together, which had

created a sort of liking, although in Reinhold it was really only

pitying tolerance, and in Ella secret fear of her mentally superior

cousin. They gave their hands obediently at the betrothal, which was

followed, after a year's reprieve, by the wedding. Almbach's sceptre

swayed over both as much after as before it, he allowed his new

son-in-law, who, as far as the name went, was literally his partner, as

little independence in the business as his wife did the young mistress

in the household.

CHAPTER III.

It was Sunday morning. The office was closed, and Reinhold at last had

a free morning before him, which certainly was seldom his good fortune.

He was in the garden house, to the entire and special possession of

which he had at last attained, to be sure only after many struggles and

by repeated reference to his musical studies, which were considered

highly disturbing in the house. It was here alone that the young man

was in any degree safe from the constant control of his parents-in-law,

which extended even into the young couple's dwelling, and he seized

every free moment to take refuge in his asylum.

The so-called "garden" was of the only description possible in an old,

narrowly-built, densely populated town. On all sides high walls and

gables enclosed the small piece of ground, to which air and sunshine

were sparingly given, and where a few trees and shrubs enjoyed but a

miserable existence. The garden's boundary was one of those small

canals, which traversed the town in all directions, and whose quick,

dark stream formed a very melancholy background; beyond this, again,

walls and gables were to be seen; the same prison-like appearance,

which clung to Almbach's whole house seemed to reign over the only free

space belonging to it.

The garden house itself was not much more cheerful--the single large

room was furnished with more than simplicity. Evidently the few

old-fashioned pieces of furniture had been set aside from some other

place as superfluous, and been sought out in order to fit up the room

with what was absolutely necessary. Only in the window, round which

climbed some stunted vines, stood a large, handsome piano, the legacy

of the late Music Director, Wilkens, to his pupil, and its magnificent

appearance contrasted as singularly and strangely with the room as did

the figure of the young man, with his ideal brow and large flashing

eyes, behind the barred office windows of the dwelling-house.

Reinhold was sitting writing at the table, but to-day his face did not

wear the tired, listless expression, which rested upon it whenever he

had the figures of the account books before him; his cheeks were

darkly, almost feverishly red, and as he wrote a name rapidly on the

envelope, lying on the table, his hands trembled as if with suppressed

excitement. Steps were heard outside, and the glass door was opened;

with a quick gesture of annoyance the young man pushed the envelope

under the sheets of music lying on the table, and turned round.

It was Jonas, servant of the Captain, who for a few days only had

accepted the hospitality offered by his relations, and then had

migrated to a dwelling of his own. The sailor saluted and entered in

his peculiarly rough and somewhat uncouth manner, and then laid some

books on the table.

"The Herr Captain's compliments, and he sends the promised books from

his travelling library."

"Is my brother not coming himself?" asked Reinhold astonished. "He

promised surely."

"The Captain has been here some time," replied Jonas, "but they have

got hold of him in the house; your uncle wished to have a conference

with him on family affairs; your aunt requires his help to make some

alteration in the guest room, and the bookkeeper wants to catch him for

his society. All are fighting for him; he cannot tear himself away."

"Hugo appears to have conquered the whole house in the course of a

single week," remarked Reinhold ironically.

"We do that everywhere," said Jonas, full of self-consciousness, and

appeared inclined to add more about those conquests, when he was

interrupted by his master's entrance, who greeted his brother in the

most cheerful humour.

"Good morning, Reinhold! Now Jonas, what are you staying here for? You

are wanted in the house. I promised my aunt that you should help at the

dinner to-day. Go at once to the kitchen!"

"Amongst the women!"

"Heaven knows," said Hugo, turning laughingly to his brother, "where

this man has learned his hatred for women. Certainly not from me; I

admire the lovely sex uncommonly."

"Yes, unfortunately, quite uncommonly," muttered Jonas, but he turned

away obediently and marched out of the room, while the Captain came

quite close to Reinhold.

"To-day there is a large family dinner!" he began, imitating his Uncle

Almbach's pedantic, solemn voice so well as almost to deceive any one.

"In my honour of course! I hope you will pay proper respect to this

important ceremony, and that you will not again behave in such a

manner, that I can at the utmost use you as a butt for my too developed

amiability."

Reinhold knitted his brows slightly--

"I beg you, Hugo, do be sensible for once! How long do you intend to

continue this comedy, and amuse yourself at the expense of the whole

house? Take care, lest they find out what your amiability consists of,

and that you are really only ridiculing them all."

"That would indeed be bad," said Hugo, quietly, "but they will not find

me out, depend upon that."

"Then do me the kindness, at least, of ceasing your horrid Indian

tales! You really go too far with them. Uncle was debating with the

bookkeeper yesterday about the battle with the monster serpent, which

you served up for them lately, and which, even to him, appeared unheard

of. I became extremely confused in listening to them."

"It put you to confusion?" mocked the Captain. "If I had been there, I

should immediately have given them the benefit of an elephant hunt, a

tiger story, and a few attacks of savages, with such appalling effects,

that the affair of the giant snake would have appeared highly probable

to them. Be easy! I know my hearers; the whole house oppresses me

almost, with its acts of sympathy."

"Excepting Ella," suggested Reinhold, "it is certainly remarkable that

her shyness towards you is quite invincible."

"Yes, it is very remarkable," said Hugo with an offended air. "I cannot

allow any one in the house to exist who is not entirely persuaded of my

perfections, and have already set myself the task of presenting myself

to my sister-in-law in all my utterly irresistible charms. I do not

doubt at all that she will thereupon immediately join the majority--you

are not jealous, I hope."

"Jealous?--I? and on Ella's account?" The young man shrugged his

shoulders half-pityingly, half-contemptuously.

"What are you thinking of?"

"Well, there is no danger! I have sought an interview with her already,

but she was entirely occupied with the young one. Tell me, Reinhold,

where does the child get those wonderful, blue, fairy-tale-like eyes

from? Yours are not so, besides there is not the least resemblance,

and, excepting his, I do not know any in the family."

"I believe Ella's eyes are blue," interrupted his brother

indifferently.

"You believe only? Have you never convinced yourself then? Certainly it

may be somewhat difficult; she never raises them, and, under that

monstrous cap, nothing can be seen of her face. Reinhold, for Heaven's

sake, how can you allow your wife such an antediluvian costume? I

assure you, for me that cap would be grounds sufficient for a divorce."

Reinhold had seated himself at the piano, and let his hands glide

mechanically over the notes, while he answered with perfect

indifference--

"I never trouble myself about Ella's toilet, and I believe it would be

useless to try and enforce any alterations there. What does it matter

to me?"

"What it matters to you how your wife looks?" repeated the Captain, as

he seized some sheets of music on the table, and turned them over

lightly, "a charming question from a young husband! You used to have a

sense of beauty, too easily aroused, and I could almost fear--what is

this then? 'Signora Beatrice Biancona on it.' Have you Italian

correspondents in the town?"

Reinhold sprang up, confusion and annoyance struggled in his face, as

he saw the letter, which he had pushed under the music, in his

brother's hands, who repeated the address unconcernedly.

"Beatrice Biancona? That is the \_prima donna\_ of the Italian Opera, who

has made such a wonderful sensation here? Do you know the lady?"

"Slightly," said Reinhold, taking the letter quickly from his hands. "I

was introduced to her lately at Consul Erlau's."

"And you correspond with her already?"

"Certainly not! The letter does not contain one single line."

Hugo laughed aloud, "An envelope fully addressed, a very voluminous

sheet of paper inside it, with not a single line! Dear Reinhold, that

is more wonderful than my story of the giant snake. Do you expect me

really to believe it? There, do not look so savage, I do not intend to

force myself into your secrets."

Instead of answering, the young man drew the paper out of the unsealed

envelope, and held it to his brother, who looked at it in astonishment.

"What does it mean? Only a song--notes and words--no word of

explanation with it--just your name below. Have you composed it?"

Reinhold took the paper again, closed the letter and put it in his

pocket.

"It is an attempt, nothing more. She is \_artiste\_ enough to judge of

it. She can accept or reject it."

"Then you compose also?" asked the Captain, whose face had become

serious all at once. "I did not think that your passionate liking for

music went so far as creating it yourself. Poor Reinhold, how can you

bear this life, with all its narrow, confined ways, wishing to stifle

every spark of poetry as being unnecessary or dangerous? I could not do

it."

Reinhold had thrown himself upon the seat before the piano again.

"Do not ask me how I endure it," he replied, with suppressed feeling.

"It is enough \_that\_ I do it."

"I guessed long since that your letters were not open," continued Hugo;

"that behind all the contentment with which you tried to deceive me,

something quite different was concealed. The truth has become plain to

me, during one week in this house, notwithstanding that you gave

yourself all conceivable trouble to hide it from me."

The young man gazed gloomily before him. "Why should I worry you, when

far away, with anxieties about me? You had enough to do to take care of

yourself, and there was a time, too, when I was contented, or at least

believed myself so, because my whole mental being lay, as it were,

under a spell, when I allowed everything to pass over me in stupid

indifference, and I offered my hand willingly for the chain. I have

done it; well, yes! But I must carry it my whole life long!"

Hugo had gone towards him, and laid his hand upon his brother's

shoulder.

"You mean your marriage with Ella? At the first news of it, I knew it

must be my uncle's work."

A bitter smile played round the young man's lips as he answered

scornfully--

"He was always a splendid master of calculation, and he has shown it

again in this case. The poor relation, taken up out of kindness and

charity, must consider it happiness that he is raised to be son and

heir of the house, and the daughter must be married some time; so it

was a case of securing, by means of her hand, a successor for the firm,

who bore the same name. It was neither Ella's nor my fault that we were

bound together. We were both young, without wills, without knowledge of

life or of ourselves. She will always remain so--well for her. It has

not been so fortunate for me."

One would hardly have credited those merry brown eyes with the power of

looking so serious as at this moment, when he bent down to his brother.

"Reinhold," said he, in an undertone, "on the night when I fled to

save myself from a caprice, which would have ruined my freedom and

future, I had planned and foreseen everything, excepting one, the most

difficult--the moment when I should stand by your bed to bid you

farewell. You slept quietly, and did not dream of the separation; but

I--when I saw your pale face on the pillow, and said to myself that for

years, perhaps never again, should I see it, all longing for freedom

could not resist it--I struggled hard with the temptation to awake and

take you with me. Later, when I experienced the thorny path of the

adventurous homeless boy, with all its dangers and privations, I often

thanked God that I had withstood the temptation; I knew you were safe

and sound in our relation's house, and now"--Hugo's strong voice

trembled as with suppressed anger or pain--"now I wish I had carried

you with me to want and privation, to storm and danger, but at any rate

to freedom; it had been better."

"It had been better," repeated Reinhold, listlessly; then rising as if

reckless, "Let us cease! What is the use of regrets, which cannot

change what is past. Come! They expect us upstairs."

"I wish I had you on my 'Ellida,' and we could turn our backs on the

whole crew, never to see them again," said the young sailor, with a

sigh, as he prepared to follow his brother's bidding. "I never thought

things could be so bad."

The brothers had hardly entered the house, when Hugo's indispensability

began to show itself again. He was in request, at least on three sides,

at once. Every one required his advice and help. The young Captain

appeared to possess the enviable power of throwing himself directly

from one mood into another, as, immediately after his serious

conversation with his brother, he was sparkling with merriment and

mischief, helped every one, paid compliments to each, and at the same

time teased all in the most merciless manner. This time it was the

bookkeeper who caught him, as Jonas expressed it, to explain the

affairs of his society; and while the two gentlemen were discussing it,

Reinhold entered the dining-room, where he found his wife busied with

preparations for the before-named guests.

Ella was in her Sunday costume to-day, but that made little alteration

in her appearance. Her dress of finer material was not more becoming;

the cap, which inspired her brother-in-law with such horror, surrounded

and disfigured her face as usual. The young wife devoted herself so

assiduously and completely to her domestic duties, that she hardly

seemed to notice her husband's entrance, who approached her with rather

lowering mien.

"I must beg you, Ella," he began, "to have more regard for my wishes in

future, and to meet my brother in such a manner as he can and would

expect his sister-in-law to do. I should think that the behaviour of

your parents, and every one in the house, might serve as an example for

you; but you appear to find an especial pleasure in denying him every

right of relationship, and in showing him a decided antipathy."

The young wife looked as timid and helpless at this anything but kindly

expressed reproof, as she did when her mother desired her to interfere

about her husband's musical "mania."

"Do not be angry, dear Reinhold," she replied, hesitatingly, "but I--I

cannot do otherwise."

"You cannot?" asked Reinhold, sharply. "Of course, that is your

never-failing answer when I ask anything of you, and I should have

thought it was seldom enough that I do address a request to you. But

this time I insist positively that you should change your demeanour

towards Hugo. This shy avoidance and consequent silence whenever he

speaks to you is too ridiculous. I beg seriously that you will take

more care not to make me appear too much an object of pity to my

brother."

Ella appeared about to answer, but the last unsparing words closed her

lips. She bowed her head, and did not make any further attempt to

defend herself. It was a movement of such gentle, patient resignation

as would have disarmed any one; but Reinhold did not notice it, as at

the same moment the old bookkeeper was heard taking leave in the next

room.

"Then we may count upon the honour of your membership, Herr Captain?

And as regards the election of a President, I have your word that you

will support the opposition?"

"Quite at your service," said Hugo's voice, "and of course only with

the opposition. I always join the opposition on principle whenever

there is one; it is generally the only faction in which there is any

fun. Excuse me, the honour is on my side."

The bookkeeper left, and the Captain appeared in the room. He seemed

inclined to redeem the promise he had given to his brother, and at the

same time to convince the young wife of his perfections, as he

approached her with all the boldness and confidence of his nature, with

which a certain knightly gallantry was mingled.

"Then I owe it to chance that at last I see my sister-in-law, and she

is compelled to remain with me a few moments? Certainly she never would

have accorded me this happiness of her own free will. I was complaining

bitterly to Reinhold this morning about your repelling me, which I do

not know that I have merited in any way."

He wished to take her hand, even to kiss it, but Ella drew back, with

a, for her, quite unwonted decision.

"Herr Captain!"

"Herr Captain!" repeated Hugo, annoyed. "No, Ella, that is going too

far. I certainly, as your brother, have a right to the 'thou' which you

never refused to your cousin and childish companion, but as you, from

the first day of my arrival, laid so much stress on the formal 'you,' I

followed the hint you gave me. However, this 'Herr Captain' I will not

stand. That is an insult against which I shall call Reinhold to my

assistance. He shall tell me if I must really bear hearing myself being

called 'Herr Captain' by those lips."

"Certainly not!" said Reinhold, as he turned to leave, "Ella will give

up this manner of speaking to you, as well as her whole tone towards

you. I have just been speaking distinctly to her about it."

He went away, and his glance ordered his wife to remain, as plainly as

his voice demanded obedience. Neither escaped the Captain.

"For goodness sake, do not interfere with your husband's authority!

Would you command friendliness towards me?" cried he after his brother,

and turned again quickly to Ella, while he continued, gallantly, "that

would be the surest way to prevent my ever finding favour in my

beautiful sister-in-law's eyes. But that is not required between us, is

it? You will permit me, at least, to lay the due tribute of respect at

your feet, to describe to you the joyful surprise with which I received

the news--"

Here Hugo stopped suddenly, and seemed to have lost his train of ideas.

Ella had raised her eyes, and looked at him. It was a gleam of quiet,

painful reproach, and the same reproach lay in her voice as she

replied, "At least leave me in peace, Herr Captain. I thought you had

amusement enough for to-day."

"I?" asked Hugo, taken aback. "What do you mean, Ella? You do not

think--"

The young wife did not let him finish. "What have we done to you?" she

continued, and although her voice trembled timidly at first, it gained

firmness with every word. "What have we done to you that you always

scoff at us, since the day of your return, when you acted a scene of

repentance before my parents, until the present moment, when you make

the whole house the target for your jokes? Reinhold certainly tolerates

our being daily humiliated; he looks upon it as a matter of course. But

I, Herr Captain--" here Ella's voice had attained perfect steadiness,

"I do not consider it right that you should daily cast scorn and

contempt over a house in which you, after all that has passed, have

been received with the old love. If this house and family do appear so

very meagre and ridiculous to you, no one invited you here. You should

have remained in that world of which you are able to relate so much. My

parents deserve more respect and mercy even for their weaknesses; and,

although our house may be simple, it is still too good for the scoffs

of an--adventurer."

She turned her back upon him, and left the room without waiting for a

single word of reply. Hugo stood and gazed after her, as if one of the

impossible scenes out of his own Indian stories had just been acted

before him. Probably, for the first time in his life, the young sailor

lost, with his presence of mind, the power of speech also.

"That was plain," said he at last, as he sat down, quite upset; but the

next moment he sprang up as if electrified, and cried--

"She has them in truth; the child's beautiful blue eyes. And I

discovered them only now! Who, indeed, would look for this glance under

that horrible cap? 'We are too good for the scoffs of an adventurer.'

Not exactly flattering, but it was merited, although I expected least

of all to hear it from her! I shall often try that."

Hugo moved as if going into the guest room, but he stopped again on the

threshold, and looked towards the door, by which his sister-in-law had

retired. All signs of mockery and mischief had entirely vanished from

his face; it bore a thoughtful expression as he said, gently, "And

Reinhold only \_believes\_ she has blue eyes! Incomprehensible!"

\* \* \* \* \*

In the large concert-room of H----, all the \_elite\_ of the town seemed

to be gathered on the occasion of one of those concerts which, set on

foot for some charitable purpose, were patronised by the first

families, and whose support and presence there was considered quite a

point of honour. To-day the programme only bore well-known names, both

as regarded the performances as well as performers; and besides, it was

arranged by means of the highest possible prices that the audience

should consist principally, if not entirely, of persons belonging to

the best circles of society.

The concert had not commenced, and the performers were in a room

adjoining, which served as a place of assembly on such occasions, and

to which only a few specially favoured of the outside world had the

right of entrance. Therefore the presence was the more remarkable of a

young man who did not belong either to the favoured or the performers,

and who kept aloof from both. He had entered shortly before and

addressed himself at once to the conductor, who, although he did not

appear to know him, yet must have been informed of his coming, as he

received him very politely. The gentlemen around only heard so much of

the conversation, that the conductor regretted not to be able to give

Mr. Almbach any information: it was Signora Biancona's wish; the

Signora would appear directly. The short interview was soon over, and

Reinhold drew back.

The group of artists, engaged in lively conversation, broke up

suddenly, as the door opened and the young \_prima donna\_ appeared; she

had not been expected so soon, as she usually only drove up at the last

moment. Every one began to move. All tried to outdo one another in

attentions to their beautiful colleague, but to-day she took remarkably

little notice of the wonted homage of her surroundings. Her glance on

entering had flown rapidly through the room, and had at once found the

object of its search. The Signora deigned to reply to the greetings

only very slightly, exchanged a few words with the conductor, and

withdrew at once from all further attempts at conversation with the

gentlemen, as she turned to Reinhold Almbach, who now approached her,

and went towards the farthest window with him.

"You have really come, Signor?" she began in a reproachful tone, "I did

not believe, indeed, that you would accept my invitation."

Reinhold looked up, and the forced coldness and formality of the

greeting began already to melt as he met her gaze for the first time on

that evening.

"Then it was your invitation," he said. "I did not know if I was to

consider the one sent by the conductor in your name, as such. It did

not contain a single line from you."

Beatrice smiled. "I only followed the example set me. I, too, have

received a certain song, whose composer added nothing to his name. I

only retaliated."

"Has my silence offended you?" asked the young man, quickly. "I dared

add nothing. What--" his eyes sank to the ground--"what should I have

said to you?"

The first question was indeed unnecessary; as the devotion of the song

seemed to have been understood, and Signora Biancona looked the reverse

of offended as she answered--

"You appear to like the wordless form, Signor, and always to wish to

speak to me in notes of music. Well, I bowed to your taste, and have

determined to answer also only in our language."

She laid a slight but still marked emphasis upon the word. Reinhold

raised his head in astonishment.

"In our language?" he repeated slowly.

CHAPTER IV.

Beatrice drew a paper out of the roll of music which she held in her

hand. "I have waited in vain for the author of this song to come to me,

in order to hear it from my lips and receive my thanks for it. He has

left to strangers that which was his duty. I am accustomed to \_be

sought\_, Signor. You seem to expect the same."

There certainly lay some reproach in her voice, but it was not very

harsh, and it would have been hardly possible, as Reinhold's eye

betrayed only too plainly what this staying away had cost him. He made

no reply to the reproach, did not defend himself against it, but his

glance, which seemed magnetically bound by the brilliantly beautiful

apparition, told her that his self-restraint was caused by anything

rather than indifference.

"Do you think I have sent for you to hear the air which is put down in

the programme?" continued the Italian, playfully. "The audience always

desires this air \_da capo\_; it is too trying for a repetition; I

propose, therefore, instead of this, to sing--something else."

A deep glow covered the young man's features, and he stretched out his

hand, as if with an unconscious movement, towards the paper.

"For mercy's sake! surely not my song?"

"You are uncommonly alarmed about it," said the singer, stepping back,

and withdrawing the music from him. "Are you afraid for the fate of

your work in my hands?"

"No, no!" cried Reinhold passionately, "but--"

"But? No objections, Signor! The song is dedicated to me, is handed

over to me for good or evil. I shall do with it what I choose. Only one

more question. The director is quite prepared; we have practised the

performance together, but I should prefer seeing you at the piano when

I appear before the audience with your music. May I count upon you?"

"You will trust yourself to my accompaniment?" asked Reinhold, with

trembling voice. "Trust yourself entirely without first trying it? That

is a risk for us both."

"Only if your courage fail, not otherwise," explained Beatrice. "With

your power over the piano I have already made acquaintance, and there

is certainly no question as to whether you are sure of the

accompaniment to your work. If you are as sure of yourself before this

audience as you were lately at the party, we can perform the song

without hesitation."

"I will risk all, if you are at my side," Reinhold exclaimed,

passionately. "The song was written for you, Signora. If you decide

differently for it, its fate lies in your hand. I am ready for all."

She answered only with a smile, proud and confident of success, and

turned to the conductor who at that moment drew near. Then ensued a

low, but lively conversation in the group, and the other gentlemen

regarded with undisguised displeasure the young stranger who quite

monopolised the attention and conversation of the Signora and, to their

great annoyance, occupied her until the signal for the commencement of

the concert was given.

The room, in the meanwhile, had filled to the very last seat, and the

dazzlingly-lighted place, in conjunction with the rich toilets of the

ladies, offered a brilliant sight. Consul Erlau's wife sat with several

other ladies in the front part of the room, and was engaged in

conversation with Dr. Welding, when her husband, accompanied by a young

man, wearing a captain's uniform, came up to her seat.

"Herr Captain Almbach," he said, introducing him, "to whom I owe the

rescue of my best ship and all its crew. It was he who came to the help

of the 'Hansa,' when already almost foundered, and it is entirely to

his self-sacrificing energy--"

"Oh pray, Herr Consul, do not let Frau Erlau immediately anticipate a

storm at sea!" interrupted Hugo, "we poor sailors are always so

maligned as regards our adventures, that every lady looks forward with

secret horror to their inevitable relation. I assure you though,

Madame, that you have nothing to fear with me. I intend my

conversational attempts to be confined to the mainland."

The young sailor appeared indeed to understand very thoroughly the

differences of the society in which he moved. It never entered his head

here, when the opportunity was offered him, to recount adventures,

which in his relative's house he lavished so liberally. The Consul

shook his head a little dissatisfied.

"You appear wishful to laugh away all recognition of your services,"

responded he. "I am not the less in your debt, even if you do make it

impossible for me to discharge it in any way. Besides, I do not believe

the relation of this adventure would injure you with the ladies, quite

the contrary. And as you refuse all account of it so positively, I

shall reserve it myself for the next opportunity."

Frau Erlau turned with winning friendliness to Hugo.

"You are no stranger to us, Herr Captain Almbach, even for your

family's sake. Only lately we had the pleasure of seeing your brother

at our house."

"Yes--only once," added the Consul, "and then merely by chance. Almbach

appears unable to forgive me that my mode of living varies so from his

own. He purposely keeps himself and all his family at a distance, and

for years has stopped all visits from our godchild--we hardly know what

Eleanor looks like."

"Poor Eleanor!" remarked Frau Erlau, compassionately. "I fear she has

been intimidated by a too strict bringing up, and being kept much too

secluded. I never see her otherwise than shy and quiet, and I believe

in the presence of strangers she never raises her eyes."

"She does though," said Hugo, in a peculiar voice. "She does sometimes,

but certainly I doubt if my brother has ever seen her do so."

"Your brother is not here, then?" asked the lady.

"No. He declined to accompany me. I do not understand it, as I know his

infatuation for music and especially for Biancona's singing. I am to

see this sun of the south, whose rays dazzle all H----, rise to-day for

the first time."

The Consul cautioned him laughingly with his finger.

"Do not scoff, Captain; rather protect your own heart against these

rays. To you, young gentleman, such things are most dangerous. You

would not be the first who had succumbed to the magic of those eyes."

The young sailor laughed confidently.

"And who says then, Herr Consul, that I fear such a fate? I always

succumb in such cases with the greatest pleasure, and the consolatory

knowledge that the magic is only dangerous for him who flees it.

Whoever stands firm, is generally soon disenchanted, often sooner than

he wishes."

"It appears you have had great experience already in such affairs,"

said Frau Erlau, with a touch of reproof.

"My God, Madame, when year after year one flies from country to

country, and never takes root anywhere, is nowhere so much at home as

on the rolling, ever-moving sea, one learns to look upon constant

change as inevitable, and at last to love it. I expose myself entirely

to your displeasure with this confession, but I must really beg of you

to look upon me as a savage, who has long forgotten, in tropical seas

and countries, how to satisfy the requirements of North German

civilisation."

Yet the manner in which the young Captain bowed and kissed the lady's

hand as he spoke, betrayed a sufficient acquaintance with these

requirements, and Dr. Welding remarked, drily, as he turned to the

Consul--

"The tropical barbarism of this gentleman will not distinguish

itself very badly in our drawing-rooms. So the hero of the much

talked of 'Hansa' affair is really the brother of the young Almbach to

whom Signora Biancona is just now according an interview in the

assembly-room?"

"Whom? Reinhold Almbach?" asked Erlau, astonished. "You heard just now

that he is not here."

"Certainly not, according to the Herr Captain's views," said Welding,

quietly. "According to mine, he positively is. Pray do not mention it!

To-night's concert seems intended to bring us some surprise. I have a

certain suspicion, and we shall see if it be well-founded or not. The

Signora likes theatrical effects, even off the stage; everything must

be unexpected, lightning-like, overwhelming; a prosaic announcement

would spoil everything. The conductor is, of course, in the plot, but

was not so easily persuaded. We shall await it."

He ceased, as Hugo, who until now had been talking to the ladies, came

to them, and immediately after the concert commenced.

The first part and half of the second passed, according to the

programme, with more or less lively interest for the audience. Only

towards the close did Signora Biancona appear, whose performance,

notwithstanding all that had so far been heard, formed the point of

attraction of the evening. The audience received and greeted their

favourite, whose pale features were more charming than ever, with loud

applause. Beatrice was indeed radiantly beautiful as she stood under

the streaming light of the chandelier, in a flowing gauze dress strewn

with flowers, and roses in her dark hair. She acknowledged it with

smiling thanks on all sides, and, when the conductor, who undertook the

accompaniment, had seated himself at the piano, began her recitative.

This time it was one of those grand Italian \_bravura\_ airs, which at

every concert and on every stage are certain of success, and demand the

audience's applause without at the same time fulfilling higher

requirements. A number of brilliant passages and effects made up for

the depth, which was really wanting in the composition, but it offered

the Italian an opportunity for perfect display of her magnificent

voice. All these runs and trills fell clearly as a bell from her lips,

and took such entrancing possession of the hearers' ears and senses,

that all criticism, all more serious longings, vanished in the pure

enjoyment of listening. It was a charming playing with tones--to be

sure, only playing, nothing more--but combined with the finished

certainty and grace of the performance, it acted like electricity upon

the audience, who overwhelmed the singer more lavishly than usual with

applause, and stormily encored the air \_da capo\_.

Signora Biancona seemed also inclined to accede to this wish as she

came forward again, but at the same moment the conductor left the

piano, and a young man, who had hitherto not been observed among the

other performers, took his place. The spectators stared in

astonishment, the Consul and his wife gazed at him in surprise; even

Hugo at the first moment looked almost shocked at his brother, whose

presence he had not suspected, but he began to guess at the connection.

Only Dr. Welding said quietly, and without the least surprise, "I

thought it!" Reinhold looked pale, and his hands trembled on the keys;

but Beatrice stood at his side--a softly-whispered word from her mouth,

a glance out of her eyes, gave him back his lost courage. He began the

first chords steadily and quietly, which at once told the audience it

was not to be a repetition of their favourite piece. All listened

wonderingly and eagerly, and then Beatrice joined in.

That was certainly something very different from the \_bravura\_ air just

heard. The melodies which now flowed forth had nothing in common with

those runs and trills, but they made their way to the hearers' hearts.

In those tones, which now rose as in stormy rejoicing, and again sank

in sad complaint, there seemed to breathe the whole happiness and

sorrow of a human life; a long-fettered yearning seemed at last to

struggle forth. It was a language of affecting power and beauty, and if

it was not quite understood by all, yet all felt that there was a sound

of something powerful, everlasting in it; even the most indifferent

superficial crowd cannot remain void of feeling when genius speaks to

it.

And here genius had found its mate, who knew how to follow and perfect

it. There was no more talk of a risk for both, as the one met the idea

of the other. The most careful study could not have given so perfect a

mutual understanding as was here created in a moment and by

inspiration. Reinhold found himself comprehended in every note, grasped

at every turn, and never had Beatrice sung so enchantingly, never had

the spirit of her singing displayed itself so much. She took her part

with glowing \_abandon\_; the talent of the singer and the dramatic power

of the actress flowed together. It was a performance which would have

ennobled even the most insignificant composition--here it became a

double triumph.

The song was ended. The breathless silence with which it had been

listened to continued a few seconds longer; no hand moved, no sign of

applause was heard; but then a storm broke forth, such as even the

\_fêted prima donna\_ had seldom heard, and at any rate is unknown in a

concert-room. Beatrice seemed only to have waited for this moment; in

the next she had stepped to Reinhold, seized his hand, and drawn him

with her to the foot-lights, introducing him to the audience. This one

movement said enough; it was understood at once that the composer stood

before them. The storm of applause for both raged anew, and the young

musician, still half-bewildered by the unexpected success, holding

Beatrice's hand, received the first greeting and first approbation of

the crowd.

Reinhold only returned clearly to consciousness in the assembly-room,

whither he had accompanied Signora Biancona; a few moments of solitude

still remained to him; beyond, in the concert-room, the orchestra was

playing the finale to a most indifferent audience, which was still

completely impressed by what it had just heard. Beatrice withdrew her

arm which lay in that of her companion.

"We have conquered," she said, softly; "were you satisfied with my

song?"

With a passionate movement, Reinhold seized both her hands, "Ask not

this question, Signora! Let me thank you, not for the triumph, which

was more yours than mine, but that I was also permitted to hear my song

from your lips. I composed it in the recollection of you--for you

alone, Beatrice. You have understood what it says to you, otherwise you

could not have sung it in such a manner."

Signora Biancona may have understood it only too well, but in the

glance with which she looked down at him there lay still more than the

mere triumph of a beautiful woman, who has again proved the

irresistibility of her power. "Do you say that to the woman, or the

actress?" asked she, half-playfully. "The road is now open, Signor,

will you follow it?"

"I will," declared Reinhold, raising himself determinedly, "whatever

opposes me, and whatever form my future may take, it will have been

consecrated for me, since the Goddess of Song herself opened the gate

to me."

The last words had the same tone of passionate adulation which Beatrice

heard from him once before; she bent closer towards him, and her voice

sounded soft, almost beseeching, as she answered--

"Do not then avoid the Goddess any more so obstinately as hitherto. The

composer will surely be allowed to come to the actress from time to

time. If I study your next work, Signor, shall I have to discover its

meaning alone again, or will you stand by me this time?"

Reinhold gave no reply, but the kiss which he pressed burningly

hot upon her hand, did not say no. Nor did he this time bid her

farewell--this time no recollection tore him away from the dangerous

proximity. Whatever arose in the distance that time with gentle

warning, had now no place in a single thought of the young man's

mind. How could, indeed, the faint, colourless picture of his young

wife exist near a Beatrice Biancona, who stood before him in all the

witch-like charms of her being, this "Goddess of Song," whose hand had

just conducted him to his first triumph! He saw and heard her only.

What for years had lain hidden within him--what, since his meeting with

her had struggled and fought its way out, this evening decided the

beginning of an artist's career, and of a family drama.

\* \* \* \* \*

The following days and weeks in the Almbachs' house were not the most

agreeable. It could naturally not remain concealed from the merchant

that his son-in-law had appeared before the public with his

composition, and for this reason, that Dr. Welding, in the morning

paper, gave a detailed account of the concert, in which the name of the

young composer was mentioned. But neither the praise which the usually

severe critic accorded in this instance, nor the approval with which

the song was everywhere received, nor even the intervention of Consul

Erlau, who, taking Reinhold's part very eagerly and decidedly, upheld

his musical gifts, could overcome Almbach's prejudices. He persisted in

seeing in all artistic efforts an idling as useless as it was

dangerous--the real ground of all incapacity for practical business

life, and the root of all evil. Knowing as little as most people that

it had been almost an act of compulsion by which Signora Biancona

had forced Reinhold to appear publicly, he regarded the whole as a

pre-arranged affair, which had been undertaken without his knowledge

and against his will, and which made him almost beside himself. He

allowed himself to be so carried away, that he called his son-in-law to

account like a boy, and forbade him, once for all, any farther musical

pursuits.

That was, of course, the worst thing he could have done. At this

prohibition, Reinhold broke out into uncontrollable defiance. The

passion which, despite all that fettered it outwardly and held it in

bounds, formed the groundwork of his character now broke out into a

truly terrific fury. A fearful scene ensued, and had Hugo not

interposed with quick thought, the breach would have become quite

irremediable. Almbach saw with horror that the nephew whom he had

brought up and led, whom he had tied to himself by every possible bond

of family and business, had outgrown his control completely, and never

thought of bending to his power. The strife had ceased for the time

present, but only to break out afresh at the first opportunity. One

scene succeeded another; one bitterness surpassed another.

Reinhold soon stood in opposition to his whole surroundings, and the

defiance with which he clung more than ever to his musical studies, and

maintained his independence out of the house, only increased the anger

of his father and mother-in-law.

Frau Almbach, who shared her husband's opinion entirely, supported him

with all her strength; Ella, on the contrary, remained, as usual, quite

passive. Any interference or taking a part was neither expected nor

desired; her parents never thought of crediting her with the very least

influence over Reinhold, and he himself ignored her in this affair

altogether, and did not even seem to grant her the right of offering an

opinion. The young wife suffered undeniably under these circumstances;

whether she felt the sad, humiliating part which she, the wife,

played--thus overlooked by both factions--set aside and treated as if

incapable--could hardly be decided. At her parents' bitter and excited

discussions, and her husband's constant state of irritation, which

often found vent at trifling causes, and was generally directed against

her, she always showed the same calm, patient resignation, seldom

uttered a beseeching word, never interfered by any decided

partisanship, and when, as usual, roughly repulsed, drew back more

shyly than ever.

The only one who remained now, as before, on the best terms with all,

and kept his undisputed place as general favourite, was, strange to

say, the young Captain. Like all obstinate people, Almbach resigned

himself more easily to a fact than to a struggle, and forgave more

easily the direct but quiet want of regard for his authority, such as

his eldest nephew had shown him, than the stormy opposition to his will

which was now attempted by the younger one. When Hugo saw that a hated

calling was forced upon him, he had neither defied nor offended his

uncle; he had simply gone away, and let the storm rage itself out

behind his back. Certainly, he did not hesitate later to enact the

return of the prodigal son to ensure his entrance into the house to

which his brother belonged, and his restoration to his relations'

favour. Reinhold possessed neither the capability nor the inclination

to play with circumstances in this way. Just as he had never been able

to disguise his dislike to business life, and his indifference to all

the provincial town interests, so he now made no secret of his contempt

for all around him, his burning hatred for the fetters which confined

him--and it was this which could not be pardoned. Hugo, who espoused

his brother's side positively, was permitted to take his part openly,

and did so on every occasion. His uncle pardoned him this, even looked

upon it as quite natural, as the young Captain's mode of treatment

never let it come to a rupture, while with Reinhold, the subject only

needed to be touched upon in order to cause the most furious scenes

between him and his wife's parents.

It was about noontide, when Hugo entered the Almbachs' house, and met

his servant, whom he had sent before with a message to his brother, at

the foot of the stairs. Jonas was really nominally only a sailor in the

"Ellida;" he had long had his discharge from the ship, and been

appointed solely to the young Captain's personal service, whom he never

left, even during a lengthy stay on shore, and whom he followed

everywhere with constant, unvarying attachment. Both were of about the

same age. Jonas was truly far from ugly; in his Sunday clothes he might

even pass for a good-looking fellow, but his uncouth manner, his rough

ways and his chariness of speech never allowed these advantages to be

perceived. He was almost on an enemy's footing with all the servants,

especially the women of Almbach's household, and none of them had ever

seen a pleasant expression on his face, nor heard a word more than was

absolutely necessary. Even now he looked very sour, and the four or

five dollars he was just counting in his hand seemed to excite his

displeasure, judging from the savage way he looked at them.

"What is it, Jonas?" asked the Captain, approaching, "are you taking

stock of your ready money?"

The sailor looked up, and put himself in an attitude of attention, but

his face did not become more pleasant.

"I am to go to the nursery garden and get a bouquet of flowers," he

grumbled, as he put the money in his pocket.

"Oh! are you employed as messenger for flowers?"

"Yes, here too," said Jonas, emphasising the last word, and with a

reproachful glance at his master, added, "I am used to it, to be sure."

"Certainly," laughed Hugo. "But I am not used to your doing such things

for others than myself. Who has given you the commission?"

"Herr Reinhold," was the laconic reply.

"My brother--so?" said Hugo, slowly, while a shade flitted across his

features, so bright just now.

"And it is a sin the sum I am to pay for it," muttered Jonas. "Herr

Reinhold understands even better than we how to throw away dollars for

things which will be faded to-morrow, and we at any rate are not

married, but he--"

"The bouquet is of course for my sister-in-law?" the Captain

interrupted shortly. "What is there to wonder at? Do you think I shall

give my wife no bouquets when I am married?"

The last remark must have been very unexpected by the sailor, as he

drew himself up with a jerk, and stared at his master in the most

perfect horror, but the next minute he returned reassured to his old

position, saying confidently--

"We shall never marry, Herr Captain."

"I forbid all such prophetic remarks, which condemn me without further

ado to perpetual celibacy," said Hugo quickly, "and why shall '\_we\_'

never marry?"

"Because we think nothing of women," persisted Jonas.

"You have a very curious habit of always speaking in the plural,"

scoffed the Captain. "So I think nothing of women; I thought the

contrary had often roused your ire?"

"But it never comes to marriage," said Jonas triumphantly, in a tone of

unconquerable conviction, "at heart we do not think much of the whole

lot. The story never goes beyond sending flowers and kissing hands,

then we sail away, and they have the pleasure of looking after us. It

is a very lucky thing that it is so. Women on the 'Ellida'--Heaven

protect us from it!"

This characteristic account, given with unmistakable seriousness,

although again in the unavoidable plural, appeared to be full of truth,

as the Captain raised no objection to it. He only shrugged his

shoulders laughingly, turned his back upon the sailor, and went

upstairs. He found Reinhold in his own rooms, which lay in the upper

story, and a single glance at his brother's face, who was walking

angrily up and down, showed him that something must have happened again

to-day.

"You are going out?" asked he, after greeting him, while looking at the

hat and gloves lying on the table.

"Later on!" answered Reinhold, recovering himself. "In about an hour.

You will stay some time?"

Hugo overlooked the last question. He stood opposite his brother, and

gazed searchingly at him.

"Has there been a scene again?" he asked half-aloud.

The moody defiance, which had disappeared for a few moments from the

young man's face, returned.

"To be sure. They have attempted once more to treat me like a

schoolboy, who, when he has accomplished his daily appointed task, is

to be watched, and made to render an account of every step he takes,

even in his hours of recreation. I have made it clear to them that I am

tired of their everlasting guardianship."

The Captain did not ask what step the quarrel was about; the short

conversation with Jonas seemed to have explained all that sufficiently;

he only said, shaking his head--"It is unfortunate that you are so

completely dependent upon our uncle. If later on it end in a regular

rupture between you, and you leave the business, it would become a

question of existence for you--your income goes entirely with it. You,

yourself, might trust wholly to your compositions, but to think they

could support a family yet would be making your future very uncertain

from the beginning. I had only myself to act for; you will be compelled

to wait until a greater work places you in the position of being able

to turn your back, with your wife and child, upon all the envy of a

small provincial town."

"Impossible!" cried Reinhold almost madly. "By that time I shall have

foundered ten times over, and what talent I possess with me. Endure,

wait, perhaps for years? I cannot do it, it is the same thing to me as

suicide. My new work is completed. If only in some degree it attain the

success of the first, it would enable me to live at least a few months

in Italy."

Hugo was staggered.

CHAPTER V.

"You are going to Italy? Why there particularly?" asked the Captain.

"Where then?" interposed Reinhold impatiently. "Italy is the school of

all art and artists. There alone could I complete the meagre, defective

study to which circumstances confined me. Can you not understand that?"

"No," said the Captain, somewhat coldly. "I do not see the necessity

that a beginner should go at once to the higher school. You can find

opportunity enough for study here; most of our talented men have had to

struggle and work for years before Italy at last crowned their work.

Supposing, however, you carry out your plan, what is to become of your

wife and child in the meanwhile? Do you intend to take them with you?"

"Ella?" cried the young man, in an almost contemptuous voice. "That

would be the most certain method of rendering my success impossible. Do

you think, that in the first step I take towards freedom, I could drag

the whole chain of domestic misery with me?"

A slight frown was perceptible between Hugo's eyes--

"That sounds very hard, Reinhold," he answered.

"Is it my fault, that I am at last conscious of the truth?" growled

Reinhold. "My wife cannot raise herself above the sphere of cooking and

household management. It is not her fault, I know, but it is not

therefore any less the misfortune of my life."

"Ella's incapacity, certainly seems settled as a sort of dogma in the

family," remarked the Captain quietly. "You believe in it blindly, like

the rest. Have you ever given yourself the trouble to find out if this

accepted fact be really infallible?"

Reinhold shrugged his shoulders--

"I think it would be unnecessary in this case. But in none can there be

a question of my taking Ella with me. Naturally she will remain with

the child in her parents' house until I return."

"Until you return--and if that do not happen?"

"What do you say? What do you mean?" said the young man angrily, while

a deep colour spread over his face.

Hugo crossed his arms and looked fiercely at him--

"It strikes me you are now suddenly coming forward with ready-made

plans, which have certainly long been arranged, and probably well

talked over. Do not deny it Reinhold! You, by yourself, would never

have gone to such extremities as you do now in the disputes with my

uncle, listening to no advice or representations; there is some foreign

influence at work. Is it really absolutely necessary that you should go

day after day to Biancona?"

Reinhold vouchsafed no reply; he turned away, and so withdrew himself

from his brother's observation.

"It is talked of already in the town," continued the latter. "It cannot

continue long without the report reaching here. Is it a matter of

perfect indifference to you?"

"Signora Biancona is studying my new composition," said Reinhold

shortly, "and I only see in her the ideal of an actress. You admired

her also?"

"Admired, yes! At least in the beginning. She never attracted me. The

beautiful Signora has something too vampire-like in her eyes. I fear

that whoever it be, upon whom she fixes those eyes with the intention

of holding him fast, will require a powerful dose of strength of will

in order to remain master of himself."

At the last words he had gone to his brother's side, who now turned

round slowly and looked at him.

"Have you experienced that already?" he asked, gloomily.

"I? No!" replied Hugo, with a touch of his old mocking humour.

"Fortunately I am very unimpressionable as regards such-like

romantic dangers, besides being sufficiently used to them. Call it

frivolity--inconstancy--what you will--but a woman cannot fascinate me

long or deeply; the passionate element is wanting in me. You have it

only too strongly, and when you encounter anything of the sort, the

danger lies close by. Take care of yourself, Reinhold!"

"Do you wish to remind me of the fetters I bear?" asked Reinhold,

bitterly. "As if I did not feel them daily, hourly, and with them the

powerlessness to destroy them. If I were free as you, when you tore

yourself away from this bondage, all might be well; but you are right,

they chained me by times, and a bridal altar is the most secure bar

which can be placed before all longing for freedom--I experience it

now."

They were interrupted; the servant from the house brought a message

from the bookkeeper to young Herr Almbach. The latter bade the man go,

and turned to his brother.

"I must go to the office for a moment. You see I am not in much danger

of coming to grief by excessive romance; our ledgers, in which,

probably, a couple of dollars are not properly entered, guard against

that. Adieu until we meet again, Hugo!"

He went, and the Captain remained alone. He stayed a few moments as if

lost in thought, while the frown on his brow became still darker; then

suddenly he raised himself as with some resolve, and left the room, but

not to go to the lower floor to his uncle or aunt; he went straight to

the opposite apartments inhabited by his sister-in-law.

Ella was there; she sat by the window, her head was bent over some

needlework, but it seemed as if this had been seized hurriedly when the

door opened unexpectedly; the handkerchief thrown down hastily, and the

inflamed eyelids betrayed freshly dried tears. She looked up at her

brother-in-law's entrance with undisguised astonishment. It was

certainly the first time he had sought her rooms; he came half-way

only, and then stood still without approaching her seat.

"May the adventurer dare to come near you, Ella? or did that condemning

verdict banish him entirely from your threshold?"

The young wife blushed; she turned her work about in her hands in most

painful confusion.

"Herr--"

"Captain!" interrupted Hugo. "Quite right--thus do my sailors address

me. Once more this name from your lips, and I shall never trouble you

again with my presence. Pray Ella, listen to me to-day!" he continued

determinedly, as the young wife made signs of rising. "This time I

shall keep the door barred by which you always try to elude my

approach; fortunately, too, there is no maid near whom you can keep by

your side for some task. We are alone, and I give you my word I shall

not leave this spot until I am either forgiven, or--hear the

unavoidable 'Herr Captain' which will drive me away once for all."

Ella raised her eyes, and now it was plainly evident that she had wept.

"What do you care for my forgiveness?" she replied quickly. "You have

wounded me least of all; I only spoke in the name of my parents and all

the household."

"For them I do not care," said Hugo with the most unabashed candour,

"but that I have hurt you I do regret, very much regret; it has lain

like a nightmare upon me until now. I can surely do no more than beg

honestly and heartily for forgiveness. Are you still angry with me,

Ella?"

He put out his hand towards her. In the movement and words there lay

such a warm, open kindliness and frankness, that it seemed almost

impossible to refuse the petition, and Ella actually, although somewhat

reluctantly, laid her hand in his.

"No," said she, simply.

"Thank God!" cried Hugo, drawing a long breath. "So at last my rights

as brother-in-law are conceded. I thus take solemn possession of them."

The words were followed by the deed, as he drew forward a chair and sat

down beside her. "Do you know, Ella, that since our late encounter you

have interested me very much?" continued he.

"It seems one must be rude to you in order to arouse your interest,"

remarked Ella, almost reproachfully.

"Yes, it appears so," agreed the Captain, with perfect composure. "We

'adventurers' are a peculiar people, and require different treatment to

ordinary mankind. You have taken the right course with me. Since you

read me my lecture so unsparingly, I have left all the house in peace;

I have behaved towards my uncle and aunt with the most perfect respect

and deference, and even robbed my Indian stories of all their appalling

effects, simply from fear of certain rebuking eyes. This can surely not

have escaped your notice?"

Something like a half-smile crossed Ella's countenance as she asked--

"It has been very hard for you, then?"

"Very hard! Although the state of affairs in the house should have made

it somewhat easier for me, they have not been of a description lately,

on which one could exercise one's love of joking."

The passing gleam of merriment vanished immediately from Ella's face at

this allusion; it bore an anxious, beseeching expression, as she turned

to her brother-in-law.

"Yes, it is very sad with us," she said, softly, "and it becomes worse

from day to day. My parents are so hard, and Reinhold so irritated, so

furious at every occurrence. Oh, my God, can you do nothing with him?"

"I?" asked Hugo, seriously, "I might put that question to you, his

wife."

Ella shook her head in inconsolable resignation. "No one listens to me,

and Reinhold less than any one. He thinks I understand nothing about it

all--he would repulse me roughly."

Hugo looked sorrowfully at the young wife, who confessed openly that

she was quite wanting in power and influence over her husband, and that

she was not permitted to share his longings and strivings in the least.

"And yet something must be done," said he decidedly. "Reinhold

irritates himself in this struggle; he suffers tremendously under it,

and makes others suffer too. You had been crying, Ella, as I entered,

and in the last few weeks not a day has passed without my seeing this

red appearance about your eyes. No, do not turn aside so timidly!

Surely the brother may be allowed to speak freely, and you shall see

that I do more than talk nonsense. I repeat it; something must be

done--done by you. Reinhold's artistic career depends upon it, his

whole future; and in the struggle his wife must stand at his side,

otherwise others might do it instead, and that would be dangerous."

Ella looked at him with a mixture of astonishment and alarm. For the

first time in her life she was called upon to take a side openly, and

some result was looked for depending upon her interference. What could

be meant by "others" who might take her place? Her face showed plainly

that she had not the slightest suspicion of anything.

Hugo saw this, and yet had not the courage to go any farther; as going

farther meant planting the first suspicion in the mind of the so-far

quite unconscious wife--being his brother's betrayer--and unavoidably

calling forth a catastrophe, of whose necessity he was nevertheless

convinced. But the young Captain's whole nature rebelled against the

painful task; he sat there undecided, when chance came to his help.

Some one knocked at the door, and immediately Jonas entered, carrying a

large bouquet of flowers.

The sailor was surely more prudent when he executed such commissions

for his master. He knew from experience, that the latter's offerings of

flowers, although received with pleasure by the young ladies, were not

always treated the same by their fathers and protectors, and although

with possible secret annoyance, he always took care to go to the right

address. But this time Hugo's casual remark that the flowers were

intended for his sister-in-law, caused the mistake. Jonas never doubted

that the Captain's remark, meant merely to shield his brother, was made

in earnest; he therefore went straight to the young Frau Almbach, and

presented the flowers to her, with the words--

"I cannot find Herr Reinhold anywhere in the house, so had better

deliver the flowers here at once."

Ella looked down in surprise at the beautiful bouquet which, arranged

with as much skill as taste, showed a selection of the most perfect

flowers.

"From whom are the flowers?" asked she.

"From the garden," answered Jonas. "Herr Reinhold ordered them, and I

have brought them; but as I cannot find him--"

"That will do. You can go," broke in Hugo, as he stepped quickly to his

sister-in-law's side, and put his hand on her arm as if to stop her. A

sign gave more stress to his order, and Jonas rolled away, but could

not help wondering that the young Frau Almbach received her husband's

attention in so peculiar a manner. She had started suddenly, as if she

had been seized with a pain at her heart, and become ashen white. But

the Captain stood there with knitted brows, and an expression on his

face as if he should have liked best to throw the expensive flowers out

of the window. Fortunately, Jonas was too phlegmatic to trouble himself

much about the state of affairs in the Almbachs' house; owing to the

warlike footing on which he stood to the servants he learned but little

about it; so, after wondering slightly, he gave it up, and being

satisfied he had executed his orders conscientiously, troubled himself

no more about the giver of them.

Deep silence reigned a few seconds in the room. Ella still held the

bouquet convulsively in her hand, but her usually quiet, listless

countenance, with its vacant, almost stupid expression, had changed

curiously. Now every feature was dilated as if in agonising pain, and

her eyes remained fixed and immovable upon the gay, blooming beauty,

even when she turned to her brother-in-law.

"Reinhold gave the order?" she asked, as if striving for breath, "then

the flowers only came by mistake to me!"

"Why then," said Hugo, with a vain attempt to soothe her, "Reinhold

ordered the flowers; well, surely they are for you?"

"For me?" Her voice sounded full of pain. "I have never yet received

flowers from him; these are certainly not intended for me."

Hugo saw he could not hesitate any more; chance had decided for him;

now he must obey fate's signal. "You are right, Ella," he replied

firmly, "and it would be useless and dangerous to deceive you any

longer. Reinhold did not say for whom the flowers were, but I know that

this evening they will be in Signora Biancona's hands."

Ella shivered, and the bouquet fell to the ground. "Signora Biancona,"

repeated she, in a dull tone.

"The actress who sang his first song in public," continued the Captain,

impressively, "for whom, also, his new composition is intended; to whom

he goes daily; who enters into all his thoughts and feelings. You know

nothing of it as yet, I see in your face, but you must learn it now,

before it is too late."

The young wife made no reply; her face was as colourless as the white

blossoms which formed the outer circle of the bouquet; silently she

stooped, picked it up, and laid it on the table, but no sound, no

response came from her lips. Hugo waited for one in vain.

"Do you believe the cruelty of disclosing that which one always hides

from every wife has given me any pleasure?" asked he, with suppressed

emotion. "Do you think I could not, by some pretence, have covered the

man's stupidity, and given myself out as the sender of the unlucky

flowers? If I do not act thus, if I discover the whole truth

unsparingly, I do it because the danger has become extreme--because

only you can still save him; and this you must see clearly. Signora

Biancona is about to return to her home, and Reinhold explained to me

just now that he must and will continue his studies in Italy. Do you

comprehend the connection?"

Ella started. Now, for the first time, a desperate fear broke through

the stolid calm of her nature.

"No, no!" she cried, as if beside herself, "He cannot! he \_dare\_ not.

We are married!"

"He dare not?" repeated Hugo. "You know men but little, and your own

husband least of all. Do not trust too much to the right which the

Church gave you; even this power has its limits, and I fear Reinhold

already stands beyond them. To be sure, you have no conception of that

burning fiendish passion, which enchains and makes a man powerless--so

surrounds him with its bonds, that for its sake he forgets and

sacrifices everything. Signora Biancona is one of those demonlike

natures which can inspire such passions, and here she is connected with

everything which makes up Reinhold's life--with music, art and

imagination. Nor Church nor marriage can protect, if the wife cannot

protect herself. You are wife, and mother of his child. Perhaps he will

listen to your voice, when he will to nothing else."

The young wife's heavily-drawn breath showed how much she suffered, and

two tears, the first, rolled slowly down her cheeks as she replied,

almost inaudibly, "I will try it."

Hugo came close to her side. "I know I have thrown a lighted brand into

the family to-day, which will, perhaps, destroy the last remains of

peace," he said, earnestly. "Hundreds of wives would now rush

despairingly to their parents, so as, with them or alone, to call their

husbands to account, and cause a scene which would break the last bond,

and drive him irretrievably from the house. You will not do this, Ella;

I know it, therefore I dared do with you what I should not have

ventured on so easily with any other woman. What you may say to

Reinhold--what you may insist upon, rests with yourself; but do not let

him leave you now; do not let him go to Italy!"

He ceased, and seemed to expect an answer--in vain; Ella sat there, her

face buried in her hands. She hardly moved as he said good-bye to her.

The young Captain saw that she must overcome the blow alone, so he

went.

When, half-an-hour later, Reinhold returned from the office, he saw the

bouquet of roses lying on the writing-table in his own room, and took

it up under the firm impression that Jonas had put it there. In the

meanwhile Ella sat in her child's room and waited, not for a farewell

from her husband, she had not been used to such tendernesses ever since

her marriage; but she knew he never left the house without first going

to see his boy. The wife felt only too well that she herself was

nothing to her husband, that her only value for him lay in the child;

she felt that the love for his child was the only point by which she

could approach his heart, and therefore she waited here for him in

order to hold the terribly difficult and painful interview. He must

surely come; but to-day she had to wait in vain. Reinhold did not

come. For the first time he forgot the farewell kiss on his child's

brow--forgot the last and only bond which chained him to his home. In

his heart there was only room now for one thought, and that was

Beatrice Biancona.

The opera was over. A stream of people flowed out of the theatre,

dispersing in all directions, and carriages rolled by on every side to

take up their respective owners. The house had been filled to

overflowing, as the Italian Opera Company had given their farewell

performance, and all H---- had tried to show the singers, especially

the \_prima donna\_, how much charmed it was with their efforts, and how

sorry it was to lose them now the hour of parting had arrived. The

stairs and corridors were still crowded; below in the vestibule people

were closely packed, and at the places of egress the numbers increased

to an uncomfortable, almost dangerous degree.

"It is almost impossible to get through," said Doctor Welding, who,

with another gentleman, descended the stairs. "One's life is imperilled

in the crush below. Rather let us wait until the rush is over!"

His companion agreed, and both stepped aside into one of the deep, dark

niches in the corridor, where a lady had already taken shelter. Her

dress, although simple, betokened that she belonged to the upper

classes; she had drawn her veil closely over her face, and appeared to

avoid the crowd, also to feel quite strange in the theatre, from the

manner in which she pressed herself with evident nervousness firmly

against the wall, when the two gentlemen approached, and, without

paying any attention to her, resumed their interrupted conversation.

"I prophesied it from the commencement that this Almbach would make a

great sensation," said Welding; "his second composition surpasses his

first in every respect; and the first was great enough for a beginner.

I should think he might be satisfied with its reception this time; it

was, if possible, more enthusiastic. Certainly, every one has not the

luck to find a Biancona for his works, and to inspire her for them, so

that she exerts her utmost power. It was altogether her idea to sing

this newest song of Almbach's as introduction to the last act of the

opera, to-day, too, at her farewell; when applause was a matter of

course, she made sure, by those means, of success at once."

"Well, I don't think he is wanting in gratitude," scoffed the other

gentleman. "People say all sorts of things. So much is certain, all her

circle of adorers is furious at this interloper, who hardly appears

before he is on the high road to be sole ruler. The affair, besides,

seems rather serious and highly romantic, and I am really anxious to

see what will be the end of it, when Biancona departs."

The Doctor buttoned his overcoat quietly--

"That is not difficult to guess; an elopement of the first order."

"You think he will elope with her?" asked the other incredulously.

"He with her? That would be objectless. Biancona is perfectly free to

decide what she likes, as to the choice of her residence. But she with

him; that would be more like the case--the fetters are on his side."

"To be sure, he is married," rejoined his companion. "Poor woman! Do

you know her personally?"

"No," said Welding, indifferently; "but from Herr Consul Erlau's

description, I can form a truly correct picture of her. Contracted

ideas, passive, unimportant in the highest degree, quite given up to

the kitchen and household affairs--just the woman in fact to drive a

genial, fiery-headed fellow like Almbach to a desperate step; and as it

is a Biancona who is set up against her, this step will not have to be

waited for very long. Perhaps it would be fortunate for Almbach if he

were torn suddenly out of these confined surroundings, and thrown on to

the path of life, but certainly the little family peace there is would

be entirely ruined. The usual fate of such early marriages, in which

the wife cannot in the smallest degree raise herself to her husband's

importance."

At these last words he turned round somewhat astonished; involuntarily

the lady behind them had made a passionate movement, but at the same

moment as the Doctor was about to observe her more narrowly, a side

door was opened, and Reinhold Almbach appeared, accompanied by Hugo,

the conductor, and several other gentlemen.

Reinhold here was quite a different being from what he was at home. The

gloom which always rested on his features there, the reserve which made

him so often unapproachable, seemed thrown off with one accord; he

beamed with excitement, success, and triumph. His brow was raised

freely and proudly, his dark eyes flashed with conscious victory, and

his whole manner breathed forth passionate satisfaction, as he turned

to his companions.

"I thank you, gentlemen. You are very kind, but you will excuse me if I

retire from these flattering acknowledgments. The Signora wishes for my

company at the entertainment, where the members of the opera assemble

once more as a farewell meeting. You will understand, I must obey this

command before all others."

The gentlemen seemed to understand it perfectly, and also to regret

they had not to obey a similar command, when Doctor Welding joined the

group.

"I congratulate you," he said, giving his hand to the young composer.

"That was a great, and what is more, a merited success."

Reinhold smiled. Praise from the lips of a critic usually so exacting

was not indifferent to him.

"You see, Herr Doctor, I have to appear at last before your judgment

seat," replied he pleasantly. "Herr Consul Erlau was unfortunately

wrong when he considered me quite safe from any such danger."

"None should be considered happy before the end," remarked the Doctor

laconically. "Why do you rush so headlong into danger, and turn your

back upon the noble merchant's position? Is it true we are to lose you

with Signora Biancona? Shall you take flight to the south at the same

time?"

"To Italy, yes!" said Reinhold positively. "It has been my plan for

long. This evening has decided it, but now--excuse me gentlemen, I

cannot possibly allow the Signora to wait."

He bowed and left them, accompanied by his brother. The usually not

quite silent Captain had observed a remarkable reticence during the

conversation. He started slightly, when at Welding's approach the niche

was disclosed in which the woman's dark figure was pressed back in the

shadow of the wall, as if not wishing to be seen on any account, and no

one else did see her, at least no one took any notice of her; she could

not leave her place of refuge without passing the group, which kept its

place after the departure of the brothers. The gentlemen all knew one

another, and took advantage of this meeting to exchange their opinions

about the young composer, Signora Biancona, and the suspected state of

affairs between the two. The latter especially was subjected to a

tolerably merciless criticism. The scoffing, witty, and malicious

remarks fell thick as hail, and some time elapsed before the group

separated at last. Now that the corridor was quite empty, the lady in

the recess raised herself and prepared to depart, but she tottered at

the first few steps, and seized the banisters of the staircase as if

about to fall, when a powerful arm supported, and held her up.

CHAPTER VI.

"Come into the fresh air, Ella!" said Hugo, standing suddenly beside

her. "That was torture of the rack."

He drew her hand within his arm, and led her down by the nearest way

into the street. Only here, in the cool, sharp night air did Ella

appear to regain consciousness; she threw back her veil and drew a long

breath, as if she had been nearly suffocated.

"If I had dreamed that my warning would have brought you here, I should

have withheld it." continued Hugo, reproachfully. "Ella, for heaven's

sake, what an unfortunate idea!"

The young wife drew her hand away from his arm. The reproach seemed to

pain her.

"I wanted to see her for once," replied she softly.

"Without being seen yourself?" added the Captain. "I knew that the

moment I recognised you, therefore I said nothing to Reinhold, but I

felt as if standing on hot coals here below, while the criticising

group above was holding forth before your place of refuge, and giving

free course to their amiable remarks and opinions. I can fancy pretty

well what you had to listen to."

During the last words he had hailed a cabman, told the street and

number of house, and helped his sister-in-law into the carriage; but as

he showed signs of taking a seat beside her, she declined his doing so,

quietly but firmly.

"Thanks, I shall go alone."

"On no account!" cried Hugo, almost excitedly. "You are much agitated,

almost fainting; it would be unpardonable to leave you alone in this

state."

"You are not responsible for what becomes of me," said Ella, with

uncontrolled bitterness, "and to others--it does not matter. Let me

drive home alone, Hugo, I beseech you."

Her eyes looked at him entreatingly through their veil of tears. The

Captain did not say another word; he shut the door obediently, and

stepped back; but he watched the carriage as it rolled away until it

was out of sight.

It was long past midnight when Reinhold returned, and, without entering

his house, he went at once to his garden room. The house and

outbuildings lay still and dark; nothing was moving around, all who

lived and worked here were accustomed to be occupied in the daytime,

and required the night for undisturbed repose. It was fortunate that

the garden-house lay so distant and isolated, otherwise his companions

and neighbours would have been much less patient with the young

composer, who could not refrain, however late he might return home,

from always seeking his piano, and often morning's dawn surprised him

at his musical phantasies.

It was a quiet, moonlight, but sharp raw northern spring night. In the

dawning light, the walls and gables which enclosed the garden looked

even more gloomy and prison-like than by day; the canal appeared darker

in the pale moon's rays, which trembled over it, and the bare leafless

trees and shrubs seemed to tremble and shudder in the cold night wind,

which passed mercilessly over them. It was already April, and yet the

first buds were hardly to be seen. "This miserable spring, with its

tardy growth and bloom, its dreary rainy days and cold winds!" Reinhold

had heard these words spoken a few hours since, and then such a glowing

description followed of endless spring, which blossoms forth as by

magic in the gardens of the south, those sunny days, with ever blue

sky, and the thousandfold glorious colours of the earth; the moonlight

nights full of orange perfume and notes of song. The young man must

indeed have head and heart still full of this picture; he looked more

contemptuously than usual on the poor bare surroundings, and

impatiently pushed aside a branch of elderberry whose newly opening

brown buds touched his forehead. He had no more feeling for the gifts

of this miserable spring, and no more pleasure in growing and living as

miserably as these blossoms, ever fighting with frost and wind. Out

into freedom, that was the only thought which now filled his mind.

Reinhold opened the door of the garden room and started back with

sudden alarm. A few seconds elapsed before he recognised his wife in

the figure leaning against the piano standing out clearly in the

moonlight as it fell through the window.

"Is it you, Ella?" he cried at last, entering quickly. "What is it?

What has happened?"

She made a movement of denial. "Nothing, I was only waiting for you."

"Here? and at this hour?" asked Reinhold, extremely distantly. "What

has entered your head?"

"I hardly ever see you now," was the soft response, "at least only at

table in my parents' presence, and I wished to speak to you alone."

She had lighted the lamp at these words, and placed it upon the table.

She still wore the dark silk dress which she had on at the theatre this

evening; it was certainly plain and unornamented, but not so coarse and

unbecoming as her usual house dress. Also her never failing cap had

disappeared, and now, that it was missing, could be seen for the first

time what a singular wealth was hidden beneath it. The fair hair, of

which at other times only a narrow strip was visible, could hardly be

confined in the heavy plaits which showed themselves in all their

splendid abundance; but this natural ornament, which any other woman

would have displayed, was in her case hidden carefully day after day,

until chance disclosed it, and yet it appeared to give her head quite a

different mould.

As usual, Reinhold had no eyes for it; he hardly looked at his young

wife, and only listened slightly and abstractedly to her words. There

was not even the slightest trace of reproach in them, but he must have

felt something of the sort lay there as he said impatiently--

"You know I am occupied on all possible sides. My new composition which

was completed a few weeks since, was brought out publicly to-night for

the first time--"

"I know it," interrupted Ella. "I was in the theatre."

Reinhold seemed taken aback. "You were in the theatre?" asked he

quickly and sharply. "With whom? At whose instigation?"

"I was there alone--I wished--" she stopped, and continued

hesitatingly; "I too wished to hear your music for once, of which all

the world speaks and I alone do not know."

Her husband was silent and looked enquiringly at her. The young wife

did not understand the art of deceiving, and an untruth would not pass

her lips. She stood before him, deadly pale, trembling in all her

limbs; no especially keen sight was required to guess the truth, and

Reinhold did so at once.

"And only for this reason you went?" said he slowly at last. "Will you

deceive me with this excuse, or yourself, perhaps? I see the report has

found its way to you already! You wished to see with your own eyes,

naturally. How could I think it would be spared me and you?"

Ella looked up. There was again the darkly lowering brow she was always

accustomed to in her husband, the look of gloomy melancholy, the

expression of defiant, suppressed suffering, no longer a breath of

that beaming triumph which had lighted up his features a few hours

before--that was when away, far from his own people; only the shadow

remained for home.

"Why do you not answer?" he began afresh. "Do you think I should be

coward enough to deny the truth? If I have been silent towards you so

far, it was done to spare you; now that you know it, I will render

account. You have been told of the young actress, to whom I owe the

first incitement to work, my first success, and to-day's triumph. God

knows how the connection between us has been represented to you, and

naturally you look upon it as a crime worthy of death."

"No, but as a misfortune."

The tone of these words would surely have disarmed any one; even

Reinhold's irritation could not resist it. He came nearer to her and

took her hand.

"Poor child!" said he, pitifully. "It certainly was no happiness what

your father's will decided for you. You, more than any other, required

a husband who would work and strive from day to day in the quiet

routine of daily life without even having a wish to step beyond it, and

fate has chained you to a man whom it draws powerfully to another

course. You are right; that is a misfortune for us both."

"That is to say, I am one for you," added the young wife, sadly. "She

will, perhaps, know better how to bring you happiness."

Reinhold let her hand fall and stepped back. "You are mistaken," he

replied, almost rudely, "and quite misconstrue the connection between

Signora Biancona and myself. It has been purely ideal from the

beginning, and is so still at this moment. Whoever told you differently

is a liar."

At the first words, Ella seemed to breathe more easily, but at the

following her heart contracted as if with cramp. She knew her husband

was incapable of speaking a falsehood, least of all at such a moment,

and he told her the connection was spiritual. That it was so still she

did not doubt, but how long would it be so? This evening, in the

theatre, she had seen the flash of those demon-like eyes, which nothing

could resist; had seen how that woman, in her part, had run through the

whole scale of feelings to the greatest passion; how this passion

carried away the audience to a perfect storm of approbation; and she

could easily tell herself that if it had pleased the Italian so far

only to be the gracious goddess whose hand had led the young composer

into the realms of art, the hour was sure to come in which she would

wish to be more to him.

"I love Beatrice," continued Reinhold, with a cruelty of which he

seemed to have no real conception; "but this love does not injure nor

wound any of your rights. It only concerns music, as whose embodied

genius she met me, concerns the best and highest in my life, the

ideal--"

"And what is left for your wife, then?" interrupted Ella.

He remained silent, struck dumb. This question, simple as it was,

sounded nevertheless peculiar from the lips of his wife, deemed so

stupid. It was a matter of course, that she should be satisfied with

what still remained--the name she bore and the child, whose mother she

was. Strange to say, she did not appear inclined to understand this,

and Reinhold became quite silent at the quiet but yet annihilating

reproach of the question.

The wife rested her hand on the piano. She was visibly fighting with

the fear she had always cherished for her husband, whose mental

superiority she felt deeply, without, at the same time, ever venturing

on an attempt to raise herself to him. In the knowledge that he stood

so high above her, she had ever placed herself completely under him,

without ever attaining anything by it excepting toleration, which

almost amounted to contempt.

Now that he loved another, the toleration ceased; the contempt

remained--she felt that plainly in his confession, which he made so

quietly, so positively; his love for the beautiful singer "neither

injured nor wounded any of her rights." She had indeed no right to his

spiritual life. And she should keep firm hold of that man now, when the

love of a beautiful, universally admired actress, when the magical

charm of Italy, when a future full of renown and glory beckoned to him,

she, who had nothing to give excepting herself--Ella was conscious for

the first time of the impossibility of the task which had been

appointed to her.

"I know you have never belonged to us, never loved any of us," she

said, with quiet resignation. "I have always felt it; it has only

become clear to me since I was your wife, and then it was too late. But

I am it now, and if you forsake me and the child, you will give us up

for the sake of another."

"Who says so?" cried Reinhold, with anger, which exonerated him from

the suspicion that such a thought had really entered his mind.

"Forsake? Give up you and the child? Never!"

The young wife fixed her eyes enquiringly upon him, as if she did not

understand him.

"But you said just now you loved Beatrice Biancona?"

"Yes, but--"

"But! Then you must choose between her and us."

"You suddenly develope most unusual determination," cried Reinhold,

roused. "I must? And if I will not do it? If I consider this ideal

artist love quite compatible with my duties, if--"

"If you follow her to Italy," completed Ella.

"Then you know that already?" cried the young man, passionately. "You

seem to be so perfectly informed, that it only remains for me to

confirm the news others have been so kind as to tell you. It is

certainly my intention to continue my studies in Italy, and if I should

meet Signora Biancona there--if her vicinity give me fresh inspiration

to compose--her hand open me the door to the world of art, I shall not

be fool enough to reject all this, just because it is my fate to

possess a--wife!"

Ella shuddered at the unsparing hardness of the last words.

"Are you so ashamed of your wife?" she asked, softly.

"Ella, I beg you--"

"Are you so ashamed of me?" repeated the poor wife, apparently calmly;

but there was a strange, nervous, trembling inflection in her voice.

Reinhold turned away.

"Do not be childish, Ella," he replied, impatiently. "Do you think it

is good or elevating for a man, when he returns home after his first

success, there to find complaints, reproaches, in short, all the

wretched prose of domestic life? So far you have spared me it, and

should do the same in future. Otherwise you might discover that I am

not the patient sort of husband who would allow such scenes to take

place without resistance."

Only a single glance at the young wife was required to recognise the

boundless injustice of this reproach. She stood there, not like the

accuser, but like the condemned; indeed she felt that in this hour the

verdict was spoken upon her marriage and her life.

"I know well that I have never been anything to you," said she, with

trembling voice, "never could be anything to you, and if I only were

concerned, I would let you go without a word, without a petition. But

the child is still between us, and therefore"--she stopped a moment,

and breathed heavily----"therefore you can comprehend that the mother

should pray once more for you to remain with us."

The petition came out shyly, hesitatingly; in it could be heard the

effort it cost her to make it to the husband, in whose heart no chord

throbbed for her, and yet in the last words there rang such a touching,

frightened entreaty, that his ear could not remain quite deaf. He

turned to her again.

"I cannot stay, Ella," he replied, more mildly than before, but still

with cool decision. "My future depends on it. You cannot conceive what

lies in that word for me. You cannot accompany me with the child.

Besides this being quite impossible in a tour undertaken for study, you

would soon be very miserable in a foreign country whose language you do

not understand, in circumstances and surroundings for which you are

quite unsuited. You must, indeed, now accustom yourself to measure me

and my life with another measure than that of narrow-minded prejudice

and middle-class contracted ideas. You can stay here with the little

one, under your parents' protection; at latest I shall return in a

year. You must resign yourself to this separation."

He spoke calmly, even pleasantly; but every word was an icy rejection,

an impatient shaking off of the irksome bond. Hugo was right; he lay

already too firmly under the influence of his passion to listen to any

other voice--it was too late. A cold, pitiless, "You must resign

yourself," was the only answer to that touching prayer.

Ella drew herself up with a determination at other times quite foreign

to her, and there was also a strange sound in her voice; there lay in

it something of the pride of a wife, who, trampled upon and kept down

for years, at last revolts when extremities are resorted to.

"To the separation, yes," replied she, firmly. "I am powerless against

it. But not to your return, Reinhold. If you go now, go with her,

notwithstanding my prayers, notwithstanding our child, so do it. But

then, go for ever!"

"Will you make conditions?" roared Reinhold, passionately. "Have I not

borne the yoke which your father's so-called kindness forced upon me

for years, which embittered my childhood, destroyed my youth, and now,

at the threshold of man's estate, compels me to conquer, only by means

of endless struggles, what every one requires as his natural right,

free decision for himself? You all have kept me apart from everything

that by others is called freedom and happiness; have bound me to a

hated sphere in life with all possible fetters, and now think

yourselves sure of your property. But at last the hour has come for me

when it begins to dawn, and if it penetrates like lightning to my soul,

and shows in flaming clearness the goal, and the reward at the goal,

then one awakes out of the dream of long years, and finds oneself--in

chains."

It was an outbreak of the wildest passion, most burning hatred, which

welled forth without restraint, without asking if it were poured over

the guilty or the innocent. That is the horrible fiendishness of

passion, that it turns its hatred against everything which it

encounters, even if this hatred meet the nearest, most sacred--if it

even meet bonds voluntarily made.

A long pause, still as death, followed. Reinhold, overpowered by

excitement, had thrown himself on a seat and covered his eyes with his

hands. Ella still stood on the same spot as before; she did not speak

or move; even the tremor which, during the conversation, had so often

passed through her, had ceased. Thus passed a few moments, until at

last she approached her husband slowly.

"You will leave me the child, though?" said she, with quivering lips.

"To you it would only be a burden in your new life, and I have nothing

else in the world."

Reinhold looked up, and then sprang suddenly from his seat. It was not

the words which moved him so strangely, not the deadly, fixed calm of

her face; it was the look which was so unexpectedly and astoundingly

unveiled before him as before his brother. For the first time he saw in

his wife's face "the beautiful fairy-tale blue eyes" which he had so

often admired in his boy, without ever asking whence they came; and

these eyes, large and full, were now directed towards him. No tear

stood in them, neither any more beseeching; but an expression for which

he never gave Ella credit, an expression before which his eyes sank to

the ground.

"Ella," said he, uncertainly, "if I was too furious--What is it, Ella?"

He tried to take her hand; she drew it back.

"Nothing. When do you intend leaving?"

"I do not know," answered Reinhold, more and more struck. "In a few

days--or weeks--there is no hurry."

"I will inform my parents. Good-night." She turned to go. He made a

hasty step after her as if to detain her. Ella remained.

"You have misunderstood me."

The young wife drew herself up firmly and proudly. She appeared all at

once to have become a different person. This tone and carriage, Ella

Almbach had never known.

"The 'fetters' shall not press upon you any longer, Reinhold. You can

attain your object unhindered, and your--prize. Good-night."

She opened the door quickly and went out. The moonlight fell brightly

on the slight figure in the darkness, upon the sad pale face and the

blond plaits. In the next moment she had disappeared. Reinhold stood

alone.

\* \* \* \* \*

"This house is miserable now," said the old bookkeeper in the office,

as he put his pen behind his ear, and closed the account book. "The

young master away for three days without giving any signs of his being

alive, without enquiring for wife or child. The Herr Captain does not

set his foot across the threshold; the principal goes about in such a

rage that one hardly dares to go near him; and young Frau Almbach looks

so wretched that one's heart aches to see her. Heaven knows how this

unhappy story will end."

"But how, then, did this disturbance come so suddenly?" asked the head

clerk, who also--it was the hour for closing the office--put his

writing aside and shut his desk.

The bookkeeper shrugged his shoulders. "Suddenly? I do not believe it

was unexpected by any of us. It has been smouldering in the family for

weeks and months; only the spark was wanting in all this inflammable

matter, and it came at last. Frau Almbach brought the news home from

some lady's party, and thus her husband learned what half the town knew

already, and what no one hears willingly, of his son-in-law. You know

our chief, and how he always looked upon all this artist business with

dislike; how he fought against it--and now this discovery! He sent for

the young master, and then there was such a scene--I heard part of it

in the next room. If Herr Reinhold had only behaved sensibly and given

in in this case when he really was not innocent, perhaps the affair

might have been set aside, instead of which he put on his most

obstinate manner, told his father-in-law to his face that he would not

remain a merchant, would go to Italy, would become a musician; he had

endured the slavery here long enough, and much more of the same kind.

The chief could not contain himself for rage; he forbade, threatened,

insulted at last, and then, of course, came the end. The young master

broke out so wildly that I thought something would happen. He stamped

his foot like a madman, and cried--'And if the whole world set itself

in opposition, it will still be. I will not be domineered over anyhow,

nor allow my thoughts and feelings to be prescribed for me.' And it

went on in this tone. An hour later he stormed out of the house, and

has not let himself be heard of since. God protect everyone from such

family scenes."

The old gentleman laid his pen aside, left his seat, and wished the

others good-night, while he prepared to leave the office. He had hardly

gone a few steps along the passage when he met Herr Almbach, who turned

in quickly from the street. The bookkeeper struck his hands together in

joyful alarm.

"Thank God that you, at least, are to be seen again, Herr Captain," he

cried. "We are indeed wretched in this house."

"Is the barometer still pointing to stormy?" asked Hugo, with a glance

at the upper story.

The bookkeeper sighed. "Stormy! Perhaps you will bring us sunshine."

"Hardly," said Hugo, seriously. "At this moment I am seeking Frau

Almbach. Is she at home?"

"Your aunt is out with the chief," said the former.

"Not she. I mean my sister-in-law."

"The young mistress? Oh dear, we have not seen her for three days. She

is sure to be upstairs in the nursery. She hardly leaves the little one

for a moment now."

"I will seek her," said Hugo, as with a rapid adieu he hastened

upstairs. "Good-evening."

The bookkeeper looked after him, shaking his head. He was not used to

the young Captain's passing him without some joke, some chaff; and he

had also remarked the cloud which to-day lay on the young man's usually

cheerful brow. He shook his head once more, and repeated his former

sigh, "God knows how the affair will end."

In the meanwhile Hugo had reached his sister-in-law's apartments.

"It is I, Ella," he said, entering. "Have I startled you?"

The young wife was alone; she sat by her boy's little bed. The rapid,

youthful steps outside, and the quick opening of the door, might well

have deceived her as to the comer. She had surely expected another. Her

painful start and the colour in her face, which suddenly gave way to

intense pallor, as she recognised her brother-in-law, showed this.

"My uncle carries his injustice so far as to forbid me the house also,"

continued the latter, as he came nearer. "He persists in thinking I had

some share in this unhappy breach. I hope, Ella, that you exonerate me

from it."

She hardly listened to the last words. "You bring me news from

Reinhold?" asked she quickly, with fleeting breath. "Where is he?"

"You surely did not expect that he would come himself," said the

Captain, evasively. "Whatever blame may be due to him in the whole

affair, the behaviour on my uncle's part was such that every one would

have rebelled against it. On this point I stand on his side, and

understand thoroughly that he went with the intention not to return. I

should have done the same."

"It was a terrible scene," replied Ella, with difficulty keeping back

the tears which were gushing out. "My parents learned elsewhere what I

would have hidden at any cost, and Reinhold was awful in his wild rage.

He left us, but he might have let me receive one word at least, during

the three days, through you. He is surely with you?"

"No," replied Hugo, shortly, almost roughly.

"No," repeated Ella, "he is not with you? I took it as a matter of

course that he would be there."

The Captain looked down. "He came to me, and with the intention of

remaining, but a difference arose between us about it. Reinhold is

unboundedly passionate when a certain point is touched upon; I could

and would not hide my feelings about it, and we quarrelled for the

first time in our lives. He thereupon refused to be friends; I have

only seen him again this morning."

Ella did not reply. She did not even ask what was the cause of the

quarrel; she felt only too well that in her brother-in-law, esteemed so

frivolous, mischievous, and heartless, she possessed the most energetic

protector of her rights.

"I have tried my utmost once more," said he, coming close beside her,

"although I knew it would be in vain. But you, Ella, could you not keep

him?"

"No," replied the young wife, "I could not, and at last I would not."

Instead of any response, Hugo pointed to the sleeping babe; Ella shook

her head violently.

"For his sake I conquered myself, and begged the husband, who wished to

tear himself away from me at any price, to remain. I was repulsed; he

let me feel what a fetter I am to him--he may then go free."

Hugo's glance rested enquiringly on her countenance, that again showed

the energetic expression which was once so foreign to her features.

Slowly he drew forth a note.

"If then you are prepared, I have a few lines to bring you from

Reinhold. He gave me them two or three hours since."

The wife started. The firmness she had just shown could not continue

when she saw her husband's handwriting on the envelope; only his

handwriting, while with mortal agony she had clung to the hope that he

would come himself, if it had merely been to say farewell. With

trembling hand she took the letter and opened it; it contained only a

few lines--

"You witnessed the scene between your father and myself, and will

therefore comprehend that I do not enter his house again. That scene

has changed nothing in my decision. It only hastens my departure, as

the want of tact on your parents' part has given the affair a publicity

which does not make it appear desirable for me to remain an hour longer

in H---- than is absolutely necessary. I cannot bid you and the child

good-bye personally, as I shall not set foot again across a threshold

from which I was driven in such a manner. It is not my fault if a

separation, which I was resolved to obtain for a time, now becomes a

lengthened one that is brought about by a violent quarrel. It was you

who made the condition, that I should either remain or go for ever.

Well, then, I go! Perhaps it will be better for us both. Farewell!"

CHAPTER VII.

The Captain must have known what the letter contained, as he stood

close by Ella's side, apparently ready to support her, as in the

theatre; but this time she betrayed no weakness. She looked silently

down at the icy words of farewell with which her husband freed himself

from wife and child. With what haste had he seized the excuse which her

father's harshness and her own words offered him; with what relief had

he shaken off the irksome bonds! This blow did not fall unexpectedly

now. Since that last interview she knew her fate.

"He is gone already?" asked she, without raising her eyes from the

letter, which she still held in her hand.

"An hour ago."

"And with her?"

Hugo was silent; he could not say "No" to this question. Ella rose,

apparently calm, but she leaned heavily on the boy's bed.

"I knew it. And now--leave me alone, I implore you!"

The Captain hesitated. "I came, also, to bid you adieu," replied he.

"My departure was decided without this, and now, in my brother's

absence, nothing keeps me. I shall make no attempt to remove my uncle's

absurd prejudice against me, but I should like to take a word of

farewell from you, Ella, away with me. Will you refuse it me?"

The young woman raised her eyes slowly; they met his, and as if

following an involuntary impulse, held out both hands to him--

"I thank you, Hugo, farewell!"

With a quick movement he caught her hands in his--

"I have ever only been able to bring you pain," he said softly. "By me

came the first news which utterly destroyed your peace; it came too

late, and to-day it was again my hand which brought you the last. But

if I pained you, Ella, must pain you--my God, it has not been easy for

me."

His lips rested for a moment on her hand, then he let it fall, and left

the room quickly; a few moments later he was in the open air.

It was a raw, regular northern spring evening. The rain fell steadily;

mist hung heavily and densely in the streets; even the lamp light only

shone dimly red in the grey atmosphere. The rolling train bore Reinhold

Almbach away in this fog to the south, where fame and love, where his

future beckoned brightly to him; and in the same hour his young wife

lay at home on her knees by her child's cradle, pressing her head in

the pillow to smother the cry of despair, which now, that she knew

herself to be alone, broke forth at last. He had not come once to say

adieu; he had not one kind last word for her; not one farewell kiss for

his child. They were both forsaken, given up--probably forgotten

already.

\* \* \* \* \*

The blazing glory of the sunset seemed to bathe heaven and earth in a

sea of fire, and illumination. All the wonderful colouring of the south

lighted up the western horizon, and the flood of light poured itself

far away over the town, with its cupolas, towers, and palaces. It was

an incomparable panorama stretching around the villa, which lay outside

the town on a slight elevation visible from afar, with its terrace and

colonnades, surrounded by the lower lying gardens, in which the most

luxuriant southern vegetation displayed itself. There sombre cypresses

raised their gloomy heads; pines waved in the gentle evening wind;

white marble statues peeped forth through laurel and myrtle bushes;

the waters from the fountains rippled and fell on the carpet of

turf; and thousands of flowers sent forth their intoxicating sweet

perfume--everywhere beauty and art, scent and flowers, light and

dazzling colours.

A numerous party was assembled on the terrace and in the adjoining

parts of the park, preferring the enjoyment of this beautiful evening,

and the wonderful view outside, to remaining in the rooms. It seemed

principally to consist of the aristocracy, yet many a figure might be

seen there which undoubtedly betrayed the artist, and here and there

appeared the dark habit of a priest near the light toilettes of the

ladies or brilliant uniforms. The most different elements seemed to be

united here. They walked, chatted, and sat or stood together in

unconstrained groups.

In one of these groups, which had gathered at the foot of a terrace

close to the great fountain, the conversation was conducted with

unusual vivacity; it must be about some subject of general interest.

The few words and names mentioned appeared to rouse the attention of

one of the guests, and he, coming from the terrace, passed close by the

group. He was clearly a stranger, as was denoted by his light brown

hair, eyes, and indeed his whole face, which, although tanned by sun

and air, still did not show the dark colouring of the southerner. The

uniform of a captain set off his strong manly figure very

advantageously, and in his bearing and movements was a happy

combination of the free, somewhat easy manner of a sailor with the

forms of good society. He stopped near the gentlemen who were talking

so eagerly, and listened to their conversation with evident interest.

"This new opera is, and will be the chief event of the season," said an

officer in the uniform of the carbineers, "and therefore I do not

understand how it can be so easily postponed. The performance is

already arranged, the rehearsals have begun, all preparations are

nearly finished, when suddenly everything is interrupted, and the whole

performance postponed until the autumn, and all this without any

apparent reason."

"The reason lies alone in the sovereign pleasure of Signor Rinaldo,"

replied another gentleman, in a somewhat ill-natured tone. "He is

accustomed to treat the opera and public according to his humour and

fancy."

"I am afraid you are mistaken, Signor Gianelli," interrupted a young

man of distinguished appearance, somewhat excitedly. "If Rinaldo

himself demanded the postponement, there is sure to be some cause for

it."

"Excuse me, Marchese, it is not so," replied the former. "I, as

conductor of the grand opera, know best what endless trouble, and what

immense sacrifice of time and money it has cost to meet Rinaldo's

wishes. He brought the whole theatrical world into confusion with his

conditions and requirements, as he demanded changes in the company such

as had never been made before, and everything in the same way. As

usual, all was acceded to, and all expected at last to be sure of his

approval; but now, on arriving from M----, he finds nothing but what is

far beneath his anticipations, he orders alterations and dictates

improvements in the most inconsiderate manner. In vain was it attempted

to dissuade him, through Signora Biancona; he threatened to withdraw

the entire opera, and--" here the maestro shrugged his shoulders

satirically, "his Excellency the Director would not take the

responsibility of such a misfortune upon his shoulders. He promised

everything, conceded everything, and as it was quite impossible to

carry out the so peremptorily demanded additions in such a short time,

even although ordered by the sovereign Signor Rinaldo, the performance

was obliged to be postponed until the next season."

"The Director in this case was quite right to give way to the wish, or,

if you like it, whim of the composer," said the young Marchese

decidedly. "The company would never have forgiven it if bad management

had robbed them of one of Rinaldo's operas. It is known that he would

be capable of carrying out his threat, and really withdrawing his work,

and with such an alternative before him, nothing remained but to give

way unconditionally."

"Certainly; my objection only concerns this species of terrorism which

a strange composer allows himself here, in the heart of Italy, inasmuch

as he compelled the inhabitants to content themselves with his

essentially German ideas of music."

"Especially when these same inhabitants have twice made a \_fiasco\_ of

an opera, while every new creation of Rinaldo's is greeted with

tempestuous applause by the audience," whispered the Marchese to his

neighbour.

The latter, an Englishman, looked much bored. He only understood

Italian imperfectly, and the rapid, vivacious conversation was

therefore greatly lost to him. Nevertheless he answered the Marchese's

low spoken and contemptuous remark with a solemn nod, and then looked

attentively at the maestro, as if the latter had become an object of

curiosity for him.

"We are speaking of Rinaldo's new opera," said the officer, turning

and explaining politely to the stranger, who so far had remained a

silent listener, and now replied in foreign sounding, but yet fluent

Italian--"I just heard the name. No doubt some musical celebrity."

The gentlemen looked in speechless astonishment at the inquirer; only

the maestro's face betrayed unmistakable satisfaction that there was at

least one person in the world who did not know this name.

"Some celebrity!" repeated Marchese Tortoni. "Excuse me Signor

Capitano, but you must have been a long time at sea, and perhaps come

from another hemisphere?"

"Direct from the South Sea Islands!" said the Captain with a pleasant

smile, notwithstanding the ironical tone of the question, "and as

there, unfortunately, they are not so well acquainted with the artistic

productions of the present times as might be desired in the interests

of civilisation, I beg to receive assistance in my deplorable

ignorance."

"We are speaking about the greatest and most charming of our present

composers," said the Marchese. "He is certainly by birth a German, but

since some years has belonged to us exclusively. He lives and works

only on Italian ground, and we are proud to be permitted to call him

ours. It will be easy for you to make his personal acquaintance this

evening. He is sure to appear!"

"With Signora Biancona--of course!" interrupted the officer, "have you

had an opportunity already of hearing our beautiful \_prima donna\_?"

The Captain made a gesture of denial. "I only arrived a few days since;

however, I saw her some years previously in my home, where she gained

her first laurels."

"Ah, she was a rising star then," cried the others. "To be sure she

laid the foundation of her fame in the north. She returned to us as a

known actress. But now she stands undoubtedly at the height of her

power. You must hear her, and hear her in one of Rinaldo's operas, when

you can admire her in all her glory."

"To be sure, as then one fire ignites the other," added the young

Marchese. "At any rate you will find in the Signora of to-day a

brilliantly beautiful apparition. Do not delay an introduction and

interview with her."

"Provided it be agreeable to Signor Rinaldo," said the maestro, joining

in again. "Otherwise you may attempt to approach her in vain."

"Has Rinaldo power to decide such points?" asked the Captain lightly.

"Well, at least he takes the right to do so. He is so used to being

master and ruler everywhere that he tries it here also, and, alas, not

without result. I do not understand Biancona. An actress of her

importance, a woman of her beauty, to allow herself to be so completely

ruled by a man."

"But he is Rinaldo," laughed the officer, "and that is saying enough.

Let us confess it, Tortoni, we can none of us compete with his

successes. All hearts fly towards him, wherever he appears; so at last

it is no wonder if even a Biancona bows willingly before the magic

which this man seems to bear about him."

"Hum, it is not done quite so willingly," said Gianelli, grimly.

"Signora is passionate in the highest degree, but Rinaldo, if possible,

even surpasses her. Between them it is quite as often storm as

sunshine, and furious scenes are the order of the day."

"This Rinaldo appears to govern all society as well as his audiences,"

said the Captain, now turning exclusively to the conductor. "Do people

submit to such a thing from one single man, and he a stranger?"

"Because all are blind, and will be to every other merit," cried the

maestro with suppressed violence. "When society once raises an idol to

a throne, it carries on its adoration until it becomes ridiculous.

They regularly worship Rinaldo, so it is no wonder if his pride and

self-appreciation become boundless, and he thinks he can trample on all

with impunity who do not pay him homage."

The Captain looked steadily and with a peculiar smile at the excited

Italian.

"It is a pity that such talent should have so dark a side! But after

all, it is not so much talent as fashion, whim of the public, unmerited

success; do not you think so?"

Gianelli would probably have agreed with all his heart, but the other

gentlemen's presence put some restraint upon him.

"The public generally decides in such cases," he replied, prudently,

"and here it is extravagant in its favours. For my part, I maintain,

without wishing in the least to detract from Rinaldo's fame, that he

might compose the most meritless work and they would extol it to the

skies, because it came from him."

"Very probably," agreed the stranger. "And possibly this new opera is

meritless. I am certainly of your opinion, and shall assuredly--"

"I advise you, Signor to withhold your opinion until you have become

acquainted with Rinaldo's works," interrupted the Marchese, sharply.

"He has certainly made the unpardonable mistake of attaining the summit

of fame in one unbroken course of triumph, and of acquiring greatness

to which no other can reach so easily. This cannot be forgiven him in

certain circles, and he must do penance for it on every occasion.

Follow my advice."

The Captain bowed slightly. "With pleasure, and all the more as it is

my brother whom you have defended so eloquently, Marchese."

This explanation, made with a most pleasant smile, naturally created a

great sensation in the group. Marchese Tortoni took a step backwards in

astonishment, and examined the speaker from head to foot. The maestro

became pale and bit his lips, while the officer with difficulty

refrained from laughing. The Englishman this time understood enough of

the conversation to comprehend the trick which had been played, and

which seemed to arouse his entire satisfaction. He smiled with an

expression of extreme contentment, and with long strides crossed over

immediately to the Captain, at whose side he placed himself silently,

thus giving him an unmistakable sign of approval.

"The musical name of my brother appears only to be known to these

gentlemen," continued Hugo unabashed, "mine doubtless sounded too

foreign to you in the general introduction. We have, indeed, no reason

to deny our relationship."

"Ah, Signor Capitano, I had heard already of your intended arrival,"

cried the Marchese, offering his hand with evident heartiness, "but it

was not fair to cheat us with an \_incognito\_. To one, at least, it has

caused bitter confusion, although he richly deserved the lesson."

Hugo looked round at once for the maestro, who had preferred to retire

unnoticed. "I wished to reconnoitre the ground a little," retorted he,

laughing, "and that was only possible so long as my \_incognito\_ lasted.

But it would soon have reached its termination, as I expect Reinhold

every moment; he was detained in the town, while I drove on in advance.

Ah, he is there already."

He really appeared at that moment on the terrace, and the maestro would

have had fresh opportunity to give vent to his anger at the "adoration,

which became ridiculous," as the sudden cessation of all conversation,

the interest with which all eyes were directed to one point, the

movement which spread through all the company, was only due to

Reinhold's entrance.

Reinhold himself had become quite different in these years--quite

different. The young genius who had once fought so impatiently against

the confining limits and prejudices of his surroundings, had raised

himself to be a renowned composer, whose name extended beyond the

boundaries of Italy and his home, whose works were familiar on the

stages of all capitals; to whom fame and honour, money and triumph,

flowed in richest abundance. The same mighty change had also been

carried out in his exterior, and this alteration was not at all

disadvantageous, as instead of the pale, serious youth, there now stood

a man in whom it was evident that he was at home with life and the

world, and only in the man did the always peculiarly attractive style

of his beauty manifest itself entirely. The proud self-consciousness

which now rested upon his \_spirituel\_ brow, and showed itself in all

his features and his whole bearing, became them well, but there lay

also a heavy shadow on this brow and on those features which happiness

had surely never placed there. His mouth curved with harsh mockery,

with contemptuous bitterness, and the former spark slumbered no more in

the depths of his eyes; now a flame shone there, burning, destroying,

flashing almost demonlike at every emotion. Whatever this face might

have gained outwardly, \_peace\_ spoke no more from within.

He conducted Signora Biancona on his arm, no longer the youthful \_prima

donna\_ of a second-rate Italian opera company, which gave wandering

performances in the north, but a star of European renown, who, after

having gathered laurels and triumphs in all important places, now

occupied the first position at the theatre of her native town. Marchese

Tortoni was right; she was dazzlingly beautiful, this woman; there was

the old burning glance, which once understood how to set on fire the

honourable patrician blood of the noble Hanseatic town, only now it

appeared to have become more glowing, more scorching; there was still

the countenance, with its witch-like entrancing magic, the figure with

its noble plastic limbs, only everything seemed fuller, more

voluptuous. The flower had developed to the ripest, almost over-ripe

splendour; she still bloomed, her beauty was still at its zenith, if

even one could not but acknowledge that perhaps in the course of the

next few years the limits would be already passed beyond which she

would be tending irrecoverably to her descent.

Both, especially Reinhold, were seized upon the moment they arrived.

All crowded around him; all sought his vicinity, his conversation. In a

few moments he had become the centre of the assemblage, and some time

elapsed before he could withdraw from all the attentions and flatteries

in order to look round for his brother, who had stood somewhat aloof.

"There you are at last, Hugo," said he, approaching, "I missed you

already. You make one seek you?"

"It was not possible to break through that triple circle of admirers,

which surrounds you like a Chinese wall; I have not attempted such a

piece of daring, but indulged in contemplating what happiness it is to

possess a celebrated brother."

"Yes, this everlasting crush is really oppressive," said Reinhold, with

an expression which showed not contented triumph, but, on the contrary,

unmistakable weariness; "however come now, I will introduce you to

Beatrice."

"Beatrice?--Ah, Signora Vampire! \_must\_ I, Reinhold?"

His brother's look became overcast. "Certainly you must. You cannot

avoid seeing her in my company, much and often. She is beautiful, and

with reason wonders it has not already been done. What is it, Hugo? You

appear wishful to evade this introduction altogether, and yet you do

not know Beatrice even."

"I do, though," replied the Captain shortly. "I have seen her already

at a concert on the stage at H----."

"But never spoken to her. It is odd one must almost compel you to do

what any other would look upon as a privilege! Usually you are the

first, when acquaintance with a beautiful woman is in question."

Hugo replied nothing, but followed without farther protest. Signora

Biancona, as was her custom, was surrounded by a circle of gentlemen,

and engaged in most lively conversation, which she, however, broke off

immediately the two appeared. Reinhold presented his brother to her.

Beatrice turned to the latter with all her fascinations.

"Do you know, Captain, I have been angry with you already, without

knowing you?" she began. "Reinhold was beside himself when he received

the news of your arrival. He left me in M---- in the most ungallant

manner, in order to hasten towards you. I had to undertake my return

journey alone."

Hugo bowed politely, but more distantly than was his wont to a lady,

nor did he appear to notice that Beatrice's beautiful hand was extended

confidently to Rinaldo's brother, at least he utterly resisted the

temptation of kissing it, which was certainly expected.

"I am very unhappy, Signora, at having roused your ill-will. But one

who disposes so exclusively of Reinhold's presence and company, should

possess liberality enough to forego it a short time in favour of his

brother."

He looked round for Reinhold, but the latter was already engaged.

"I resign myself," said Beatrice, still with charming friendliness, "or

rather I must still resign myself, as, since you came, I have seen

little enough of Rinaldo. There will remain no other remedy than to beg

you to accompany him when he comes to see me."

Hugo made a somewhat measured gesture of thanks--

"You are very kind, Signora. I shall seize with pleasure the

opportunity of becoming better acquainted with my brother's

admired--Muse."

Signora Biancona, smiled--

"Has he called me so to you? To be sure the name is not strange in our

circle of friends. Rinaldo gave it me once, when I led his first steps

to the path of art. A somewhat romantic designation, especially

according to German views, is it not, Signor? You hardly have such in

your north?"

"Sometimes," said the Captain quietly, "only with a slight difference.

With us, muses are ideal, floating in unattainable heights. Here they

are--beautiful women. An undeniable advantage for the artist!"

The words sounded like a compliment, and adhered steadily to the

playful tone which Beatrice herself had commenced; nevertheless she

cast a quick searching glance at the speaker's face--perhaps she saw

the sparkling scorn in it--as she answered sharply--

"For my part, I confess to have no sympathy with the north. Simply

because compelled, did I pass some short time there, and could only

breathe again when Italy's sky rose above me. We southerners cannot

succeed in submitting to the icy, pedantic rules which confine society

there, to the fetters which they would wish even to impose upon

artists."

Hugo leant with perfect indifference against the marble balustrade.

"Good God, that is of no importance. They are easily broken, and then

one is free as the birds in the air. Reinhold proved that sufficiently,

and now he has foresworn home and pedantic rules for ever, which is

entirely due to you, Signora."

Beatrice used her fan violently, although at this moment the evening

breeze blew refreshingly cool.

"How do you mean, Signor?" asked she, quickly.

"I? Oh, I mean nothing, excepting, perhaps, that it must be an

elevating sensation to have thus the entire fate of a man--or even a

family--in one's hands; in tearing him away from his 'fetters,' one

must feel in such a case something like an earthly providence. Is it

not so, Signora?"

Beatrice had started slightly at these words, whether from astonishment

or anger was not easy to decide. Her eyes met his; but this time they

measured one another, as two antagonists do. The Italian's glance

flashed; but the Captain bore it so firmly and quietly, that she felt

it was not such an easy game opposite those clear brown eyes, which

dared fearlessly to break a lance with her.

"I believe Rinaldo has every cause to be grateful to this providence,"

replied she, proudly. "Perhaps he would have sunk amid circumstances

and surroundings which were unworthy of him, if it had not aroused his

genius and shown him the path to greatness."

"Perhaps," said Hugo, coolly. "But people maintain that real genius

never does sink, and the more difficulties it has to penetrate the more

do they strengthen its power; however, that, of course, is also one of

the northern pedantic views. The result has decided in favour of your

view, Signora, and success is a god to which all bow."

He inclined his head and retired. He had said all this in the lightest

conversational tone, apparently quite unmeaningly, but Signora Biancona

must surely have felt the bitterness which lay in the Captain's words,

for she pressed her lips together in most intense internal irritation,

and her fan was moved almost furiously.

CHAPTER VIII.

Meanwhile Hugo had sought his brother, whom he found in conversation

with Marchese Tortoni; both stood a little apart from the rest of the

company.

"No, no, Cesario," said Reinhold, at that moment, refusing something.

"I have only shortly returned from M----, and cannot possibly think of

leaving town again. Perhaps later--"

"But the opera is postponed," interrupted the young Marchese, in a

beseeching tone, "and the heat begins to be oppressive. You are sure to

select some \_villegiatura\_ in a few weeks. Come to my assistance,

Captain," said he, turning to Hugo, just then approaching. "You intend,

surely, to become acquainted with our south, and there is no better

opportunity than in my Mirando."

"Do you know the Marchese already?" asked Reinhold. "Then I need not

introduce you."

"Certainly not," replied Hugo, mischievously. "I introduced myself

personally to these gentlemen, just as they were sitting in judgment

upon you, and I had the harmless pleasure, as an unknown listener, of

rousing them against you by casual remarks. Unfortunately it only

succeeded with one. Marchese Tortoni, on the contrary, took your part

most passionately; I had to feel the whole weight of his displeasure,

as I allowed myself to doubt your talent."

Reinhold shook his head. "Has he been playing his tricks already,

Cesario? Take care, Hugo, with your jokes! We are here on Italian

ground, where people do not take such things so lightly as in our

home."

"Well, in this case the name was only required to reconcile us," said

the Marchese, smiling. "But we are losing the thread of our discussion

entirely," continued he, impatiently. "I have still received no reply

to my request. I count positively upon your visit, Rinaldo; naturally

on yours also, Signor."

"I am my brother's guest," exclaimed Hugo, to whom the last words were

addressed. "Such a decision depends upon him and--Signora Biancona."

"Upon Beatrice! How so?" asked Reinhold, quickly.

"Well, she is already greatly annoyed that my presence keeps you so

much from her. It is decidedly a question whether she will set you at

liberty for any time, as Marchese Tortoni seems to wish."

"Do you think I should allow myself to be so entirely governed by her

whims?" Reinhold's voice betrayed rising irritation. "I shall have to

show that I can form a decision without her leave. We will come,

Cesario, next month, I promise you."

An expression of great pleasure passed over the young man's face at

this rapid, impetuous assent; he turned politely to the Captain.

"Rinaldo knows my Mirando well, and has always praised it. I hope also

to be able to make your stay agreeable to you. The villa is beautifully

situated, close to the sea shore--"

"And isolated," said Reinhold, with a peculiar mixture of melancholy

and longing. "One can breathe there while one is almost suffocated in

the drawing-room atmosphere. But our friends are going to dinner," said

he, turning the conversation, with an upward glance to the terrace. "We

must, I suppose, join the others. Will you take Beatrice to dinner,

Hugo?"

"No, thank you," declined the Captain, coolly. "That is surely your

exclusive right. I do not wish to dispute it."

"Your conversation with her was remarkably short," said Reinhold, as

together they ascended the steps of the terrace. "What was the matter

with you both?"

"Nothing particular. A little outpost skirmish; nothing more. Signora

and I have taken up our positions towards one another at once. I hope

you do not object."

He received no answer, as Signora Biancona's silk dress rustled close

by them, and the next moment stood between the brothers. The Captain

bowed low, with consummate gallantry, before the beautiful woman. It

would indeed have been impossible to find the least fault with this

mode of greeting, and Beatrice acknowledged it with an inclination of

her head, but the glance which she shot towards him showed sufficiently

that she also had taken up her position. The intense hatred of the

roused southerner blazed in her eye, only for a moment to be sure; the

next she turned round, laid her hand on Reinhold's arm, to let him lead

her into the dining-room.

"That seems to me neither more nor less than a declaration of war,"

murmured Hugo, as he followed the pair. "Wordless, but sufficiently

comprehensible. The enmity has begun--at your commands, Signora."

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Marchese Tortoni was not wrong in his remarks; the heat,

notwithstanding the early season of the year, began to be oppressive.

The season was not over yet, but many families had already exchanged

their residence in the town for the usual \_villegiatura\_ in the

mountains or by the seaside, and the rest of the society was also on

the point of dispersing itself earlier than usual to all points of the

compass, until autumn brought them together once more.

In Signora Biancona's house no preparations had been made so far which

might lead to the inference of a speedy departure, and yet one seemed

to be under discussion in the interview which had just taken place

between her and Reinhold Almbach. The two were alone in the singer's

brilliantly and dazzlingly illuminated saloon; but Beatrice's beautiful

face bore an expression of unmistakable excitement. Leaning against the

cushions of the divan, her lips pressed angrily together, she plucked

to pieces one of the beautiful bouquets which ornamented the celebrated

actress' reception-room so plentifully; while Reinhold was walking up

and down the room with folded arms and gloomily clouded brow. It only

required a single glance to guess that one of those stormy scenes was

being enacted which Maestro Gianelli declared were as frequent between

the two as was sunshine.

"I beg you, Beatrice, spare me any more of these exhibitions," said

Reinhold, with great violence. "You cannot alter an affair already

determined upon. Marchese Tortoni received my promise, and our

departure for Mirando is arranged for to-morrow."

"Well, then, you must retract this promise," replied Beatrice, in the

same tone. "You gave it without my knowledge, gave it weeks ago, and

then we had already decided to spend our \_villegiatura\_ in the

mountains this year."

"Certainly! And I shall follow you there as soon as I return from

Mirando."

"As soon as you return! As if Tortoni would not try every means to

chain you there as usual, and if now, in addition, you go in your

brother's company, it is a matter of course that you will be kept away

from me as long as possible."

Reinhold stopped suddenly, and a dark look was turned towards her.

"Will you not have the goodness to leave this wearisome, exhausted

subject at last?" asked he, sharply. "I know already quite well enough

that there is no sympathy between you and Hugo; but he, at any rate,

spares me any dissertations upon it, and does not require me to share

his sympathies and antipathies. Besides, you must allow that he has

never been impolite towards you."

Beatrice threw her bouquet aside and rose. "Oh, yes, I allow that,

certainly; and it is just this courteousness which annoys me so much.

The agreeable conversations, with the everlasting, scornful smile on

his lips; the attentions, with contempt in his eyes; that is quite the

German manner, from which I suffered so much in your north, which

governs and rules us in the so-called circles of society, which knows

how to restrain us there, even when fighting ever so bitterly with any

one. Your brother understands that perfectly; nothing hits him, nothing

wounds him; everything glances off from his everlasting, mocking smile.

I--I hate him, and he me not less."

"With difficulty," said Reinhold bitterly, "as you are such a mistress

of the art, as few others can be. I have often enough seen that, when

you have imagined yourself insulted by anyone. With you it overflows

all bounds at once. But this time, you will remember, that it is my

brother against whom this hatred is directed, and that through it I am

not disposed to let myself be robbed of our first short meeting for

years. I shall endure no insult, no attack, upon Hugo."

"Because you love him more than me," cried Beatrice, wildly. "Because I

count for nothing beside your brother. To be sure, what am I to you?"

And now the way was opened to a regular flood of reproaches,

complaints, and threats, which finally ended in a torrent of tears. All

the passion of the Italian broke forth; but Reinhold seemed to be moved

to nothing less than concession by it. He attempted to restrain her

several times, and as he did not succeed, he stamped furiously with his

foot.

"Once more, Beatrice, cease these scenes. You know that you never gain

anything with me by them, and I should have thought you had already

found by experience that I am not such a slave without a will, that a

word or a caprice from you is a command. I shall not put up with these

continual exhibitions any longer, which you call forth on every

occasion."

He went furiously to the balcony, and, turning his back upon the room,

looked down into the street, where the busy movement of the Corso was

visible. For a few minutes Beatrice's passionate sobs were heard in the

saloon; then all was still, and immediately after she placed a hand on

his shoulder, as he stood at the window.

"Rinaldo!"

Half-reluctantly he turned round. His glance met Beatrice's glowing

dark eye; a tear still stood in it, but it was no longer a tear of

anger, and her voice, just now so excited, had a soft, melting ring in

it.

"You say I am a mistress in the art of hating. Only in hating, Rinaldo?

You have often enough experienced the contrary."

Reinhold now turned completely to her, and returned from the balcony.

"I know that you can love," replied he, more mildly, "love warmly and

wholly. But you can also torment with this love; that I have to feel

every day."

"And you would wish to flee this torment, at least for a time?"

A deep reproach sounded in her voice. Almbach made an impatient

movement.

"I seek peace, Beatrice," said he, "and that I do not find at all near

you. You can only breathe in constant heat and excitement, both are

your conditions of life, and you drag your entire surroundings with you

in the everlasting fire of your nature. I--am tired."

"Of society or of me?" asked Beatrice, with freshly rising fury.

"Can you not cease from seeking a stab in every word?" asked Reinhold,

angrily. "I see we do not understand each other again to-day. Adieu!"

"You are going!" cried the Italian, half-frightened,

half-threateningly. "And with this farewell for a separation of weeks!"

Reinhold, who was already at the door, thought a moment and turned

slowly round.

"Ah, yes; I forgot the departure. Farewell, Beatrice!"

But he was not permitted to make his farewell so easily. Signora

Biancona had long since learned not to defy for any time the man who

now understood how to bend her otherwise capricious will to his own,

and when he again drew near to her all farther opposition was at an

end. Her voice trembled as she asked softly, "And you will really go

alone, without me?"

"Beatrice--"

"Alone, without me?" repeated she, more passionately. Reinhold made an

attempt to withdraw his hand from her, but it remained only an attempt.

"Cesario expects me positively," he said, deprecatingly, "and I have

already explained that you cannot accompany me--"

"Not to Mirando," interrupted Beatrice, "I know that. But what prevents

my altering the original plan, and making my first summer stay in

S---- instead of in the mountains, the great resort of all strangers?

It is near enough to Mirando, half-an-hour by boat would bring you

across to me. If I were to follow you--may I, Rinaldo?"

This tone of flattering entreaty was irresistible, and her glance

begged still more. Reinhold looked down silently at the beautiful

woman, the possession of whose love once appeared to him the highest

prize of happiness. The magic still exercised its old power, and

exercised it now most strongly when he was attempting to escape from

it. The concession was not made in words, but Beatrice saw, as he bent

towards her, that she had conquered this time. When he really left her,

half-an-hour later, the change in the plan of her journey was quite

decided upon, and their farewell was not for a separation of weeks, but

only of days.

It was already becoming dark, and the moon was rising slowly, when

Reinhold reached his own abode, which lay at some distance, in a more

open part of the town. On entering his reception-room he found the

Captain there, who appeared just to have been giving his servant an

impressive lecture, as Jonas stood before him with a most rueful

countenance, which was comically mixed with suppressed indignation, to

find words for which his master's presence only prevented him.

"What is it?" asked Reinhold, somewhat astonished.

"An inquisitorial enquiry," replied Hugo, annoyed. "For years I have

taken trouble in vain with this obstinate sinner and incorrigible

woman-hater, but neither teaching nor example--Jonas, you are to go

instantly up to the Padrona, beg her pardon, and promise to be more

mannerly in future. March! go along!"

"I shall be obliged to send him back to the 'Ellida' at last,"

continued he, turning to his brother, when Jonas had left the room. "The

ship's cat is the only female person there which he has near him; and

it is to be hoped he will not quarrel with it."

Reinhold threw himself on a seat. "I wish I had your unconquerable

humour, your happy gift of taking life like a game. I never could do

it."

"No, the ground notes of your being were always elegiac," said the

Captain. "I believe you never looked upon me as quite equal to yourself

in birth, as I could not take such ideal romantic flight to the

heights, nor penetrate to the depths, like your artistic natures. We

sailors are happy on the surface, and if now and then a storm should

disturb the deep, it does not matter to us, we remain above."

"Quite true," said Reinhold, gloomily. "May you always, stay on your

sunny, bright surface! Believe me, Hugo, it is only muddy below in the

depths, where people seek for treasures; and an icy breath blows above

in the height, where one dreamed of nothing but sunlight. I have tasted

both."

Hugo looked searchingly at his brother, who lay more than sat on his

seat, his head leaning back, as if tired to death, while his gloomy

eyes wandered out over the gardens of the neighbourhood, and at last

remained fixed on the faintly illumined horizon, where the last rays of

daylight just disappeared.

"Listen, Reinhold; you do not please me at all," he broke forth

suddenly. "After years I come to see my brother again, whose name fills

the whole world, to whom fate has given everything it can give to one

man. I find you at the height of renown and success--and I expected to

find you different."

"And how, then?" asked Reinhold, without raising his head or turning

his eyes from the darkening evening sky.

"I do not know," said the Captain, earnestly. "But I know that after a

fortnight only I cannot endure this life, which you have led for years.

This restless rushing from pleasure to pleasure, without any

satisfaction; this constant wavering between wild excitement and deadly

exhaustion does not suit my nature. You should put a bridle on yours."

Reinhold made a half-impatient movement. "Folly. I have become

accustomed to it for long; and besides, you do not understand it,

Hugo."

"Possibly. At any rate I do not require to deaden my feelings."

Reinhold started up. A glance of burning anger met his brother, who

attempted to pierce so far into his innermost thoughts, and who

continued, quite unmoved--

"It is only a means of deadening your feelings which you struggle for

day after day, which you seek everywhere without finding. Give up this

life, I entreat you. You will ruin yourself, body and mind, by it; you

must succumb to it at last."

"How long is it since the joyous Captain of the 'Ellida' has become a

preacher of moralities," scoffed Reinhold, with as much scornful

expression as he could use. "Who would have thought long ago that you

would lecture me in this manner. But do not take any trouble about my

conversion, Hugo. I have foresworn all the pious ideas of my youth,

once for all."

The Captain was silent. This was again the tone of wounding scorn with

which Reinhold made himself unapproachable the moment such topics were

touched upon; this tone, which made all influence impossible, which

jarred so upon every recollection of youth, and made the formerly warm

bond between the brothers strange and cold. Hugo did not even try

to-day to alter it; he knew that it would be in vain. Turning away, he

took up a book which was lying on the table, and began turning over its

leaves.

"I have never heard a single word from you about my compositions,"

began Reinhold, again, after a momentary silence. "You have had an

opportunity here of becoming acquainted with my operas. How do you like

them?"

"I am no connoisseur of music," said Hugo, evasively.

"I know that, and therefore I lay some value on your opinion, because

it is that of the unprejudiced, but acute public. How do you like my

music?"

The Captain threw the book on the table.

"It is agreeable and--" he stopped.

"And?"

"Unbridled as yourself. You and your tones go beyond all bounds."

"An annihilating criticism," said Reinhold, half-struck by it. "It is

well that I should hear it; you would fare badly in the circle of my

admirers. How then do you allow that there is anything agreeable in

it?"

"When you, yourself speak--yes!" explained Hugo, decidedly, "but that

is seldom enough. Generally this strange element predominates which has

given the turn to your talent, and still rules it. I cannot help it,

Reinhold, but this influence which from the commencement you have

followed, which all the world prizes as so elevating, has brought no

good, not even to the artist. Without it you might not have been so

celebrated, but undoubtedly greater."

"Truly, Beatrice is right, when she dreads you as her implacable

opponent," remarked Reinhold, with undisguised bitterness. "Certainly,

she only thinks of a personal prejudice. That you do not even allow the

value of her artistic influence upon me would indeed be new to her."

Hugo shrugged his shoulders. "She has quite drawn you into the Italian

style. You always storm when others only play, but it is all the same.

Why do you not write German music? But what am I talking about? You

have turned your back upon home and all its belongings for ever."

Reinhold rested his head on his hand. "Yes certainly--for ever."

"That almost sounds like regret," hazarded the Captain, looking with

fixed scrutiny at his brother's face. The latter looked up darkly.

"What do you mean? Do you perhaps think I regret the old chains,

because I have not found the happiness dreamed of in freedom? If I

tried any communication it would--"

"Ah, you did attempt some communication with your wife?"

"With Ella?" asked Reinhold, and there was again the old mixture of

pity and contempt, which betrayed itself in his voice the moment he

spoke of his wife. "What good could that have done? You know how I

left; it was done by a complete rupture with her parents, and therefore

naturally a narrow, dependent nature like Ella's would join in the

verdict of condemnation if it were ever even able to raise itself to a

verdict of its own. If the breach between us was formerly wide, now,

after all that has happened, it has become impassable. No, there could

be no talk of that, but I wished to receive news of my child. I could

not bear longer to have my boy so far away, not to be able to see him,

not even to possess a picture of him. I wanted his at any price,

therefore I chose the shortest means, and wrote to the mother."

"Well, and--?" asked Hugo, with interest.

Reinhold laughed bitterly--

"T might have spared myself the humiliation. No answer came--that

certainly was answer enough, but I wanted just to know how the child

was; I thought of the possibility of a mistake, of its being lost--what

does one not think of in such a case?--and wrote again. The letter came

back unopened"--he clenched his fist in wild anger--"unopened, to me!

It is my uncle's work; there is no doubt of it. Ella would never have

dared to offer it to me."

"Do you think so? You do not know your wife. She certainly has 'dared'

to offer it, and she alone could dare it, as her parents have been dead

some years."

Reinhold turned round quickly--

"How do you know that? Are you still in communication with H----?"

"No," said the Captain, quietly; "you may imagine that the state of

mind which existed in the family towards you was also partly carried

over to me. Since I left H---- at that time, a few days after you did,

I have never revisited it, but I correspond still with the former

bookkeeper of the firm of Almbach, who has taken over the business, and

continues it on his own account. I heard a few things from him."

"And you only tell me this now, after being together for nearly a

fortnight?" cried Reinhold, almost furiously.

"I have naturally not wished to touch upon a subject which it seemed to

me you wished to avoid," answered Hugo coolly.

Reinhold walked up and down the room a few times--

"Her parents are dead, then? And Ella and the child?"

"You need not be anxious about them; my uncle left a good fortune, much

more than people thought."

"I knew he was richer than he wished to be deemed," said Reinhold

quickly, "and this certainly alone gave me perfect freedom of action in

my departure. I was not necessary for my wife and child. They were safe

from any change of fate, without even my presence. But where are they

now? Still in H----?"

"Herr Consul Erlau was appointed the boy's guardian," informed Hugo,

rather shortly and distantly. "He appears also to have taken very

active interest in the deserted wife, as directly after expiration of

the time of mourning she moved into his house with the child. There

both were still living, half-a-year ago; so far my news extends."

"Indeed?" said Reinhold thoughtfully, "only I do not understand how

Ella, with her education and her habits, can possibly exist in the

splendid establishment of the Erlaus. I suppose she will have arranged

a few back rooms so as never to appear, or, notwithstanding her

fortune, have undertaken the post of housekeeper. She will never be

able to rise above this ambition. Had it not been so, I should have

borne much, indeed all--for the child's sake."

He went to the window, pushed it open, and leant out. The evening air

blew cool into the close room, where now a long silence ensued, as even

the Captain seemed to have no more inclination to prolong the

conversation. After a time he arose.

"Our departure in the morning is arranged rather early; we must be

awake betimes. Good night, Reinhold!"

"Good night!" replied Reinhold, without turning round.

Hugo left the room. "I wish this Circe of a Beatrice could see him at

such moments," muttered he, shutting the door. "You have conquered,

Signora, and torn him to yourself as your indisputable property--you

have not made him happy."

Reinhold remained a few moments longer immovable, at his place; then he

raised himself and went over to his work room. He had to pass through

several apartments in order to reach it. This abode, which occupied the

entire ground floor of the roomy villa, was not so brilliant as that of

Signora Biancona, but yet more extravagantly furnished, as the

magnificence which reigned there was here ten times surpassed by the

artistic decorations of the rooms; so there pictures hung on the walls,

statues stood in the window niches, whose value could only be estimated

by thousands; here were produced masterly copies of the most splendid

art treasures of Italy. Wherever the eye turned, it met vases, busts,

drawings and beautiful works, which elsewhere would have been each

alone the ornament of any drawing-room, and which here, scattered

everywhere, only served as additional decorations. Everywhere was

wealth of beauty and art such as only a Rinaldo could gather around

him in so lavish a manner, to whom gold as well as fame flowed in

never-ceasing plenty, and who was accustomed to throw the former away

quite recklessly.

In the middle of the study there stood a splendid piano, the gift of an

enthusiastic circle of admirers, who wished to offer a visible

testimony of their thanks to the master; the writing-table was covered

with cards and letters, which bore the names of the first people in the

kingdom, both as regards birth and genius, and which here were

indifferently thrust aside, without the recipient placing the least

value on them; from the principal wall, a life-sized picture of

Beatrice Biancona looked down, painted by a celebrated hand, most

charmingly represented, a really speaking likeness. She wore the

fanciful costume of one of her chief parts in an opera of Rinaldo's,

through the successful representation of whose works she herself had

only risen to be an actress of the first order. The painter had

succeeded in embodying the utterly infatuating magic, the glowing charm

of the original, in this portrait. The beautiful figure appeared

half-turned to the piano in an inimitably graceful pose, and the dark

eyes gazed with deceptively life-like truth down upon the man whom they

had kept so long already in indissoluble bonds, as if even here, in the

sacred place of his works and labour, they would not leave him alone.

CHAPTER IX.

Reinhold sat at his piano, improvising. The room was not lighted, only

the moon's rays, streaming fully in, hung over the flood of tones,

which now rose as if the storm were raging in its waves, now rolling up

mountains high, and then again disclosing the depths of an abyss. The

melodies flowed forth passionately, glowing, intoxicatingly, and then

suddenly they would start and change as if to harsh dissonance, to

jarring discord. Those were the tones with which Rinaldo for years had

reigned in the realms of music, with which he carried the crowd away to

admiration; perhaps because they lent language to that demon-like

element which slumbers in every one's breast, and of which every one is

conscious, partly with dread, partly with secret shuddering. There lay,

too, in these melodies something of that wild rush from pleasure to

pleasure, of that rapid change from feverish excitement to deadly

exhaustion, from that striving to benumb all feeling, which, sought for

ever, is never found; and yet there rang forth something powerful,

eternal, which had nothing in common with that element with which it

fought, and which was raised above it, only to be wrecked within it at

last.

The perfume of oranges rose from the gardens and streamed in through

the widely-opened doors on to the balcony, and was wafted

intoxicatingly through the apartments. Clear, full of great beauty and

intense peace, lay the moonlight above the old town, and the dim

distance disappeared in the blue, misty vapour. The fountain rustled

dreamily amongst the blooming trees, and the light which shone in the

falling drops illuminated with powerful distinctness the whole row of

apartments, with their marble treasures of art; it illuminated the

picture in the richly gilt frame, so that the witch-like, beautiful

figure above seemed to live; and the same light fell upon the

countenance of the man, whose brow, amid all this beauty and all this

peace, remained so heavily overcast.

How many years, and, indeed, much besides which weighed more heavily

than years only, lay between those long northern winter nights on which

the young musician created his first compositions, and this balmy

moonlight night of the south, on which the world-renowned Rinaldo

repeated, in endless variations, the principal theme of his newest

opera. And yet all vanished in this hour. Softly, recollection passed

before him, and let long-forgotten days live again, long-forgotten

pictures stand before him; the little garden house, with its

old-fashioned furniture, and the stunted vines over the window, the

miserable little strip of garden with its few trees and shrubs, and the

high, prison-like walls around it; the narrow, gloomy house, with the

so intensely hated business-room. Faint, colourless pictures--and yet

they would not give way, as above them floated smilingly a pair of

large, deep, blue child's eyes, which only there had shone for the

father, and which here, in this orbit, full of poetry and beauty, he

sought for in vain. He had seen them so often in his child's face, and

also once--somewhere else. The remembrance of this was certainly but

dim, almost forgotten; they had only then shown themselves to him for a

moment, before being veiled again immediately, as they had been for

years; but it was still those eyes, which hovered before him, as now,

out of the storming and rolling tones, a magically sweet melody arose.

An endless longing spoke in it, a pain which his lips would not utter,

and thus formed a bridge across into the far distant past. Now had

genius burst the fetters which then oppressed and confined him; now he

stood aloft on the once dreamed-of heights. All that life and success,

fame and love could give had become his portion, and now--again like a

storm, it swept over the notes, wild, passionate, bacchante-like, and

through it ever again that melody came plaintively, with its touching

pain, its restless longing, which could not be pacified.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I fear our captain will not endure Mirando much longer. It is

dangerous having the sea thus ever before his eyes; he gazes over it

with such longing, as if the sooner that he could sail away from us the

better."

With these words Marchese Tortoni turned to his guest, who, for the

last quarter of an hour had taken hardly any part in the conversation,

and whom the young lord just caught in the act of a surreptitious yawn.

"Indeed not," said Hugo, defending himself. "I only feel myself so

utterly unimportant and ignorant in these ideal art discussions, and so

deeply impressed with the sense of my ignorance, that I have just gone

hurriedly through all the words of command during a storm, in order to

obtain for myself the consolatory conviction that I do understand

something."

"All evasion!" cried the Marchese. "You miss the female element

here, which you adore so much, and now appear unable to forego.

Unfortunately, my Mirando cannot offer you that charm, as yet. You know

I am not married, and have not been able to resolve upon sacrificing my

freedom."

"Not resolve upon sacrificing your freedom," intimated Hugo. "My God,

that sounds shocking. If you have not yet ascended the highest ladder

of earthly happiness, as books express it--"

"Do not believe him, Cesario," broke in Reinhold. "Notwithstanding all

his gallantry and knightliness, at heart he is of an icy nature, which

nothing warms too easily. He plays with all--has no feeling for any;

the ever-recurring romance, which he even sometimes calls passion,

lasts just so long as he is on shore, and disappears with the first

fresh breeze which wafts his 'Ellida' away on the sea. Nothing has ever

yet stirred his heart."

"Abominable character!" cried Hugo, throwing away his cigar. "I protest

against it most solemnly."

"Well you, perhaps, maintain that it is untrue?"

The Captain laughed and turned to Tortoni. "I assure you, Signor

Marchese, that I too can be unimpeachably true to my beautiful blue

ocean bride"--he pointed towards the sea--"to her I am pledged with

heart and hand. She alone understands how to chain and hold me fast

again and again, and if she do allow me now and then to look into a

pair of beautiful eyes, she never tolerates serious faithlessness."

"Until you look at last into a pair of eyes which teach you that you

also are not proof against the universal fate of mortals," said

Reinhold, half-jokingly, half with a bitterness which was intelligible

only to his brother. "There are such eyes."

"Oh, yes, there are such eyes," repeated Hugo, looking out over the sea

with an almost dreamy expression.

"Ah, sir, the tone sounds very suspicious," said the Marchese,

teasingly. "Perhaps you have already met with those kind of eyes?"

"I?" The Captain had at once thrown off the momentary seriousness, and

was again full of the old mischief. "Folly! I hope to defy long enough

yet the 'universal doom of mortals.' Do you hear?"

"What a pity you can find no opportunity here of proving this

determination," said Cesario. "The only neighbours whom we have keep

themselves so secluded that no attempt ever could be made. The young

Signora even--"

"A young Signora? Where?" Hugo jumped up eagerly.

The Marchese pointed to a country house, which, barely a mile distant,

lay half-hidden in an olive grove.

"The villa Fiorina yonder has been inhabited for some months. So far as

I hear they are also countrymen of yours, Germans, who have settled

there for the summer; but they appear to make the most perfect solitude

and invisibility their law. No one is received, no one allowed to

enter. Visitors from S----, taking advantage of their acquaintance at

home, were dismissed, without exception, and, as the family confine

their walks chiefly to the park and terrace, it is impossible to

approach them."

"And the Signora--is she beautiful?" asked Hugo, with most lively

eagerness.

Cesario shrugged his shoulders. "With the best will I cannot tell you.

I only saw her once slightly, and at some distance. A slight, youthful

figure; a head covered with beautiful golden plaits; unfortunately her

face was not turned towards me, and I rode pretty quickly past her."

"Without having seen her face? I admire your stoicism, Marchese, but

guarantee myself solemnly against the suspicion of doing likewise. By

this evening I will bring you and Reinhold information as to whether

the Signora be beautiful or no."

"You may find it difficult," laughed the Marchese. "Do you not hear,

all entrance is forbidden?"

"Bah! as if that would prevent me!" cried Hugo, confidently. "The

affair only now begins to be interesting. An unapproachable villa, an

invisible lady, who is, besides, fair and a German. I will enquire into

it, thoroughly examine into it. My duty as a countryman requires it."

"Thank God that you put him upon this scent, Cesario," said Reinhold.

"Now let us hope that his ill-concealed yawns will not disturb us any

more, when we talk of music. I wished to discuss the parts with you

again."

The young Marchese had risen and laid his hand entreatingly on

Rinaldo's shoulder.

"Well, and the opera? Do you stand immovably by your ultimatum? I

assure you, Rinaldo, it is almost impossible to carry out all these

alterations by the autumn; I have convinced myself of it. A new

postponement will be required, and the public and company have been

waiting for months already."

"They must wait longer." The words sounded haughty, and short in their

decision.

"Spoken like a dictator," remarked Hugo. "Are you always so autocratic

towards the public? The picture which Maestro Gianelli sketches of you

appears to possess some very striking traits of resemblance. I believe

it was not really so absolutely necessary to bring the entire opera

company, including his Excellency the intendant, into such despair as

you have done this time."

Reinhold raised his head with all the pride and indifference of the

spoilt, admired artist, who is accustomed to see his will obeyed as if

it were law, and to whom opposition is considered equal to an insult.

"I dispose of my work and its performance. Either the opera shall be

heard in the form I wish, or not at all. I have left them the choice."

"As if there were any choice!" said Cesario, shrugging his shoulders,

as he turned to his servant to give him an order, and left the two

brothers alone.

"Unfortunately, there appears to be none in this case," said Hugo,

looking after his young host. "And Marchese Tortoni will have you on

his conscience also, if you become thoroughly spoiled at last with this

senseless worship of you. He does his utmost, like the rest of your

adoring circle! They set you up in their midst like a Llama, and group

themselves respectfully around you to listen to the remarks of your

genius, even if it should please your genius to maltreat your

infatuated, surrounders. I am sorry for you, Reinhold. You are driving

yourself with certainty to the rock on which already so many valuable

powers have been wrecked--self-adoration."

"Hum! in the meanwhile you take care that this should not occur,"

replied Reinhold, sarcastically. "You appear to like the part of the

faithful Eckhard in a remarkable degree, and rehearse it at every

opportunity; but it is the most thankless of all. Give it up, Hugo! It

does not suit your nature in the least."

The Captain knit his brows, but he remained quite calm at the tone,

which might easily have irritated another, threw his fowling-piece over

his shoulder, and went out. A few minutes later he found himself by the

shore, and only when the fresh sea breeze cooled his head, did the

Captain's seriousness leave him; he struck at once into the road to the

Villa Fiorina.

To tell the truth, Hugo began to be wearied of Mirando and the

prevailing artistic atmosphere which the Marchese's inclination and his

brother's presence created there. The paradise-like situation of the

property was nothing new to the sailor, who knew so well the beauties

of the tropical world, and the solitude to which Reinhold gave himself

up with an almost sick longing did not at all suit Hugo's joyous

nature. Certainly S----, so much frequented by strangers, lay pretty

near, but he could not sail over to it too frequently, and thus

indicate to the young host that he missed companionship. Therefore this

probably beautiful, and at any rate interesting and mysterious

neighbour was very welcome, and Hugo resolved immediately to utilise

it.

"Let some one else endure these art lovers and art enthusiasts!" said

he, annoyed, as he followed the road by the sea. "Half the day long

they sit at the piano, and the rest of the time talk of music. Reinhold

always is in extremes. From the midst of the wildest life, out of the

most senseless excitement, he rushes head over heels into this romantic

solitude, and will hear and know of nothing but his music; I only

wonder how long it will last. And this Marchese Tortoni? Young,

handsome, rich, of a most noble line; this Cesario does not know what

better to do with his life than to bury himself for months in his

lonely Mirando, to play the \_dilettante\_ in grand style, and, with his

endless worship, turn Reinhold's head still more. I know how to spend

my time better than that."

At these last words, spoken with great self-satisfaction, the Captain

stopped, as the end of his walk was already, so far, attained. Before

him lay the Villa Fiorina, shaded by high fir trees and cypresses, and

buried almost in blooming shrubs. The house itself appeared magnificent

and roomy, but the chief façade as well as the terrace turned towards

the sea, and were so thickly overgrown and surrounded by roses and

oleander bushes that even Hugo's hawk's eye was not able to penetrate

the balmy fortification. A high wall, covered with creeping plants,

enclosed the park-like grounds, which terminated in the olive grove

which surrounded the estate. It might formerly have been, judging by

the size of the grounds, the property of some great family, then, like

so many others, have often changed owners, and now served as temporary

residence for rich strangers. At all events, in beauty of situation, it

did not yield the palm to Marchese Tortoni's highly prized Mirando.

The Captain had already formed his plan of campaign; he therefore only

scanned the country slightly, made a vain attempt to obtain a better

view of the terrace from the seaward side, measured the height of the

garden walls with his eye, in case of accident, and then went direct to

the entrance, where he rang the bell, and demanded to see the owners,

without hesitation.

The porter, an old Italian, appeared to have received his instruction

for the like cases, as, without even asking the stranger's name, he

explained shortly and decidedly that his master and mistress received

no visits, and he regretted that the Signor had troubled himself in

vain.

Hugo coolly drew out a card. "They will make an exception. It is

concerning an affair of importance, which requires a personal

interview. I will wait here in the meanwhile, as I am sure to be

received."

He sat down quietly on the stone bench, and this immovable confidence

impressed the porter so much that he really began to believe in the

importance of the pretended mission. He disappeared with the card,

while Hugo, quite unconcerned as to the possible consequences, awaited

the result of his impudent man[oe]uvre.

The result was unexpectedly favourable, as in a short time a servant

appeared and addressed the stranger, who had introduced himself by a

German name, in that language, and begged him to enter. He conducted

the Captain into a garden parlour and there left him alone, with the

intimation that his master would appear immediately.

"I must be a lucky man," said Hugo, himself somewhat surprised at this

unexpected, rapid success. "I wish Reinhold and the Marchese could see

me now. Inside the 'unapproachable' villa, expecting the lord and

master of the same, and only a few doors apart from the blonde Signora.

That is certainly enough for the first five minutes, and what my

charming brother could not have attained, although all doors fly open

before him. But now I must be charming,--in lies, that is to say--what

in the world shall I say to this nobleman, to whom I have had myself

announced concerning some important affair, without ever having heard a

syllable about him, or he of me? Ah! some one or other, on some of my

voyages has given me some commission. In the worst case I can always

have mistaken the person; in the meanwhile the acquaintance has been

begun, and the rest will follow of itself. I will arrange the

improvisation according to the character of the person; at any rate I

shall not leave the place without having seen the beautiful Signora."

He sat down and began to examine the room in a perfectly calm state of

mind. "My respected countrymen appear to belong to the happy minority,

who have at their disposal an income of several ten thousands. The

entire villa, with the park, rented for their exclusive use--the

arrangements made at great cost; one does not find this comfort in the

south--brought their own servants with them; I see no fewer than three

faces outside, on which German descent is written. Now the question

remains, have we to do with the aristocracy or the exchange? I should

prefer the latter; I can then pretend it is about some mercantile

affairs, while before some great nobleman, in the nonentity of a

citizen, I--how, Herr Consul Erlau!"

With this exclamation, made in boundless astonishment, Hugo started

back from the doorway in which the well-known figure of the merchant

now appeared. The Consul had certainly aged much in the course of

years; the once luxuriant dark hair appeared grey and scant; his

features bore an expression of unmistakable suffering, and the friendly

good will which formerly enlivened them had given way, momentarily at

all events, to a distant coldness, with which he drew near to his

guest.

"Herr Captain Almbach, you wish to speak to me?"

Hugo had already recovered from his astonishment, and resolved at once

to take every advantage in his power of this unexpectedly favourable

chance. He put forth all his capacities for pleasing.

"I am much obliged to you, sir. I hardly dared hope to be received

personally by you."

Erlau sat down, and invited his guest by a sign to do the same.

"I am also medically advised to avoid visits, but at the mention of

your name, I thought I ought to make an exception, as probably it

concerns my guardianship of your nephew. You come on your brother's

behalf?"

"On Reinhold's behalf?" repeated Hugo uncertainly, "How so?"

"I am glad that Herr Almbach has not attempted any personal

intercourse, as he did once already in writing," continued the Consul,

still in the same tone of cold restraint. "He appears, notwithstanding

our intentional seclusion, to know of his son's presence here. I

regret, however, being obliged to inform you, that Eleonore is not at

all disposed--"

"Ella? Is she here? With you?" exclaimed Hugo so eagerly, that Erlau

gazed at him in utter amazement.

"Did you not know it? Then Herr Captain Almbach, may I ask what has

really caused me the honour of your visit?"

Hugo considered for a moment; he saw plainly that Reinhold's name,

which had opened the doors for him, was nevertheless the worst

recommendation which he could bring, and made his decision accordingly.

"I must first of all clear up a mistake," replied he, with thorough

frankness. "I neither come as my brother's ambassador, which you seem

to imagine, nor am I here, indeed, in his interest or with his

knowledge. I give you my word for it, at this moment he has no

suspicion that his wife and son are in the neighbourhood, or, still

less, that they are even in Italy. I, on the contrary"--here the

Captain thought it necessary to mix a little invention with the

truth--"I on the contrary was put by chance on the track, and wished

first of all to satisfy myself of its correctness; I came to see my

sister-in-law."

"Which had better remain undone," said the Consul, with remarkable

coldness. "You will comprehend that such a meeting could only be

painful for Ella."

"Ella knows best how I have ever stood as regards the whole affair,"

interrupted Captain Almbach, "and she will certainly not refuse me the

wished for interview."

"Then I do so in my adopted daughter's name," declared Erlau

positively. Hugo rose--

"I know, Herr Consul Erlau, that you have gained a father's rights

towards my nephew, and also his mother, and honour these rights.

Therefore I entreat you to grant me this meeting. I will not wound my

sister-in-law with one word, with one recollection, as you appear to

dread, only--I should just like to see her."

Such a warm appeal lay in the words, that the Consul wavered; perhaps

he remembered the time when young Captain Almbach's courage had saved

his best ship, and how politely, but positively, he had rejected the

gratitude which the rich merchant was ready to bestow so oppressively.

It would have been more than thankless to have persisted in his sturdy

refusal towards this man--he gave way.

"I will ask if Eleonore be inclined for this interview," he said

rising; "she is already informed of your being here, as she was with me

when I received your card. I must ask you to be patient for a few

moments only."

He left the room. A short period of impatient waiting passed, when at

last the door was again opened, and a lady's dress rustled on the

threshold. Hugo went quickly towards the new comer.

"Ella! I knew you would not--" he stopped suddenly; his hand, stretched

out in welcome, dropped slowly, and Captain Almbach stood as if rooted

to the ground.

"You do not seem to recognise me quite," said the lady, waiting in vain

for the rest of the greeting, "am I so much altered?"

"Yes, very much," said Hugo, whose glance still hung in intense

astonishment on the figure of the lady before him. The impudent,

confident sailor, who had hitherto always shown himself equal to every

circumstance in his life, stood now dumb, confused, almost stupified.

Who, indeed, could ever have deemed this possible!

This was what his brother's former wife had become, the shy, frightened

Ella, with the pale unlovely face, and the awkward timid manner! Now

only could one see how the dress had sinned, in which Eleanor Almbach

always appeared like the maidservant, and never like the daughter of

the house, and also that enormous cap, which, as if made for the brow

of a person of sixty, had covered the youthful woman's head day after

day. Every trace of all this had entirely disappeared. The light airy

morning dress let the still girlishly, slight, delicate figure display

itself in its full beauty, and the rich ornament of her fair plaits,

which were now worn uncovered, encircled her head in all their heavy,

glimmering, golden glory. Marchese Tortoni had not seen the face of the

"blonde Signora," but Hugo saw it now, and during this contemplation of

some seconds' duration, he asked himself, again and again, what had

really taken place in these features, which were once so stolid and

vacant that one reproached them with stupidity, and which now appeared

so full of intellect and thought, as if a ban had been lifted from off

them, and something, never suspected in them, awakened to life.

Certainly around the mouth there lay a line of tender, unconquered

pain, and her brow was shaded by a sadness it had formerly not known,

but no more did her eyes seek the ground timidly, as if veiled; now

they were clear and open, and they had truly forfeited none of their

former beauty. Ella appeared to have learned not to hide any longer

from the gaze of strangers that with which nature had endowed her. When

she was eighteen, every one asked, shrugging his shoulders, "how does

this wife come by that husband's side?" At eight and twenty, she was an

apparition, fitted to compete with any one. How heavily must the burden

and chains of her parents' house have rested upon the young wife, when

only a few years in freer, nobler surroundings had sufficed to remove

the former shroud, to the very last morsel, and to loose the wings of

the butterfly. The almost incredible alteration proved of what her

youthful education was guilty.

"You wished an interview with me, Herr Captain Almbach?" began Ella, as

she seated herself upon an ottoman, "May I offer you a seat." Words and

bearing were as assured and easy, as if coming from a perfect woman of

the world receiving a visitor, but also distant and cool, as if she had

no deeper concern in this visit. Hugo bowed, a slight colour tinged his

cheeks, as he, following the invitation, sat down beside her.

"I begged for it. Herr Consul Erlau thought himself obliged to deny me

this interview in your name, but I persisted in a direct appeal to you.

I had more confidence in your goodness, my dear Madame."

She looked inquiringly with open eyes at him, "Are we become such

strangers? Why do you give me this name?"

"Because I see that my visit here is considered as an intrusion to

which I have no right, which I was not utterly denied, only on account

of the name which I bear," replied Hugo, rather bitterly. "Herr Consul

Erlau made me feel that already, and now I experience it a second time,

and yet I can only repeat to you, that without the knowledge or on

behalf of another, am I here, and that the other up to this moment has

no suspicion of your vicinity."

"Then, I beg you to allow this vicinity to remain still a secret," said

the young wife earnestly. "You will understand that I do not wish my

presence to be betrayed, and S---- is far enough to make that

possible!"

"Who told you that we are staying in S----?" asked Hugo, somewhat

struck by the certainty of this conviction.

She pointed to some newspapers lying on the table--

"I read this morning that two of the greatest musical celebrities were

expected there. The news has been delayed, as I see, and you are your

brother's guest."

Hugo was silent; he had not courage to tell her how much nearer her

husband was, and he could easily explain the notice in the papers to

himself, as he knew of Beatrice's intended arrival. People were

accustomed always to name her and Reinhold together, and although the

latter was now even staying in Mirando, they considered his coming

as certain, the moment she arrived in S----. Indeed it was also a

pre-arranged meeting between the two, and could not be denied.

"But why this concealment?" asked he, leaving the dangerous point quite

untouched. "It is not you, Ella, who have to avoid or flee from a

possible meeting."

"No! but I will protect my boy at any cost from the possibility of such

a meeting."

"With his father?" Hugo laid a reproachful stress upon the last word.

"With your brother--yes!"

Captain Almbach looked up surprised. The tone sounded freezingly cold,

and a stony, icy look lay on the young wife's countenance, which all at

once displayed the expression of an unbending will, such as no one

would have expected in so pleasing an apparition.

"That is hard, Ella," said Hugo softly. "If you now render yourself

unapproachable--I can understand it, after all that has happened; but

why the boy also? Reinhold tried once already to communicate with his

child; you repulsed him."

Ella interrupted him--

"You have told me that you come without any commission, Hugo, and I

believe you; therefore this subject need not be discussed between us,

let it rest! I was greatly astonished to see you again here, in Italy.

Do you purpose remaining long?"

Captain Almbach took the hint given him, although somewhat taken aback

by it. He was so unaccustomed for his young sister-in-law, whom he had

almost always known as a silent, frightened listener, to govern the

conversation so entirely, and lead it with such decision and ease to

another topic when the former one had become painful to her.

"Most likely longer than I thought at first," said he, replying to her

question. "My stay was originally only intended to be a short one, but

a storm which caught us on the open sea, so dismantled the 'Ellida,'

that I only reached the Italian harbour with great difficulty, and for

the present cannot think of another voyage. The repairs will occupy

some months, and my leave has therefore been prolonged indefinitely. I

certainly never anticipated finding you here."

A shadow passed over the lady's face.

"We are here by medical advice," she replied sadly. "Weakness of his

chest, obliged my adopted father to seek the south; his wife has been

dead some years, and you know that he is childless. I had long since

received all the privileges of a daughter, so that, of course, I also

undertook the duties of one. The doctor insisted particularly upon this

place, which indeed seems to exercise a most beneficial effect, and

however much I might have desired to avoid Italy, I could not persuade

myself to allow the invalid, to whom my presence is a necessity, to

travel alone. We hoped to escape any painful meeting by avoiding the

town in which Signor Rinaldo lives, and chose the most lonely, retired

villa in order to obtain the greatest seclusion possible. Our

precautions were in vain, as I see; you were no sooner in my vicinity

than you discovered my whereabouts."

"I? Yes certainly," said Hugo with involuntary confusion. "And you

reproach me with it."

Ella smiled.

"No, but I wondered that Herr Captain Hugo still entertained sufficient

interest in the little cousin Ella, to insist so obstinately upon

seeing her, when he was at first refused. We thought we had guarded

amply against strange visits. You knew, nevertheless, how to force your

entrance, and this shows me that I even possessed friends in my former

life. Until to-day, I doubted it, but it is a fact which does me good,

and I thank you for it, Hugo."

She raised her eyes clearly and openly to him; and with a charming

smile, which made her face appear intensely lovely, she stretched out

her hand to him. But the kindly thanks met with no response. Captain

Almbach's brow burned deeply red, then he sprang up suddenly and pushed

her hand aside.

END OF VOL. I.

RIVEN BONDS.

A Novel,

IN TWO VOLUMES.

TRANSLATED BY

BERTHA NESS,

\_FROM THE ORIGINAL OF E. WERNER\_,

Author of "SUCCESS AND HOW HE WON IT,"

"UNDER A CHARM," &c.

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RIVEN BONDS.

CHAPTER I.

"No!" said Captain Almbach. "That cannot be! I have to make a

confession to you, Ella, at the risk of your showing me to the door."

"What have you to confess to me?" asked the astonished Ella.

Hugo looked down.

"That I am still the 'adventurer,' whom you once took so sternly to

task. It did not improve him certainly, but he never attempted since to

approach you with his follies, and cannot to-day either. To make my

tale short, I had no idea you were the inhabitant of this villa, when I

directed my steps here. I had myself announced to a perfectly strange

gentleman, because Marchese Tortoni had spoken of a young lady, who

lived here in complete seclusion, and yes--I knew before hand, that you

would look at me in this way--"

Her glance had indeed met him sadly and reproachfully; then she turned

silently away and looked out of the window. A pause ensued--Hugo went

to her side.

"It was chance which brought me here now, Ella. I am waiting for my

lecture."

"You are free, and have no duty to injure," said the young wife,

coldly. "Besides, my opinion in such matters can hardly have any

influence upon you, Herr Captain Almbach."

"And so Herr Captain Almbach must retire, to find the doors closed

against him next time, is it not so?" Unmistakable agitation was heard

in his voice. "You are very unjust towards me. That I, thinking to find

perfect strangers here, did undertake an adventure--well, that is

nothing new to me; but that I was guilty of the boundless folly of

confessing it to you, although I had the best excuse for deception,

that is very new, and I was only forced to it by your eyes, which

looked at me so big and enquiringly, that I became red as a schoolboy,

and could not go away with a lie. Therefore I hear Herr Captain Almbach

again, who, thank God, had disappeared from our conversation for the

last quarter of an hour."

Ella shook her head slightly.

"You have spoiled all my pleasure in our meeting now, certainly----"

"Did it please you? Did it really?" cried Hugo, interrupting her

eagerly, with sparkling eyes.

"Of course," said she, quietly. "One is always pleased, when far away,

to find greetings and remembrances from home."

"Yes," said Hugo, slowly. "I had quite forgotten that we are country

people also. Then you only recognised the German in me? I must confess

honestly that my feelings were not so purely patriotic when I saw you

again."

"Notwithstanding the unavoidable disillusion which your discovery

prepared for you?" asked Ella, somewhat sharply.

Captain Almbach looked at her unabashed for a few seconds.

"You make me suffer greatly for the imprudent confession, Ella. Be it

so! I must bear it. Only one question before I go, or one petition

rather. May I come again?"

She hesitated with her reply; he came a step nearer.

"May I come again? Ella, what have I done to you that you would banish

me also from your threshold?"

There lay a reproach in the words, which did not fail to make an

impression upon her.

"I do not do so either," replied she, gently. "If you would seek me

again, our door shall not be closed to \_you\_."

With quick movement, Hugo caught her hand, and carried it to his lips,

but those lips rested on it unusually long, much longer than is

customary in kissing a hand, and Ella appeared to think so, as she drew

it somewhat hastily away. Equally hastily Captain Almbach drew himself

up; the slight red tint which had before lain on his forehead was there

again, and he, who was at other times never at a loss for a civility or

suitable reply, said now merely monosyllabically--

"Thank you. Until we meet again, then!"

"Until we meet again!" replied Ella, with a confusion that contrasted

strangely with the calm and decision which she had shown throughout the

whole interview. It almost seemed as if she repented the permission

just given, and which still she could not withdraw.

A few minutes later, Captain Almbach found himself in the open air, and

slowly he began his return to Mirando. He had again carried out his

will, and fulfilled the promise made so confidently that morning. But

he seemed little inclined to make much of his triumph. Looking back to

the villa, he passed his hand across his forehead, like some one

awaking from a dream.

"I believe that the elegiac atmosphere of Mirando has infected me," he

muttered, angrily. "I begin to look upon the simplest things from the

most fantastically, romantic point of view. What is there, then, in

this meeting that I cannot get over it? The Erlau drawing-rooms have

been a good school to be sure, and the pupil has learned unexpectedly,

quickly, and easily. I suspected something of that for long, and

yet--folly! What is it to me if Reinhold learn at last to repent his

blindness! And she does not even know how near he is, so near that a

meeting cannot be avoided much longer. I fear any attempt at

approaching her would cost Reinhold much dearer than that first one.

What a singularly icy expression there was in her face when I hinted at

the possibility of a reconciliation! That;" here Hugo breathed more

freely, perhaps, in unacknowledged but great satisfaction--"that said,

No! to all eternity. And if chance or fate lead them together, now, it

is too late--now \_he\_ has lost her."

On the mirror-like blue sea a boat glided, which, coming from S----,

bore in the direction of Mirando. The bark's elegant exterior showed

that it was the property of some rich family, and the two rowers wore

the livery of the Tortonis. Nevertheless, for the gentleman, who

besides these two was the sole occupant of the boat, neither the rapid

motion nor the magnificent panorama all around appeared to possess the

slightest interest. He leant back in his seat, with closed eyes, as if

asleep, and only looked up at last when the boat lay to at the marble

steps, which led directly down from the villa's terrace to the sea. He

stepped out. A sign dismissed the two men, who, like all the Marchese's

servants, were accustomed to pay to their master's celebrated guest,

the same respect as to himself. A few strokes of the oars carried the

boat to one side, and immediately after it was anchored in the little

harbour away by the park.

Reinhold stepped on to the steps, and ascended them slowly. He came

from S----, where Beatrice had, in the meantime, arrived. As usual, the

actress here, also, where all foreigners and inhabitants of position

assembled for their \_villegiatura\_, was surrounded by acquaintances and

admirers, and Reinhold no sooner found himself at her side than the

same fate, and, indeed, to a greater extent, became his. In Beatrice's

vicinity there was no rest and no relaxation for him; she dragged him

at once into the vortex with her. The hours, which he intended to spend

with her, had become days, which in excitement and distraction did not

yield the palm to the last weeks in town, and after having accompanied

her yester evening to a large fête, which had continued the whole night

until morning's dawn, he had torn himself away at day-break, and thrown

himself into the boat in order to return to Mirando.

He drew a deep breath at the quiet and loneliness around him,

undisturbed even by a word of greeting or welcome. Cesario, as he knew,

had early this morning undertaken an expedition to the neighbouring

island, in Hugo's company, from which both were only expected back

towards evening, and for strangers the villa was not yet accessible.

The young Marchese did not like to be disturbed in the seclusion of his

\_villegiatura\_, and his steward had received orders not to allow any

strange visitors to enter during his residence, an order which was

carried out most strictly, to the great dissatisfaction of travellers,

by whom Mirando was considered a favourite goal for excursions. The

estate, with its extensive gardens, and magnificent buildings, which in

the north would certainly have been called a castle, and here merely

bore the modest name of a villa, was celebrated far and near, not only

on account of its paradise-like situation and the boundless view over

the sea, but also because of the rich art-treasures which it concealed

inside, and which now merely charmed the eyes of the few who had the

good fortune of being permitted to call themselves the Marchese's

guests.

Short of rest, tired, and yet unable to seek repose and sleep, Reinhold

threw himself on to one of the marble benches in the shade of the

colonnade; he felt strained to the utmost exhaustion. Yes, these sultry

Italian nights, with their intoxicating perfume of flowers, and their

moonlight quiet, or the noisy clamour of a feast, these sunshiny days,

with the ever-blue sky, and the glowing splendour of the earth's

colours, they had given him everything of which he had ever dreamed in

the cold, dreary north; but they had also cost him the best part of his

life's strength. The time was long since passed when all existence

appeared to be only one course of glowing intoxication and of inspiring

dreams to the young composer. This had lasted for months, for years;

then gradually weariness came on, and at last the awaking, when this

beautiful world, sparkling with colour, lay so empty and cold before

him, where the ideals collapsed, and freedom, once so fiercely longed

for, became an endless desert, to which no duty, but also no desire set

a limit. With the fetters which he had broken so eagerly and ruthlessly

he had also lost the reins; he wandered out into the boundless, and the

boundlessness had become a curse to him.

Certainly, the internal Prometheus-like spark preserved the artist from

the fate which overtook so many others, from that helpless sinking into

a sensation of being surfeited and indifferent to everything; but the

same power which ever and ever again forced him out of it, drove him

helpless hither and thither, seeking the only thing which was wanting,

and ever would be wanting. Italy in all its beauty was not able to give

it to him, not Beatrice's glowing love, not art, which had offered him

the fullest wealth of fame--the phantom melted so soon as he stretched

out his arms towards it. And even if the wondrous flora of the south

had displayed itself to him in all its exhilarating glory, still he

would not have found the blue flower of the fairy legends.

Reinhold started up suddenly from his dreams, something had disturbed

him in them. Was it a step, a rustle?--he raised himself, and, with

extreme surprise, saw a lady standing only a few paces distant on the

terrace, gazing out over the sea. What could it mean? How did this

stranger come here, now when Mirando was not accessible to visitors;

she could only a few minutes since have passed through the open door

leading into the saloon, which contained the celebrated collection of

pictures, belonging to the villa, and appeared to have remarked the

solitary dreamer in the colonnade as little as he had remarked her.

Reinhold had long since become indifferent to woman's beauty, but

involuntarily this apparition enchained him. She stood under the shadow

of one of the gigantic vases which ornamented the terrace; only the

bowed head was caught by the full sunlight, and the heavy blonde plaits

gleamed in the rays like spun gold. Her face was half averted. Her

delicate, clear and nobly chiselled profile could hardly be seen. Her

slight figure in its airy white robes leaned lightly in an undeniably

graceful attitude against the marble balustrade; her left hand rested

on it, while the drooping right one held her straw hat decorated with

flowers. She stood immovable, quite lost in contemplation of the sea,

and had evidently no idea that she was observed.

It was still early in the day. The morning had risen bright and clear

out of the sea, and now lay smiling sunnily in dewy freshness over the

whole country. A blue mist still encircled the mountains and the

distant coasts, whose lines seemed to tremble as if blown with a breath

on the horizon, and the still moist air was quivering as if with a

silvery light. There was something fairy-like in this morning hour and

this surrounding, above all in yonder white figure with the golden

glimmering hair, and Mirando itself, with its white marble pillars and

terraces, appeared like a fairy castle, which had risen out of the

liquid depths. Deep blue was the arching sky above, and deep blue the

sea laving its feet. The scent of flowers was wafted hither from the

gardens, but ghostly silence reigned everywhere, as if all life were

banished or sunk in sleep. No sound anywhere, nothing but the gentle

splashing of the sea, ever the same dream-like murmur of the waves,

which kissed the marble steps, and before one nothing to be seen save

the blue, heaving expanse, which extended far away into boundless

distance.

Reinhold remained motionless in his position, he would not disturb the

charm of this moment by any movement. It was as if a breath of the old

legendary poems of his home were wafted to him, long forgotten but

rising now suddenly before him with all their melancholy charms.

Suddenly this deep calm was interrupted by the clear joyfulness of a

child's voice. A boy of about seven or eight rushed up the steps of the

terrace, a large shining mussel shell in his hand, which he had picked

up somewhere on the shore. The child was evidently most delighted with

his discovery, his whole little face beamed, as, with glowing cheeks

and streaming locks, he hastened towards the lady, who turned her head

round at his cry.

With a half suppressed exclamation, Reinhold sprang up and remained as

if rooted to the ground. The moment she had turned her face completely

towards him, he recognised the stranger, who bore Ella's features and

yet could not be Ella. Bewildered, deadly pale, he stared at the lady,

whose poetical appearance he had just been admiring, and who yet, in

every feature, resembled his so despised, and at last forsaken wife.

She, too, had recognised him; the intense pallor which also overspread

her face, betrayed it, as did her sudden start backwards. She grasped

the marble balustrade as if seeking for support, but now the boy had

reached her and, holding the mussel aloft with both hands, cried

triumphantly--

"Mamma! dear mamma, see what I have found!"

This roused Reinhold from his stupor. Bewilderment, fright,

astonishment, all disappeared as he heard his child's voice. Following

the impulse of the moment, he rushed forward, and stretched out his

arms, to draw the boy eagerly to his breast.

"Reinhold!"

Almbach stopped as if struck; but the name was not for him, only for

the boy, who, immediately obeying her call, hastened to his mother.

With a rapid movement she placed both arms around him, as if to protect

and conceal her child, and then drew herself up. The pallor had not

left her face yet, her lips still trembled, but her voice sounded firm

and energetic.

"You must not trouble strangers, Reinhold. Come, my child! We will

go."

Almbach started, and stepped back a pace; the tone was as new to him as

the whole person of her, whom he once called his wife. Had he not

recognised her voice, he would have believed more than ever in a

delusion. The little one, on the contrary, looked up in surprise at the

rebuke. He had not even gone near to the strange gentleman, and

certainly had not troubled him, but he saw in his mother's

colourlessness and excitement that something unusual had occurred, and

the child's large blue eyes fixed themselves defiantly, almost

antagonistically upon the stranger, who, he guessed instinctively, was

the cause of his mother's alarm.

Ella bad already recovered herself. She turned to go, her arm still

held firmly round her boy's shoulder, but Reinhold now stepped hastily

in her way--she was obliged to stop.

"Will you be so good as to allow us to pass?" said she, coldly and

distantly. "I beg you to do so."

"What does this mean, Ella?" exclaimed Reinhold, now in passionate

excitement. "You have recognised me, as well as I have you. Why this

tone between us?"

She looked at him; in that glance lay the whole reply; icy-cold,

annihilating scorn; he had indeed never deemed it possible that Ella's

eyes could look thus, but he turned his to the ground beneath them.

"Will you be so good as to leave us the road free, Signor?" she

repeated in perfectly pure Italian, as if she imagined that he did not

understand German. There lay a positive tone of command in the words,

and Reinhold--obeyed. His self-possession quite lost, he moved aside

and let her pass. He saw how she descended the steps with the child,

how a servant below, in strange livery, who seemed to have waited,

joined them, and how all three hurried through the gardens; but he

himself still stood above on the terrace and tried to remember whether

he had been dreaming and the whole had not been merely a picture of his

imagination.

The noisy locking of the door which led to the picture gallery, brought

him back to his senses. A few steps took him there, and throwing the

door open roughly he entered the saloon, where the steward of Mirando

was just engaged in letting the blinds down again, which he had drawn

up to give a better light.

"Who was the lady with the child, who was just now on the terrace?"

With this hasty question, Reinhold rushed in upon the man, who seemed

shocked when he saw his master's guest before him, having believed him

still to be in S----; he hesitated with his reply in evident confusion.

"Pardon me, Signor, I had no idea that you had returned already, and as

Eccellenza and the Signor Capitano are only expected this evening, I

ventured----"

"Who was the lady?" persisted Reinhold, in feverish impatience, without

paying attention to the answer. "Where did she come from?--quick, I

must know it!"

"From the villa Fiorina," said the steward half-wonderingly,

half-frightened at the questioner's eagerness. "The strange lady wished

to see Mirando, and let her servant apply for her. Eccellenza has

certainly ordered that no visitors are to be admitted during his

residence here, but this morning no one was at home, so I thought I

might make an exception;" he paused, and then added, in a tone of

entreaty, "It would be sure to cause me great trouble with Eccellenza,

if Signor Rinaldo were to tell him."

"I? no," said Reinhold, absently, "what was the lady's name?"

"Erlau, if I understood rightly."

"Erlau?--oh!" Almbach passed his hand over his forehead; "That is all,

Mariano, thank you," said he, and left the saloon.

\* \* \* \* \*

The day had become burningly hot, nor did the evening bring coolness or

refreshment. Air and sea did not appear to be stirred by any breath,

and the sun went down in hot clouds of mist. In the villa Fiorina also

they seemed to suffer from the oppression. The inhabitants confined

themselves probably to the cooler rooms, as the jalousies had not been

opened the whole day, and the glass doors which led to the terrace

remained closed. The German family hardly occupied half of the

capacious dwelling which it had engaged entirely for itself. A

few rooms to the right of the garden saloon were arranged for the

Consul--those on the opposite side were inhabited by his adopted

daughter, with her child; the servants were located in the back

apartments, and the rest remained empty.

The evening was already far advanced when Ella entered the garden

saloon, which was illuminated by a lamp. The Consul had retired to

rest, and she came from her boy, whom, after he had fallen asleep, she

had left to his attendant's care. Perhaps it was the dim light which

made her face still appear pale; the colour had not returned to it

since the morning, even although her features seemed perfectly calm.

She opened the glass door and stepped out on to the terrace. Outside,

perfect darkness reigned already; no moon's rays pierced the clouds

which still enveloped the sky, no breath of wind from the sea moved the

blooming shrubs; sultry and heavy, the air seemed regularly to weigh

upon the earth, and the sea lay in idle repose, almost motionless. It

was alarming in this dense stillness and darkness, yet Ella appeared to

prefer this to remaining in the lighted garden saloon. She stood

leaning against the stone balustrade, as in the morning, partially

still in the pale circle of light which fell through the open door on

to the terrace, and, although indistinctly, displayed the slight form.

A few moments may have passed thus, when she was startled by a noise

near her. With a low cry, she tried to take refuge in the house, as

close by her there stood a tall, dark man's figure; at the same moment,

however, a hand was laid upon her arm, and a suppressed voice said--

"Be composed, Ella, it is neither a robber nor a thief who stands

before you, although you have forced me to choose the path of such an

one."

The young wife had recognised Reinhold's voice at the first word, but

she only drew back nearer to the threshold of the glass door.

"What do you desire, Signor?" said she coldly, in Italian. "And what

does this intrusion at such an hour mean?"

Reinhold had followed her, but he did not again attempt to touch her

arm, or even go near her.

"Above all, I wish you to have the goodness to speak German to me,"

retorted he, with difficulty restraining his excitement. "I have not

quite forgotten our own language, as you seem to suppose. Whence do I

come? From yonder boat! The terrace, at least is not so inaccessible as

the doors of your house, which remained closed to me."

He pointed towards the sea. It was a risk to ascend the high stone

terrace from a tossing boat, but Reinhold did not seem to be in a mood

to think of the possibility of danger. He had apparently been there

already when she came out, and now continued more excitedly--

"It is probably not unknown to you that I have been here once already

this morning. But you refused me, or rather Erlau did, because as a

matter of course I was not so wanting in tact as to enquire for you. He

neither received me nor the note, which contained my petition, yet you

must both have known what brought me here, so nothing but self-help

remained. You see I have gained admittance after all."

He spoke with keenest bitterness. The proud composer felt the double

rejection which he had experienced to-day to be a deadly insult. One

could hear how he struggled with his pride, even now, for every word,

and it must have been a powerful motive which brought him here,

notwithstanding all, and by such a path! His wife had clearly no share

in it, as he stood opposite her in gloomy, unbending defiance. As a

boy, Reinhold Almbach could never bear to humble himself, not even when

he knew himself to be wrong, and during the latter years he had too

often gained the dangerous experience that any error he committed was

covered by the right of genius, which may permit itself to do almost

anything.

While these last words were being spoken, they had entered the garden

below. In the middle of it Ella stopped.

"Signor Rinaldo appears to have mistaken his way, this time," said she,

certainly in German, but in the same tone as before. "Yonder in S----,

lies the villa where Signora Biancona resides, and it can only be a

mistake which landed his boat at our terrace."

The reproach hit him; Almbach's defiant look sank, and for a few

moments he was at a loss for a reply.

"I do not seek Signora Biancona this time," replied he at last, "and

that I am not permitted to seek Eleonore Almbach, she showed me

sufficiently this morning. It was not my intention to offend you again

by sight of me; it would have been spared you, had you acceded to my

written request. I came to see my child alone."

With a rapid step the young wife reached the bedroom door, and placed

herself before it. She did not speak a word, but in the evident

internal emotion there lay such an energetic protest, that Reinhold

immediately understood her intention.

"Will you not allow me to embrace my son?" asked he, angrily.

"No," was the firm reply, given with the most positive determination.

Reinhold was about to fly into a passion; she saw how he clenched his

fist, but he forced himself to be calm.

"I see that I did your late father injustice," said he, bitterly; "I

took it to be his work that all news of my boy was withheld from me.

Did you read my first letter yourself, and leave it unanswered?"

"Yes."

"And returned the second unopened?"

"Yes."

Reinhold's face changed from red to white; mutely he gazed at his wife,

from whose lips he had never heard an expression of her own will, much

less any opposition--whom he only knew as humbly and silently obedient,

and who now dared to refuse with such decision to grant him what he

considered his own right.

"Take care, Ella," said he, firmly, "whatever may have taken place

between us, whatever you may have to reproach me with, this tone of

scorn I will not endure; and above all, I will not tolerate being

refused the sight of my boy. I will see my child."

The demand sounded almost threatening. The young wife's pale cheeks

began to colour slightly, but she did not move from her place.

"Your child?" asked she, slowly; "the boy belongs to me, me only; you

lost every right to him when you left him with me."

"That may still be questioned," cried Almbach, beginning to wax

furious. "Are we judicially separated? Has the law given Reinhold to

you? He remains my son, whatever there may be between you and me; and

if you refuse me my rights as a father any longer, I shall know how to

enforce them."

The threat was not without effect, but it quite failed in its purpose.

Ella drew herself up, and exclaimed with quivering lips, but with great

energy--

"You will not do that; you have not the conscience to do it, and if you

had, there is, thank God, another power to which I can appeal, and

which is, perhaps, not quite so indifferent to you as the family bonds

and duties which you broke so lightly. The world would learn that

Signor Rinaldo, after he had forsaken his wife and child for years, and

had not enquired after them, now dares to threaten his wife with the

same laws which he scorned and spurned with his feet, because she does

not choose that her boy should call him father; and all your fame, and

all the adoration yonder, would not protect you from the merited

contempt."

"Eleonore!"

It was a cry of rage which escaped his lips as she uttered the last

word, and his eyes flashed in terrific wildness down upon the delicate

form standing before him. Once Reinhold's passion was excited to its

utmost, it knew no limits, and all around him were wont to tremble.

Even Beatrice, although so little his inferior in violence, dared not

at such moments irritate him farther; she knew where the line was

drawn, and once this was reached she always yielded. Here it was

different; the first time for years he was stranded by another's will;

before the eyes which met his own, so clear and large, his defiance

succumbed altogether--he was silent.

"You see yourself that it would be worse than mockery were you to

resort to law," said his wife, more calmly.

Reinhold leaned heavily against the seat near which he stood. Was it

shame or anger made the hand tremble which buried itself in the

cushion?

"I see that I laboured under a serious mistake when I believed I knew

the woman who was called my wife for two years," replied he, in a

singularly compressed tone. "Had you only once shown yourself to be the

same Eleonore whom I meet now, much would have remained undone. Who

taught you this language?"

"The hour in which you forsook me," replied she, with annihilating

coldness, as she turned away.

"That hour seems to have given you much more that was once foreign to

you--the pleasure of revenge, for example."

"And the pride, which I never knew, towards you," completed Ella. "I

had first to be crushed to the ground, but it awoke and showed me what

I owed to myself and my child, the only thing you had left to me, the

only thing that kept me up; for his sake I began again to learn, to

work, when the time for learning lay far behind me; for his sake I

roused myself above the prejudices and trammels of my education, and

gave my life a new direction when my parents' death made me free. I

must be everything now to the child, as it was everything to me, and I

had sworn that my child should never be ashamed of its mother, as his

father was ashamed of her, because externally she was inferior to other

women."

Almbach's brow was dyed a deeper red at the last words--

"It was not my intention to dispute Reinhold with you," said he

hastily. "I only wished to see him in your presence if it must be. You

know only too well what a weapon the child is in your hands, and you

use it mercilessly against me, Ella." He came nearer to her and for the

first time there was something like a tone of entreaty in his voice.

"Ella, it is our child. This link at least extends out of the past into

the present, the only one between us which is not broken. Will you

break it now? Shall the chance which brought us together really remain

merely chance? It lies in your hands to make it a turning point of fate

which may perhaps be for the good of us both."

The hint was plain enough, but the young wife drew back, and on her

countenance again that expression, full of meaning--that "No!" spoke to

all eternity.

"For us both?" repeated she. "Then you really believe I could find

happiness by your side, after all you have done to me? Truly Reinhold,

you must be much impressed with your own value, or my worthlessness,

that you venture to offer it to me. Certainly, when could you have

learned respect for me? It was not possible in my parents' house. I was

brought up in obedience and submission, and I brought both to my

husband. What was my reward for it? I was the last in his house, and

the last in his heart. He never thought it worth while to ask if the

woman, to whom he had bound himself, was really so contracted in mind,

so incapable of appreciating anything higher, or if she were only

rendered timid by the oppression of her mode of bringing up, from which

we both suffered. He rejected my shy attempt to approach him,

scornfully, woundingly, and let me feel hourly and daily that only the

merit of being his child's mother gave me any claim upon his endurance.

And when art and life were opened to him, he cast me aside as a burden,

which he had borne long enough with dislike; he gave me up to be the

talk of the world, to scorn, to dishonouring pity; he left me for the

sake of another, and at this other's side never asked if his wife's

heart were broken at the death-stroke he had dealt her--and now, you

think that only one word is needed to undo all this! You think you only

require to stretch out your hand to draw to yourself again that which

once you rejected! Do you think it? No; one cannot play so with what is

holiest upon earth; and if you thought the despised, repulsed Ella

would obey the first sign by which you signify that you would take her

back into favour, I tell you now she would rather die with her child,

than follow you once more. You have set yourself free from your duties

as husband and father, and we have learnt to do without the husband and

father. You have shown it, plainly enough, that we are the 'bonds'

which fettered the wings of your genius--well, now they are broken,

broken by you, and I give you my word for it, they shall never oppress

you again. You have your laurels and your--muse; what do you want with

wife and child also?"

She ceased, overcome with excitement, and pressed both hands against

her stormily heaving bosom. Reinhold had become deadly pale, and yet

his eyes hung on her as if enchained. The lamp-light fell full upon her

face and the fair plaits as on that evening when he announced the

separation so mercilessly. But what had become of that Ella who then

hung timidly and shyly on his looks, and obediently followed every

sign, every mood? No one trait of her was to be discovered in the being

who stood drawn up opposite him, so haughty and proud, and who hurled

back so energetically upon him the humiliations she had once received.

They could burn, these blue fairy-tale eyes, burn in glowing

indignation; he saw this now, but he saw also, for the first time, how

wondrously beautiful they were, how ravishing the whole appearance of

the young wife--in the excitement, and amid the anger and rage of the

highly irritated husband, something flashed out which almost resembled

admiration.

"Is that your final word?" asked he at last, after a pause of some

seconds.

"My final one!"

With a rapid movement, Reinhold drew himself up. All his antagonism and

pride broke forth again at this mode of refusal. He went towards the

door, while Ella remained immovable at her post, but at the threshold

he stopped once more and turned back.

"I did not ask if my wife's heart were broken by the death-stroke which

I dealt her," repeated he in a smothered voice; "Did you feel it at all,

Ella?"

She was silent.

"I certainly did not believe it then," continued Reinhold bitterly,

"and to-day's meeting makes me doubt more than ever that your heart

suffered from a separation which certainly wounded your pride more

deeply than I had ever deemed possible. You need not guard the door so

anxiously; I see, indeed, that I must first dash you aside in order to

reach the child, and that courage I possess not. You have conquered

this time; I renounce my purpose of seeing him again. Farewell!"

He went. She heard his steps outside on the terrace, then the rustle of

the shrubs as he pushed his way through them, and at last the stroke of

the oars, which bore the boat away from the shore. The wife breathed

more freely, and left the place she had defended so energetically. She

went to the glass door; perhaps a slight anxiety arose in her as to

whether the venturesome leap from the terrace would be as successful as

the ascent to it had been, but in the darkness nothing could be

distinguished. As before, the sea lay in idle calm. Far above, the

still, sultry night spread its wings, and flowers bloomed all around,

but every trace of Reinhold had disappeared.

CHAPTER II.

The clear balmy spring days were followed by summer's burning glow. The

gulf and its environs lay day after day illuminated by the sun in all

their beauty, but also in the almost tropical heat of the south; only

the sea breeze brought any coolness, so that the sea was the object of

most excursions which were now undertaken.

This repose of nature, which had continued for some weeks, was followed

at last by an outbreak; a thunderstorm raged in the air, and stirred up

the ocean to its innermost depths. The storm had come up so quickly,

broken loose so suddenly, that no one had been prepared for it, and it

had lasted for more than an hour already, with undiminished fury.

A boat shot through the foaming waves, and, apparently overtaken by the

storm, found itself struggling with the billows. For some time it had

been in danger of being seized without hope of rescue, and dashed out

into the open sea, but now with full sails set it flew towards the

coast, and after a few futile attempts succeeded at last in being

landed.

"That is really racing with the storm for a wager," cried Hugo Almbach,

as he, wet through with rain and spray, was the first to spring on

shore. "For this once we have fortunately escaped the wet embrace of

the goddess of the sea. We were near enough to her."

"It was lucky having such a true sailor with us," said Marchese

Tortoni, following him in a not less wet condition. "It was a

master-work, Signor Capitano, bringing us safely on shore in such a

storm. We should have been lost without you." Reinhold lifted the half

unconscious Signora Biancona, who clung to him, trembling and deadly

pale, out of the boat. "For heaven's sake, calm yourself, Beatrice! The

danger is over," said he impatiently, as the last occupant of the boat,

the English gentleman, who had been present at Hugo's former

\_incognito\_ discussion with Maestro Gianelli, also gained \_terra

firma\_.

In the meanwhile, Jonas poured forth all his contempt upon the two

sailors to whom the guidance had originally been entrusted, and who

fortunately did not understand the terms of praise addressed to them in

German.

"They call themselves sailors, they want to manage a ship, and when a

paltry storm comes on, they lose their heads and cry to their saints.

If my Herr Captain had not seized the rudder out of your hands, and I

taken the sails upon myself, we should now be lying below with the

sharks. I should like you to experience such a storm as our 'Ellida'

underwent before we ran in here, then you would know what a little

blowing on your gulf means."

The little blowing would have been looked upon by any one else than the

sailor as a regular stiff storm. At all events it had endangered the

lives of the party, and they owed their safety only to the energetic

guidance of Captain Almbach, who now turned aside from the Marchese's

and the Englishman's expression of thanks.

"Do not mention it, Signor! Such a trip is nothing new or unusual to

me. I only pitied you, on account of the disagreeable circumstances in

which you had been placed by the temper of a pretty woman."

"Yes, women are to blame for everything," muttered Jonas furiously,

while Hugo continued in an undertone--

"I knew two hours ago what the sky and sea prophesied to us,

notwithstanding their bright appearance. You know how earnestly I

opposed the trip; however, Signora Biancona insisted positively upon

it, and condescended to scoff at the 'timid sailor,' who could not even

'venture upon his own element.' I think surely my courage will be

rather less doubtful in her eyes; hers on the contrary"--he broke off

suddenly, and made a few steps to the other side. "May I enquire how

you feel, Signora?"

Beatrice still trembled; but the sight of her opponent, who stood

before her like the perfection of politeness, and perfection of malice,

restored her consciousness to some extent. That he opposed the

expedition had been sufficient to make her insist upon it with intense

obstinacy, and render the other gentlemen deaf to all warning by her

mocking remarks. The deadly fear of the last hour had given her a

bitter lesson, certainly, and it was still more bitter to be obliged to

owe her life to Captain Almbach, who had become the hero of the day,

while she during the danger had shown herself anything but heroic.

"Thank you--I am better," answered she, still struggling between anger

and confusion.

"I am delighted to hear that," assured Hugo, as in the midst of the

rain he made her an unexceptionable drawing-room bow, "and now I shall

put myself at the head of an expedition of discovery into the interior.

Go on Jonas, reconnoitre the territory! Reinhold, you are no stranger

here in the neighbourhood; do you not know where we are?"

"No," replied Reinhold, after a short and rapid glance around.

"And you, Marchese Tortoni?"

Cesario shrugged his shoulders--

"I regret that I also am unable to give you any information. I seldom

leave the immediate environs of Mirando; besides, in such weather it is

almost impossible to know one's bearings."

This certainly was true; earth, sky and sea seemed to flow into one

another in rolling mist. He could see barely a hundred yards over the

raging sea, and not much farther over the land. No hills, no landmarks

were visible; a dense grey veil of fog imprisoned everything, and yet

Captain Almbach did not allow that to be any excuse.

"Unpractical, artist natures!" muttered he, annoyed. "They sit there

for months in their Mirando and go into ecstasies day after day about

the incomparable beauty of their gulf, but do not know the coast, and

if once they are a mile away from the great tourist highway, they have

no idea where they are. Lord Elton, will you be so good as come to my

side? I think we are both best suited to being pioneers."

Lord Elton, who at the first meeting had been much pleased with Hugo's

mischievous nature, and who had been highly impressed by him to-day,

acceded immediately to the request. With the same imperturbable calm

which he had shown before in danger, he placed himself at the sailor's

side and went forward, while the other gentlemen followed with

Beatrice.

"It appears to me that chance has thrown us on a rather benighted

coast," said Hugo, scoffingly, upon whose temper the weather did not

exercise the slightest influence. "According to my calculations, we

must be quite ten or twelve miles distant from S----, and on our left

some hills are faintly visible through the fog, with very suspicious

looking ravines. Gennaro's band is said to frequent these mountains.

What should you say, my Lord, if we were to taste some of the regular

Italian romance of horror?"

Lord Elton turned with sudden liveliness to the ravines pointed out,

which certainly looked unpleasant enough in the thick fog, and scanned

them attentively.

"Indeed, that would be very interesting."

"Provided there were a pretty 'brigandess' amongst them, not

otherwise," added Hugo.

"Gennaro's band has no woman with it. I have learned all particulars,"

said the former, seriously.

"What a pity! The band seems to be very uncivilised still, that it has

so little consideration for the natural wishes of its honoured guests.

However, that would be something for my Jonas--a life without women! If

he were to hear us he would desert and take his oath of allegiance to

Gennaro's flag; I must take care of him."

"Do not joke so thoughtlessly," interposed the Marchese. "Remember,

Signor, we have a lady with us, and are all unarmed."

"Excepting my Lord, who always carries a six chamber revolver with him

as a pocket match-box," said Hugo, laughing. "We others did not think

it necessary to load ourselves with weapons when we undertook this

harmless expedition. Besides, we have more efficacious protection

to-day than two dozen carabineers would give us. In this rain no

brigand would venture forth."

"Do you think so?" asked Lord Elton in unmistakable disappointment.

"Certainly, my Lord! and for my part I think it will be better to

forego the pleasure party in the mountains this time. Is it not also

remarkable that we two, the only non-artists in the party, are the only

two who appear to have any sense of the romance of the situation? My

brother," here Hugo lowered his voice, "walks by Signora Biancona like

an irritated lion; besides he is now in his lion's mood, and it is

wisest to approach him as little as possible. Signora never brought

tragic despair to such perfection of expression on the stage as at this

moment, and Marchese Cesario stares illogically into the mist instead

of admiring our highly effective expedition in the rain. Ah, there

something peeps out like a building, and Jonas returns from his

\_reconnaissance\_. Well, what is it?"

"A \_locanda\_!" reported Jonas, who had gone on in front and was

returning hastily. "Now we are sheltered," added he triumphantly.

"Heaven has mercy," cried Hugo, pathetically, as he turned round to

impart the welcome news to the others. The prospect of shelter being

near did indeed revive the sinking courage of the party; they redoubled

their steps, and soon found themselves in the covered entrance of the

house indicated.

"The rough sailor's cloak has been made enviably happy to-day," said

Captain Almbach, as he removed his garment from Signora Biancona's

shoulders in the most polite manner. "I knew we should require it

to-day, therefore I ventured to bring it with me. The cloak quite

protected you, Signora."

Beatrice pressed her lips hastily together, as with forced thanks she

returned the shielding wrap. It had been hard enough to accept it from

Captain Almbach's hand; however, he was the only person in possession

of such a thing, and no choice remained to her, if she did not wish to

be quite wet through. But like all passionate natures, she could not

endure mockery, and this detested courtesy of her opponent never gave

her the opportunity of decided antagonism towards him, and kept her

mercilessly fast within the limits of social requirements.

The \_locanda\_, which lay rather lonely by the shore away from the great

tourist highways, was not one of those which are frequented by more

distinguished guests, and left much to be wished for as regards

cleanliness and comfort, but the weather and their thoroughly damp

state did not allow the guests to be particular. At any rate there were

some apartments which were called guest chambers, and really at times

served young painters and wandering tourists as a night's quarters.

Beatrice was horrified on entering, and the Marchese looked with mute

resignation at these rooms, which were certainly very unlike those of

his Mirando; Lord Elton on the contrary reconciled himself better to

the inevitable, and so far as the two brothers were concerned, Reinhold

appeared quite indifferent to the style of the reception, and Hugo much

amused by it. They now learned also that they were quite twelve miles

distant from S----, and that another travelling party had already

sought refuge here from the storm. But fortunately it had arrived at

the beginning of the same, and in a carriage, therefore had not

suffered from the rain like the lady and gentlemen just reaching it, at

whose disposal all which the place contained was readily placed.

A quarter of an hour later, Hugo entered the general public and

reception-room, and with his foot softly pushed aside a black, bristly

object, which had laid itself just before the door with admirable

coolness, and now left its place grunting crossly.

"These dear little animals appear to be considered quite fit for a

drawing-room here; with us they are merely so in a roasted state," said

he, quietly. "I wanted to see where you were, Reinhold. My God, you are

still in your wet clothes. Why have you not changed?"

Reinhold, who stood at the window and gazed out at the sea, turned and

cast an abstracted look at his brother, who already, like the other

gentlemen, had made use of the padrone's and his son's Sunday clothes

brought hastily to them.

"Changed my clothes? Oh to be sure, I had forgotten."

"Then do it now!" urged Hugo. "Do you wish to ruin your health

entirely?"

Reinhold made an impatient deprecating gesture. "Leave me alone! What a

fuss about a storm of rain."

"Well, the rain storm was within a hair's breadth of being fatal to

us," said Captain Almbach, "and I can bear testimony, as pilot, that my

ship's crew behaved bravely, with the single exception of Donna

Beatrice. She made rather extensive use of her rights as a lady, first

by bringing us into danger, and then increasing its difficulties

tenfold."

"For which you have the triumph that she owes her life to you, as do we

all," suggested Reinhold, indifferently.

Hugo looked sharply at his brother. "Which in your case you seem to

value very slightly."

"I, why?"

He did not wait for the reply, and turned again to the window; but Hugo

was already at his side and put an arm round his shoulder.

"What is the matter, Reinhold?" asked he again in the tone of former

tenderness with which he once surrounded the younger brother--whom he

knew to be oppressed and miserable in their relations' house--and which

had now become so rare between them. Reinhold was silent.

"I hoped you would at last find the rest here which you sought for so

passionately," continued Captain Almbach, more seriously, "instead of

which you rush about worse than ever during the last week. We are

barely, even nominally, the Marchese's guests any more. You drag him

and us all into this constant change of distractions and excursions.

From ship to carriage, from carriage to mules, as if every moment of

repose or solitude were a torture to you, and once we are in the midst

of the excitement you are often enough like a marble guest amongst us.

What has happened?"

Reinhold turned, not violently but decidedly, away from Hugo's arms.

"That, I cannot tell you."

"Reinhold--"

"Leave me--I beg you."

Captain Almbach stepped back; he saw the repulse did not proceed from

temper; the faint, constrained tone, betrayed suppressed pain only too

well, but he knew of old that nothing could be gained from his brother

in such a state of mind.

"The storm seems to be at an end," said he, after a short pause, "but

at present it will be useless thinking of our return. We cannot under

any circumstances venture on the boisterous sea again to-day, and the

road will be in a bad enough state, too. I have promised the gentlemen

to obtain some information respecting it for them, as to whether our

return would be possible to-day, and if we may not expect a second

outbreak from the clouds. The verandah up there seems to offer a

tolerably free view; I will try it."

He left the room, and ascended the stairs. The verandah lay on the

other side of the house; it was a large stone adjunct, which probably

dated from a former more brilliant period of the building, now, like

the latter, neglected, half decayed, but extremely picturesque in its

ruins and with its creeping vines, which climbed around the pillars and

balustrade. A long open gallery led into it, and Hugo was just going to

pass along it, when he was arrested. A pigeon fluttered immediately

before him, chased by a boy in distinguished, fashionable-looking

dress. The tame bird, accustomed to mankind, did not think seriously of

flight; it flitted, as if playfully, along the floor, and only when the

little arms were stretched out to catch it, did it soar easily up to

the roof of the house, while the eager little follower rushed forward

in wild career, and so ran up against Captain Almbach.

"See there, Signorino, that was nearly becoming a collision," said

Hugo, as he caught the little one; but the latter, still full of

eagerness for the chase, stretched both hands up above, and cried

vivaciously in German--

"I do so want the bird. Can you not catch him for me?"

"No, my little sportsman, I cannot, unless I could put on wings," said

Hugo, playfully, as he examined the boy closer, astonished to hear his

own language. He started, looked intently into his eyes a few seconds,

and then lifted him up suddenly, to fold him with increasing tenderness

in his arms.

The little one permitted the caress to take place calmly, but somewhat

astonished. "You speak just like mamma and uncle Erlau," said he

confidingly. "I do not understand any one else, and at home I

understood all."

"Is your mamma here also?" enquired Hugo, hastily.

The child nodded, and pointed to the other side. Captain Almbach put

him down quickly, and stepped on to the verandah with him, where Ella

was coming towards them, and stood still in speechless surprise when

she saw her boy holding his uncle's hand.

"Must we meet here?" cried the latter, greeting her eagerly. "I thought

you never left Villa Fiorina, especially in such weather."

"It is the first excursion, too, that we have attempted," replied Ella.

"My uncle's continued improved health led us to undertake a visit to

the temple ruins in the mountains, but on our return journey the storm

overtook us, and as the horses threatened to become unmanageable, we

were glad to find shelter and refuge here."

"We are in the same plight," reported Hugo, "only it was worse for us,

as we came by water."

A momentary pallor spread over Ella's countenance.

"How? You are accompanied by your brother? I imagined it when I saw

you."

Hugo made a gesture of assent. "You told me you wished to avoid a

meeting at any price," began he again.

"I. wished it; yes!" interrupted she, firmly, "but it was impossible.

We have seen each other already."

"I thought so!" muttered Captain Almbach. "Thence his incomprehensible

reserve."

"Why did you not tell me you were guests of the owner of Mirando?"

asked Ella, reproachfully. "I believed you to be in S----, and went

unsuspectingly to see the villa. Only when too late did I learn who was

staying in our immediate neighbourhood."

Hugo scanned her face with a rapid glance, as if he wished to assure

himself of her self-possession.

"You spoke to Reinhold?" said he, in extreme anxiety, without noticing

her reproach. "Well, then?"

"Well, then?" replied she, with an almost harsh expression, "Do not be

afraid! Signor Rinaldo knows now that he must remain at a distance from

me and my son. He will acknowledge us at any possible meeting as little

as I shall acknowledge him."

"To-day it would certainly be impossible," replied Hugo seriously, "as

he is not alone. I fear, Ella, even that will not be spared you."

"You mean a meeting with Signora Biancona?" Ella could not preserve her

lips from trembling as she uttered the name, however much she forced

herself to appear calm, "Well, if it cannot be avoided, I shall know

how to endure it."

During this conversation they had drawn near the balustrade. The storm

was really over, and the sluices of heaven seemed to have exhausted

themselves at last, but the air still hung damp and laden with rain.

The wet vines, torn and disordered by the storm, still fluttered about,

and drops of rain ran down from the saint's picture in the badly

sheltered niche in the wall. Below rolled the sea, still wildly

disturbed; the usually so quiet sapphire blue mirror was only a wild

chaos of iron-grey currents and white foaming crests of waves, which

broke hissing and surging on the shore. But the mist, which until now

had enveloped the whole country in an impenetrable veil, commenced to

melt at last, and land-marks came out distinctly already; only around

the higher points did it still cling and hang, while in the west a

clearer gleam of light began to struggle with the disappearing clouds.

"How did you recognise my little Reinhold?" asked Ella suddenly, in

quite an altered tone. "You did not see him at your last visit, and

when you left H---- he had barely passed his first year of life."

Hugo leant down to the child, and lifted up its little head.

"How I recognised him?" replied he smiling; "by his eyes. He has yours,

Ella, and they are not so easily mistaken, even if they look out of

another's face. I should know them amongst hundreds."

His tone had almost a passionate warmth. The young wife drew slightly

aside.

"Since when have you begun to pay me compliments, Hugo?"

"Are compliments so unusual to you, Ella?"

"From your lips, certainly."

"Yes, certainly. I dare not venture upon what you allow to every one

else," said Captain Almbach, with a slight accent of bitterness. "The

attempt has once already obtained me the name of 'adventurer.'"

"It seems as if you could never forget that word," said Ella, half

smiling.

He threw his head back defiantly. "No, I cannot, as it pained me, and

therefore I cannot get over it, even until this moment."

"Pained you?" repeated Ella. "Can, indeed, anything pain you, Hugo?"

"That is to say, in other words--'have you then indeed a heart, Hugo?'

Oh, no, I do \_not\_ possess such an article at all; I came off badly at

the distribution of the same; you must surely have discovered that."

"I do not mean that," interposed Ella, "I give you all credit for the

warmest feelings."

"But no earnestness, no depth?"

"No."

Captain Almbach looked at her silently for a few seconds; at last he

said softly--

"Was it necessary, Ella, to give me such a harsh lesson, because T

ventured lately to kiss your hand, which perhaps displeased you? I know

what this 'No' means. You see I understand hints, and shall take note

of to-day's. You need not be afraid."

A slight blush passed over Ella's features, as she saw that he

understood her. "I did not wish to wound you, indeed not," she

answered, and put her hand out heartily, but Hugo stood obstinately

averted, and appeared not to notice it.

"Are you angry with me?" she asked. It was a touchingly-beseeching

tone, and it did not fail in its intention. Captain Almbach turned

round suddenly, and caught her offered hand, but in his answer

excitement and the old love of teasing struggled again, and were

suppressed with difficulty, as he replied--

"If my late uncle and aunt could see us now, they would observe with

intense satisfaction how their daughter holds the incorrigible Hugo by

the head--he who will usually obey no other reins--how she will not

permit him to go even one step beyond those limits which she finds it

good to draw. No, I am not angry with you, Ella--cannot be so--only you

must not make obedience too hard for me."

Both were still engaged in lively conversation, when Marchese Tortoni

and Lord Elton also entered the verandah from the gallery.

"Look there," said the former, astonished, to his companion, "that is

the reason why our Capitano's observations are so endlessly prolonged

that we are obliged to look him up at last. It is indeed an

extraordinary nature. An hour ago he forced our boat through storm and

waves, and now he plays the agreeable to a young signora."

"Yes, an extraordinary man," agreed Lord Elton, who had taken such a

blind fancy to Hugo, that he thought everything perfect in him.

The unbearable sultry air in the close rooms appeared to have driven

the whole party out on to the verandah, as immediately after the two

gentlemen Reinhold and Beatrice appeared also. If his wife were

prepared for this encounter, he certainly was not, as he became pale as

death, and made a movement as if to turn back; but at the same moment

the boy's fair, curly head appeared from behind the young wife, and, as

if transfixed, the father stood still. His glance directed openly to

the child, he appeared to have forgotten all else around him.

"What a lovely child!" cried Beatrice, admiringly, as she stretched her

arms out with perfect assurance; but now Ella started up! with a single

movement she had withdrawn the boy from the intended caress, and

pressed him firmly to herself.

"Excuse me, Signora," said she, coldly, "the child is shy with

strangers, and not accustomed to \_such\_ caresses."

Beatrice seemed somewhat offended at this repulse; however she saw

nothing more in it than a mother's over-due anxiety. She shrugged her

shoulders imperceptibly, and a scoffing side-glance fell upon the

stranger, but it soon remained enchained by the latter's appearance,

although recognition only took place on one side.

Before Ella's recollection, that evening stood forth in perfect

distinctness when she, alone, without knowledge of her people, her veil

drawn closely over her face, hastened to the theatre, in order to see

the one who had so completely alienated her husband. She had seen

Beatrice in all the brilliancy of her beauty and talent, intoxicated by

the cheers and homage of the public, and she bore the impression

ineffaceably away with her.

Beatrice, also, had only once seen Reinhold's wife, at the time when

she first began to be interested in the young composer, and Ella did

not then suspect anything of her evil influence. A short meeting of a

few minutes sufficed for the Italian to perceive that this quiet, pale

being, with downcast eyes, and that ridiculously matronly costume,

could not possibly bind such a man to her, and this knowledge was

extensive enough for her not to take any further notice of the young

wife. At all events it was impossible for her to associate the

colourless, half ridiculous, and half pitiful picture, which she

carried in her recollection, in the remotest degree with this

apparition, which stood so unapproachably proudly there, which held its

fair head so high and erect, and whose large blue eyes looked at her

with an expression which Beatrice was unable to explain to herself. She

only saw that the stranger was very haughty, but also very beautiful.

The two gentlemen seemed to think the latter also, as they came nearer,

bowing politely; Lord Elton gazed at Ella with open admiration, and the

Marchese, whom Hugo had often reproached for blamable indifference to

ladies' acquaintance, said with unusual eagerness to him--

"You appear to know the Signora. May we not also count upon the

pleasure of being introduced to her?"

Captain Almbach, as if to protect her, had placed himself by the young

wife's side. Between his eyebrows lay a frown which seldom appeared on

his cheerful brow, and it became still deeper at this request, which

could not possibly be refused. He therefore introduced the two

gentlemen, and named his countrywoman to them as Frau Erlau. He knew

that Ella, in order to anticipate unpleasant enquiries, to which the

name of Almbach might easily give rise, bore that of her adopted

father, so long as she remained in Italy.

Beatrice's eyes flashed with offended pride. She was not accustomed to

herself and Reinhold being mentioned last in such cases, and here she

was not even named at all. Captain Almbach ignored her altogether, and

appeared actually to do so on purpose, as the angry look which she cast

towards him was received with aggravating coldness; but even Cesario

was struck by the want of tact that his usually charming friend

displayed. While he uttered a few civilities to the strange lady, he

waited in vain for the continuation of the presentation, and as this

did not ensue, he undertook it, in order to atone for the Captain's

supposed impoliteness.

"You have forgotten the most important part, Signor," said he, turning

the affair quickly into a joke. "Signora Erlau would hardly be grateful

to you were you not to mention the very two names which, doubtless,

interest her most, and which are certainly not unknown to her. Signora

Biancona--Signor Rinaldo."

Beatrice, still enraged at the insult offered to her, only vouchsafed a

slight inclination of her head, which was similarly returned; but

suddenly she became observant. She felt how Reinhold's arm quivered,

how he let hers fall, and moved a step away from her as he bowed. She

knew him too well not to perceive that at this moment, notwithstanding

his apparent calm, he was terribly agitated. This intense pallor, this

nervous quivering of his lips, were the sure sign that he was forcibly

suppressing some passionate emotion. And what meant this glance, which

certainly only met that of the stranger for a few seconds, but it

flashed with unmistakable defiance, and melted again into perfect

tenderness when it fell on the child at her side. She herself, indeed,

stood quite impassive opposite him; not a feature moved in the

countenance cold as marble. But this face was also remarkably pale, and

her arms encircled her boy with convulsive firmness, as if he were to

be torn away from them. Yet she replied in a perfectly controlled

voice--

"I am much obliged to you, Signor. I had indeed not yet the pleasure of

knowing Italy's principal singer and Italy's celebrated composer."

Reinhold's blood surged through his veins, as again, and this time

before strangers, the endless breach was shown him which separated him

from his former wife. Now it was she who assigned him the place which

he had to occupy towards her; and that she could do it with such calm

and ease roused him to the uttermost.

"Italy's?" replied he, with sharp accentuation. "You forget, Signora,

that by birth I am a German."

"Really," replied Ella, in the same tone as before. "Indeed I did not

know that until now."

"One seems to be soon forgotten in one's home," said Reinhold, with

savage bitterness.

"But surely only when people estrange themselves. In this case it is

quite comprehensible. You, Signor, have found a second fatherland, and

he to whom Italy has given so much can easily forego home and its

recollections."

She turned to the other gentlemen, exchanged a few passing indifferent

words with them, and then gave her hand quietly and openly to Hugo in

farewell.

"You will excuse me, I must go to my uncle. Reinhold bid Captain

Almbach adieu."

It was only too true. Ella possessed a terrible weapon in the child,

and understood how to use it mercilessly. Reinhold experienced it at

this moment. To him she relentlessly denied the sight and presence of

his boy, although she knew with what passion he longed for him; and now

she let him see how this boy stretched out his little arms to his

uncle, and offered his mouth for a kiss; let him see it in the presence

of the woman for whom he had forsaken them both, and whose presence

forbade him to insist upon any of his rights as a father--the revenge

penetrated to the innermost depths of his heart.

Beatrice, quite contrary to her usual custom, had not taken part, even

by a single syllable, in the conversation; but her darkly burning

glance did not move from either of the two, between whom she suspected

some secret connection, although her thoughts were immeasurably far

from the truth itself. For the present, however, Ella now put an end to

any further conversation. She took little Reinhold by the hand, and

after a slight, haughty bow, which included the whole party, she left

the verandah with the child.

"You appear to have introduced some incognita to us, Signor Capitano,"

said Beatrice, with cutting scorn. "Perhaps you will be so good as to

explain to us exactly who the princess is who has just now condescended

to leave us."

"Yes, by heaven, very proud, but also very beautiful!" cried the

Marchese, his admiration breaking forth, while Hugo replied coolly--

"You are mistaken, Signora. I told you the name of the German lady."

The young Italian went up to his friend and laid his hand on the

latter's shoulder.

"Signora's mistake is easily understood. Do not you think so also,

Rinaldo?--Good God, what is the matter--what ails you?"

CHAPTER III.

"Nothing," said Reinhold, recovering himself with a great effort. "I am

not well; the stormy voyage has upset me. It is nothing, Cesario."

"I believe the best we can do is to think of our return," interrupted

Hugo, who deemed it necessary to distract attention from his brother,

as he saw that the latter could no longer control his agitation. "A

repetition of the storm need not be feared, and as the padrone has

promised to procure us a carriage, we can reach S---- this evening if

we start soon."

It was the first time that Beatrice cordially agreed to any proposition

made by Captain Almbach. Marchese Tortoni, on the contrary, considered

any great haste very unnecessary, and raised several objections. All at

once the lonely \_locanda\_ seemed to have gained remarkable attractions

for him. But as he could not succeed in his wishes--for Reinhold also

insisted upon an immediate return--he joined Captain Almbach, who went

to see about the carriage.

"I fear you made up some tale for your brother and me, when you

declared that a certain villa was inaccessible," said he, teasingly.

"It was suspicious at the time when you confessed your failure so

openly, and let our jokes fall so quietly upon you. I could swear that

I had seen this charming figure and those glorious fair plaits once

before, when I rode past the villa. I understand, of course, that you

would not make us the confidants of your adventure, still----"

"You are mistaken," interrupted Hugo, with a decision which made it

impossible to doubt his words. "There is no talk of an adventure here,

Signor Marchese. I give you my word upon it."

"Ah, then pardon me," said Cesario, seriously; "I believe your

apparently intimate acquaintance with the lady----"

"Arises from a former acquaintance in Germany," completed Captain

Almbach. "I certainly had no suspicion of this meeting, when I believed

I was seeking a perfect stranger in the Villa Fiorina; but I repeat it,

that the word 'adventure' must not be connected in the remotest degree

with that lady, and that I claim the most perfect and unqualified

respect for her from all."

The very positive tone of this explanation might, perhaps, have

irritated another listener, but the young Marchese, on the contrary,

seemed to find unmistakable satisfaction in it.

"I do not in the least doubt that you are quite justified in your

demand," replied he, very warmly. "The whole bearing of the beautiful

lady answers for it. What imposing dignity, and what a perfectly

charming appearance! I never saw any woman unite the two so

thoroughly."

"Really?" Hugo's voice betrayed by no means pleasant surprise, as he

looked at his companion, whose cheeks were deeply suffused with colour,

and whose eyes sparkled. Captain Almbach did not utter another word,

but his countenance told plainly enough what he thought. "I believe

this ideal-man also begins to care about other things besides airs and

recitatives--however, it is quite unnecessary."

Beatrice stood alone up in the verandah. She had not followed Reinhold

and Lord Elton, who also descended. Her hand buried itself

unconsciously in the wet vine-leaves, while her dark eyes were fixed

steadily on the sea. Lost in gloomy meditation, she only clung to the

one thought, which her lips now uttered, as half threateningly, half

frightened, she whispered----"What was it between them?"

Autumn had come, and brought strangers and inhabitants back from the

seaside and mountains to the large ever stirring and bustling central

point of Italy. It was indeed not such an autumn as leads nature to its

grave in the North, with gloomy, rainy days, raw stormy nights, rolling

mists, hoar and night frosts. Here it lay mildly in golden clearness

and indescribable beauty over the wide plains, from which at last the

summer's heat had subsided; over the mountains, which, at other times

were day after day enveloped in hot vapour, encircled with white

clouds, now again showed their blue outlines undisguised; and over the

town, where the great wave of life which for several moons had rolled

slowly, now flowed forth with renewed power.

Signora Biancona had also returned. Her stay in S---- had been as

unexpectedly and quickly terminated as was Reinhold's in Mirando. He

seemed as if, all at once, he could not endure his usually favourite

place any longer. Almost immediately after their stormy sea excursion,

he insisted positively that the original plan should be adhered to, and

the \_villegiatura\_ in the mountains, long since decided upon, be

carried out. The Marchese's objections, even his openly-displayed

annoyance--having counted upon a lengthy visit from his guests--were in

vain, as Beatrice also agreed somewhat eagerly to Reinhold's plan, and

thus Cesario remained alone in Mirando, while the others went to the

mountains, from which they had now just returned.

It was during the forenoon. Signora Biancona was sitting in her

boudoir, her head resting on her arm, and her hand buried in her dark

hair, in an attitude of eager attention. The conductor, Gianelli, had

taken up his position opposite to her. Whatever his real feelings

towards the envied Rinaldo might be, he was much too clever not to show

outwardly all necessary respect and consideration to him, who, in the

world of art, as in society, was all-powerful; and towards the

beautiful \_prima donna\_ he was now all attention and devotion, which he

showed in voice and manner, as, continuing the conversation already

begun, he said--

"You had commanded, Signora, and that was sufficient for me at once to

set all machinery in motion. I am fortunate in being able to fulfil

your wish, and impart the fullest information upon a certain subject."

Beatrice lifted up her head with liveliest eagerness. "Well?"

"This Signor Erlau is, as you supposed, a merchant from H----. He must,

indeed, belong to the richest of his class, as everywhere he appears

like a millionaire. He has rented the entire Villa Fiorina, near S----,

for himself and his family, and here, also, he inhabits one of the most

expensive houses. His household is arranged in great style; part of the

servants brought from Germany. He bears important introductions to his

embassy, of which, however, he has not made any use as yet, because his

state of health necessitates retirement. His move here, in fact, was

only made in order to put himself under the treatment of one of our

most celebrated doctors----"

"I know all that already," interrupted Beatrice, impatiently. "When I

heard the name, I did not doubt that it was the same Consul at whose

house I visited during my stay in H----. But the lady who accompanies

them--the young Signora?"

"Is his niece," explained Gianelli, who made an intentional pause after

the first words.

The singer appeared to consider. "She certainly was presented to me as

Signora Erlau. A relation, therefore. I did not see her in those days.

I surely should have remarked her; one does not so easily over look

such a figure."

The maestro smiled with a malicious expression. "She is \_said\_ to bear

the same name, certainly, as her adopted father; she is \_said\_ to be a

widow--\_said\_ to have lost her husband many years since. At least, they

wish such to be believed in Italy, and the servants have strict orders

to answer all enquiries in this manner."

Beatrice listened attentively to this explanation with its double

meaning, "'\_Said\_ to be;' but is it not so? I suspected that some

secret lay hidden there. You have discovered it?"

"Servants are never silent, if one understands to apply in the right

manner," remarked Gianelli, scornfully. "I only fear it is an extremely

delicate point, and as it concerns Signor Rinaldo----"

"Rinaldo!" exclaimed Beatrice, "how so? What has Rinaldo to do with it?

Did you not say that it concerns Rinaldo?"

The maestro bent his head, and said in his softest tone, "I was then,

indeed mistaken, Signora, when I premised that the cause of your wish

to learn more particulars about the Erlau family originated with Signor

Rinaldo."

The singer bit her lips. She certainly might have foreseen that the

motive which dictated the commission she had given him could not escape

the observing eyes of a Gianelli.

"Let us leave Rinaldo out of the question!" said she, with an effort to

appear calm. "You were about to speak of Signora Erlau."

"It would be somewhat difficult to separate one from the other,"

suggested Gianelli. "I only fear Signor Rinaldo is unfortunately not

favourably disposed towards me already, certainly from no fault of

mine. I fear I might arouse his extreme ill-will if he discovered it

was I who made such a communication, and especially to you"--he paused,

and drew figures on the floor with his walking stick, in well-feigned

confusion.

"To me, especially!" repeated Beatrice, violently, "then this

communication is not intended for me? You must speak, Signor Gianelli!

You shall not withhold one word, not one syllable either! I require, I

demand it of you."

"Well then----" he seemed really about to come to the explanation, but

the game was too interesting to give it up so soon, and the maestro

himself had too often suffered from the temper of the beautiful \_prima

donna\_ to be able to deny himself the satisfaction of keeping her still

longer on the rack of eagerness.

"Well then, you surely are aware of Signor Rinaldo's former bonds; but

in, Italy few or none know that he was already married. I myself was

only informed of it on this occasion. You, of course, were acquainted

with the fact."

"I know it," replied Beatrice, suppressedly, "but how does that concern

this?"

"Indeed it does to some extent. You do not know Rinaldo's wife,

Signora?"

"No. Though yes; I saw her once momentarily. A very insignificant

person."

"They do not seem to think so, here," remarked Gianelli, again in the

same soft tone. "Notwithstanding her seclusion, the beautiful fair

German begins to create a sensation."

"Who?" Beatrice rose so suddenly and wildly, that the maestro thought

it wiser to retire a few steps. "Of whom are you speaking?"

"Of Signora Eleonore Almbach, who certainly bears her adopted father's

name here, probably to avoid inquisitive inquiries."

"That is impossible," exclaimed the singer, now with extreme violence.

"That cannot be. You deceive me, or have been yourself deceived."

"Excuse me," said Gianelli, defending himself, "my source is the most

authentic. I will answer for its correctness, and Signor Rinaldo will

be obliged to confirm it."

"Impossible!" repeated Beatrice, still quite without her

self-possession. "\_This\_ apparition his wife! I saw her formerly, of

course, although only for a few minutes. Was I then blind?"

"Or was he so?" completed Gianelli to himself; but he said aloud, "I am

inconsolable to have excited you so, Signora; you will give me credit

for not wishing to speak, but you regularly forced this information

from me. I regret this exceedingly."

His words restored Beatrice somewhat to consciousness. She felt what

she had to expect from the pity of the man who had played the spy on

her behalf.

"Certainly not!" replied she in a hasty but vain attempt to recover her

self-control. "I--I thank you, Signor. I am merely surprised, nothing

more."

The maestro saw that he could not do better than retire, but as he

prepared to leave, he laid his hand assuringly upon his heart--

"You know, Signora, that I am quite at your commands, and if you deem

it necessary to insist upon my unconditional silence in this affair, no

assurance is needed that this also is at your service. Quite at your

commands."

He left the room with a low bow; he was in earnest with the last words.

Gianelli was too good a reckoner not to consider as a valuable secret,

something which sooner or later might be employed against the hated

Rinaldo. If he were to make the piquant story public in society,

nothing more could be done with it; in his sole possession, on the

contrary, it might be very useful. At present it ensured him influence

over Beatrice, and, indirectly, even over Rinaldo, to whom it could, at

the very least, not be agreeable that his family affairs should become

generally known.

In the best of humours the maestro passed through the saloon, and

entered the antechamber, where at that moment the sailor Jonas was

alone. Captain Almbach had sent him to his brother with some message;

he supposed the latter to be with Signora Biancona. Reinhold, however,

was at the manager's, but was expected every moment. Jonas learned this

from some servant who had gone into Beatrice's service from that of the

same manager who had taken the Italian Opera Company to Germany, and as

a trophy of his northern journey was able to maltreat a few words of

German. As the sailor had received orders to give his master's note to

the latter's brother himself, nothing else remained for him than to

wait; he therefore took up his position in the ante-room, through which

Reinhold was sure to pass. He had certainly remarked that the door of

one of the back rooms stood open, and that some one was in there,

apparently one of the Signora's lady's maids, who was occupied with a

dress of her mistress. However, as this somebody was a woman, she

naturally did not exist for Jonas, who, dissatisfied and silent as

usual, withdrew into one of the window recesses, and remained there

above a quarter of an hour without taking the slightest notice of his

neighbour.

Signor Gianelli, as regards women, seemed to entertain the most

opposite views; he had barely discovered the open door and the young

girl, before he immediately altered his course, and steered in that

direction. Jonas naturally did not understand any of the conversation,

conducted in Italian, which now took place between the two, but so much

was clear to him, that the maestro endeavoured to play the agreeable,

apparently without particular success, as he only received short, and

rather defiant-sounding replies, and at the same time the heavy silken

folds were so adroitly draped that he could not come nearer without

crumpling the light satin. This lasted a few minutes, then Signor

Gianelli appeared to try and make some serious attempt, as a cry of

annoyance was heard, followed by the angry stamping of a little foot.

The dress flew aside, and the young girl fled into the ante-room, where

she stood still with arms folded defiantly and eyes sparkling with

rage. But the maestro had followed her, and without being intimidated

in the least by the opposition, gave signs of trying to enforce the

kiss which evidently had been refused him before, when he stumbled upon

a most unexpected obstacle. A powerful hand caught him suddenly by the

collar, and a strange voice said impressively--

"That is to be left alone."

At the first moment the Italian appeared staggered at this interruption

from a stranger whom he had not perceived at all; but on looking more

closely at the latter, and discovering that he had only a common sailor

to deal with, he drew himself up with great self-importance and evinced

great annoyance. He immediately reversed the order of affairs, and

pretended to be the one insulted. How could any one dare to attack a

man in his position, especially in Signora Biancona's apartments; he

should lay a complaint to the Signora; what sort of a person was it who

took such a liberty? and thereupon a flood of not exactly flattering

names swept over poor Jonas.

The latter endured the insults heaped upon him with immovable

placidity, as he did not understand even one word of them; but when the

Italian, deceived by this quiescence, took it into his head to make a

threatening gesticulation with his stick, there was an end of the

sailor's calm, as he understood this pantomime very well. With a sudden

movement he had caught the stick from the maestro, the next moment had

seized him and regularly thrust him out of the room, thrown his stick

after him, and locked the door, all without speaking a single word, and

returned quietly to his window recess as if nothing had happened. But

here the young girl came at once towards him, stretching out both hands

to him, with southern vivacity and overflowing with gratitude.

"It is not necessary! Was done willingly," said Jonas, dryly, but as he

put out his arm as if to refuse her thanks, a little hand was placed

upon it, and a clear voice said something in the softest tones, which

was undoubtedly intended to express her acknowledgments.

Jonas looked most indignantly, first at his arm, then at the hand,

which still lay upon it, and after having gazed at both for some time,

he condescended at last to cast a glance also at the person to whom the

hand belonged.

Before him stood a young girl of at most sixteen years, so lythe, so

intensely slight and graceful a figure, that she presented the greatest

contrast imaginable to the broad form of the sailor. A wreath of

splendid blue-black plaits surrounded the little face, which, with its

dark brown complexion and burning black eyes, certainly sprang from the

South of Italy. The little one was pretty, without doubt very pretty,

that could not be denied, and the liveliness with which she endeavoured

to show her protector how very grateful she was rendered her still more

charming.

"Yes, if I only understood the cursed language!" muttered Jonas, in

whom, for the first time, something like regret arose that he had

thrown away, with such obstinate determination, the rare opportunity

offered him during the summer of learning Italian. He shook his head,

shrugged his shoulders, and in this way made pantomimic signs that he

did not understand Italian, which the young girl seemed to think quite

unheard of and also very disagreeable.

"I was to find Mr. Reinhold," growled Jonas, who, strange to say,

seemed to long to impart some information, which was not usually his

case with women. He made the discovery, however, that even this name

was not understood, as now it became his companion's turn to shake her

head and shrug her shoulders.

"Yes, indeed," said the sailor angrily, "he could not even retain his

honest German name! Rinaldo he lets himself be called here--God have

pity on him! Robbers and rogues are called by such names with us at

home. Signor Rinaldo," exclaimed he, as he drew out his master's note,

which bore the same name. This address was of course well enough known

in Signora Biancona's house; any farther understanding was now,

however, unnecessary, as just at the moment when the two were bending

their heads eagerly over the letter, the door of the ante-room was

opened and Reinhold himself entered.

The young girl remarked him first. In one moment she was away from the

sailor's side and in the middle of the room, where she made a graceful

curtsy and then disappeared in the direction of the saloon, probably to

announce the long-expected one to her mistress; while Jonas, who could

not conceive how any person could fly away thus lightly and rapidly,

and disappear tracelessly in a few seconds, stared after her so

steadily that Reinhold was obliged to go up to him and ask what brought

him there. Ashamed, and somewhat confused, he delivered his errand and

gave up the note, which Almbach opened and read rapidly. The contents

seemed to be very indifferent to him--

"Tell my brother I am engaged already for to-day, and therefore beg him

to accept the Marchese's invitation merely for himself. If possible at

all, I shall appear towards evening."

He put the note in his pocket, dismissed the messenger by a gesture,

and passed into the saloon. Jonas now had his orders and ought to have

returned home; instead, however, he sought the servant who had given

him the required information before, and the latter made the discovery

that the inaccessible sailor, so chary of words, had all at once

become very inquisitive, as he enquired very particularly about

Signora Biancona's household and its \_personnel\_, and tolerated the

Italian's horrible German--who was so proud of his knowledge of the

language--with exemplary patience.

Reinhold, meanwhile, had entered the boudoir. He no longer required any

announcement to its mistress, and she came towards him at once; but had

he not been so entirely absorbed in other thoughts he must have seen at

the first glance that something had happened to her. The Italian's dark

warm colouring could appear pale at times; this was evident now, when

the glowing blood which usually throbbed in her cheeks had disappeared

to the very last drop; but it was an unnatural pallor, and her eyes

burned all the more scorchingly. Beatrice was actress enough to be

able, for a few moments at least, to control her temper when it was

required to gain some object, and she wished to obtain one to-day. A

trait of dark determination lay in her face; she wished to see clearly

at any price.

"I met Gianelli below in the street," began Reinhold, after the first

greeting. "He appeared to come from your house; was he with you?"

"Certainly! I know you are prejudiced against him, but I cannot

possibly decline to see the conductor of the opera, when he comes on

purpose to discuss something as to its performance with me."

Reinhold shrugged his shoulders. "That could be done at the rehearsals.

Are you a young beginner, who requires protection, and must fear

offending any one? I should have thought that you, in your position,

could behave with as little consideration as I do. However, I will give

you no directions about it. Receive whom you will, even Gianelli! I am

far from wishing to place any control upon you."

The tone sounded icy, and Beatrice's voice trembled slightly as she

replied, "That is new to me. You used to watch over my visitors most

despotically; formerly no one could cross my threshold who was not

agreeable to you."

Reinhold had thrown himself into a seat. "You see I have become more

tolerant."

"More tolerant!--more indifferent."

"You have often enough complained of my despotism," remarked he, with a

slight tinge of sarcasm.

"And yet I bore it because I knew it sprang from love. It is only

natural that with the one the other should also cease."

Reinhold made an impatient movement. "Beatrice you demand what is

impossible, when you require that a human heart should ever and for

ever glow with those volcanic feelings which alone you call love."

She had approached his seat, and placed her hand on its back, while she

looked down at him with a strange expression.

"I see certainly that it is impossible to require from the cold heart

of a Northerner such love as I give and demand."

"You should have left him in his north," said Reinhold, gloomily;

"perhaps the cold there would have been better for him than the

everlasting glow of the south."

"Is that intended for a reproach? Was it I who tore you from your

home?"

"No! I went voluntarily, but--be just, Beatrice!--you were the moving

power. Who urged me constantly to the resolution? Who held my artist's

course again and again before my eyes? Who dubbed me a coward as I

started back at the responsibility, and at last placed the fatal choice

before me of flight or our separation? Excuse me--you knew how the

decision must fall."

The Italian's dark eyes flashed threateningly, but she forced herself

to be calm.

"Our love depended on it," declared she, proudly; "our love depended on

it, and your artist's career. I rescued a genius for the world when I

rescued you for myself."

He was silent. The defence appeared to find no echo in his heart. She

bent lower to him, and her voice sounded sweet and fascinating again,

but the unnatural expression did not leave her features.

"You are dreaming, Rinaldo. This is one of your moods again, which I

have so often had to fight against. Is it the first time then, that an

unhappy, unsuitable marriage has been dissolved in order to form a

happier union?"

Reinhold leaned his head on his hand. "No, certainly not; but that does

not affect this case; my marriage has not been dissolved, and we--have

never thought of marriage."

Beatrice started, and her hand slid from the back of the chair.

"You were not free?" she murmured.

"It would only have cost me one word to be so. I knew I should not be

prevented, and means enough were open to you to obtain dispensation,

which would have permitted a Catholic to make this marriage. But we

both dreaded the indissoluble bond; we wished to be free and

unfettered, without limits in our love as in our life--well, we are so

still at this moment."

"What do you mean by this?" Beatrice pressed her hand upon her heart as

if breathless. "Do you still consider your marriage to exist?"

"Oh, no, certainly not; and if I did, the daring of such an idea would

soon be made plain to me. You do not know what an offended wife and

mother is in the pride of her virtue. If the sinner were to devote his

whole remaining life to penance and repentance, he would still not be

restored to favour."

The words were intended to sound scoffingly; he did not suspect the

boundless bitterness they betrayed as he hurled them forth; but

Beatrice understood it only too well, and with this recognition, her

self-control, so far preserved with such difficulty, broke down

irretrievably.

"You have, perhaps, tried it already with the offended wife," cried she

furiously. "She is in your neighbourhood; I myself was witness of your

meeting. That is why your eyes encountered each other in so mysterious

a manner; that is why you could not tear your gaze away from the child;

that is why she drew back from me, as if from something unholy. Have

you attempted the penitent scene already, Rinaldo?"

Reinhold had sprung up; anger and astonishment struggled in his

countenance. "So you know already who Signora Erlau is? But why do I

ask! The spy, this Gianelli, has just left you; he has traced it out

and communicated it to you."

A dark look passed over the singer's features for a moment, as she

remembered the distinct commission she had given to the spy, but in her

inward excitement shame found no place.

"You knew it in Mirando," continued she violently, "and she occupies

the Villa Fiorina close by. Will you try to make me believe you had not

seen each other before, not spoken?"

"I do not wish to try and make you believe anything," said Reinhold

coldly. "How I stand to Eleonore, our utterly estranged meeting must

have shown you sufficiently. Calm yourself. You have nothing to dread

from that side. What else has taken place between me and my \_wife\_ I

shall not confess to \_you\_."

A slight, but yet perceptible tone of contempt lay on the two words,

and it seemed to be understood.

"It appears you place me \_below\_ your wife," said Beatrice weeping.

"Below the woman whose only merit was and is that of being the mother

of your child; who never----"

"Pray, leave that alone!" interrupted he, with decision. "You know I

never permit you to touch upon that point, and now I shall endure it

less than ever. If you must get up a scene for me, do it, but leave my

wife and child out of the drama."

It was as if his words had let a storm loose, so raging, so unmeasured

did the Italian's passion now break forth, dragging every trace of

self-control along with it.

"Your wife and your child!" repeated she, beside herself. "Oh, I know

what these words signify to me; I must experience it often enough. Have

they not forced themselves between us from the first moment of our

meeting until to-day? To them I owe every bitter hour, every strange

emotion in your heart. They have lain upon you like a shadow, amidst

the growth of your artist's renown, amidst all your conquests and

triumphs; as if they had cursed you there in the north, with the

recollection of them, you could not tear your self away from them; and

yet there was a time when they were the oppressive fetters which

separated you from life and future--which you must break at last!"

"To exchange them for others," completed Reinhold, whose violence now

burst forth, "and the question is, are these others lighter? There, it

was only the outward circumstances which confined me; my thoughts,

feelings and actions were at all events free. You would fain see these,

also like myself, without a will, at your feet, and that you could not

attain this, or at least not always, I have had to atone for by hours

of endless excitement and bitterness. Your love would have made any

other man into your slave. Me it forced to stand in constant opposition

to your love of ruling, which tried to take possession of every

innermost thought and feeling. But I should have thought, Beatrice,

that you had hitherto found in me your master, who knew how to preserve

his own independence, and would not allow his whole being and nature to

be clasped in chains."

The storm had now been called up. Henceforth there was no restraint, no

more moderation; at least not for Beatrice, whose passion foamed out

ever wilder.

"I must hear that, too, from the lips of the man who so often called me

his muse? Have you forgotten who it was who first awoke you to the

knowledge of your talents and of yourself; who alone led you up to the

sun's height of fame? Without me, the admired Rinaldo would have

succumbed under the fetters which he did not dare to break."

She did not realise how deeply her reproach must wound his pride as a

man. Reinhold was roused, but not with that haughtiness which, until

now, too often darkened his character; this time it was a proud,

energetic self-consciousness with which he drew himself up.

"That he \_never\_ would. Do you think so little of my talent, that you

believe it could only force open its path with you, and through you? Do

you think I should not have found my way alone, not alone have swung

myself up to the present height? Ask my works about it! They will give

you the reply. I should have gone sooner or later. That I went with

you, became my doom, as that broke every bond between me and home, and

also drew me upon paths which the man as well as the composer had

better have avoided. For years you kept me in the intoxication of a

life which never offered me even one hour's real contentment or true

happiness, because you knew that when once I awoke your power would be

all at an end. You might postpone it, hinder it never--the awaking came

late, too late, perhaps; but still it came at last."

Beatrice leaned upon the marble chimney-piece by which she stood; her

whole body trembled as with fever; this hour showed her indeed what she

had long felt, without wishing to acknowledge to herself--that her

power was in truth at an end.

"And who do you think shall be the sacrifice to this 'awaking?'" said

she in a hollow voice. "Take care, Rinaldo! You forsook your wife, and

she bore it patiently--\_I\_ shall not bear it. Beatrice Biancona does

not allow herself to be sacrificed."

"No, she would rather sacrifice." Reinhold stepped before her and

looked her firmly in the face. "You would plant the dagger--is it not

true, Beatrice?--in yourself or me, all alike, if only your revenge

were cooled? And if I seized the weapon from your hand, and returned

repentant to you, you would open your arms to me again. You are right,

Eleonore bore it more patiently; not a word, not a reproach restrained

me, the cry of anguish was smothered in her heart. I did not hear even

one sound of it; but at the moment in which I left her, I was the one

rejected--my return was shut out for ever. And if I came to her now, in

all the brilliancy of my fame and success--if I laid laurels, gold,

honour, everything at her feet, and myself also--it would be in vain;

she would not forgive me."

He broke off, as if he had said too much already. Beatrice did not

reply one word; not a sound came from her lips; only her eyes spoke a

gloomy, unnatural language; but Reinhold did not understand it this

time, or would not understand it.

"You see this separation is irretrievable," said he, more quietly. "I

repeat it, you have nothing to fear from that side. It was you, not I,

who provoked this scene. It is not well to awaken the ghosts of the

past--at least not between us. Let them rest."

He left her and went into the adjoining room, where he busied himself

with the music lying on the piano, or seemed to busy himself with it,

to escape further conversation.

"Let them rest!" that was said so gloomily, so quietly, and yet it

sounded like scorn from his lips. Could he not even banish the ghosts

of the past? And he demanded it of the woman who saw menaced by them

what she deemed to be her highest good, her love for him, which,

notwithstanding all that had passed between Rinaldo and herself in the

course of years, still clung to him with all the strength of her inward

being; whose glowing, passionate nature had in love as in hate never

known any bounds. Whoever saw Beatrice now, as she raised herself

slowly, and gazed after him, must have known that she would not let

them rest, nor would she rest herself; and Reinhold should have

considered, when he opposed her so defiantly, that he did not stand

alone against her revenge any longer, and that in this hour he had

betrayed, only too well, by which means she could strike a deadly blow.

The glances of evil token which flashed there did not menace him, but

something else which he was unable to protect, because the right to do

so was denied him--his wife and child!

CHAPTER IV.

"I wish, Eleonore, we had stayed in the Villa Fiorina, and not

undertaken our migration here," said Consul Erlau, as he stood still

before his adopted daughter, whom he had surprised in tears on his

unlooked-for entrance into her room. "I see I have made you suffer far

too much by it."

Ella had soon effaced the traces of weeping, and now smiled with a

calmness which might well have deceived a stranger.

"Pray, uncle, do not be anxious on my account! We are here for your

sake, and we will thank God if your recovery, which has begun so

promisingly in the south, is completed here."

"Still I wish that Dr. Conti were at any other place in the world,"

replied the Consul, annoyed, "only not just in the town which we would

avoid at all cost, and where I am obliged to put myself under his

treatment. Poor child, I knew you were making a sacrifice for me in

this journey; how great it is I only now am learning to see."

"It is no sacrifice, at least no longer now," said Ella, firmly. "I

only dreaded the possibility of a first meeting. Now this is overcome,

and all the rest with it."

Erlau examined her features enquiringly, and somewhat suspiciously.

"Indeed! then why have you wept?"

"Uncle, one cannot always control one's mood. I was cast down just

now."

"Eleonore!" The Consul seated himself beside her, and took her hand in

his. "You know I have never been able to overcome the thought that this

unhappy connection commenced in my house, and my only satisfaction was

that this house could afford you a home afterwards. I hoped that now,

when years lie between, when everything in and around you has so

completely changed, the injury you once received would pain you no

longer; and instead I must see that it continues to burn undiminished

and unforgotten--that the old wounds are torn open afresh, that

you--"

"You are mistaken," interrupted Ella, hastily, "you are quite mistaken,

I--have long made an end of the past."

Erlau shook his head incredulously. "As if you would ever show that you

suffered! I know best what reticence and self-control are hidden under

these fair plaits. You have often displayed more of it than you could

answer for to your second father, but his sight is keener and goes

deeper than that of others; and I tell you, Eleonore, you cannot be

recognised since the day when that Rinaldo, regardless of all refusals,

at last forced an interview upon you. What exactly passed between you I

do not know to this day; it was trouble enough even to obtain the

confession from you that he was with you. You are utterly inaccessible

in such matters, but deny it as you may, you have become quite another

person since that hour."

"Nothing took place at all," persisted Ella, "nothing of importance. He

demanded to see the child, and I refused him."

"And who answers for it that he will not repeat the attempt?"

"Reinhold. You do not know him! I have dismissed him from my door; he

will never pass it a second time. He understood everything, only not

how to humble himself."

"At any rate he had tact enough to leave Mirando as soon as possible,"

said Erlau. "This vicinity would have been unbearable for any length of

time. But his withdrawal was not of much use, as then Marchese Tortoni

sprang up, who raved so uninterruptedly to you about his friend that I

felt obliged at last to give him a hint that this subject did not

receive the slightest sympathy from us."

"Perhaps you did it too plainly," suggested Ella, softly. "He had no

conception of the wounds he touched, and your harsh repulse of it must

have seemed remarkable to him."

"I do not care! Then he can obtain the commentary upon it from his

much-admired friend. Were I to allow you to endure Signor Rinaldo's

glorification for hours, certainly we were not much better off here.

One cannot take up a newspaper, receive a visit, hold a conversation,

without stumbling upon his name; every third word is Rinaldo. He seems

to have infected the whole town with his tones and his new opera, which

seems to be considered here as a sort of event of the world. Poor

child! and you must be quiet under it all, must witness how this man

regularly revels in victories and triumphs, how he has attained the

zenith of success, and maintains it undisputed."

The young wife rested her head on her hand so that the latter shaded

her face.

"Perhaps you deceive yourself after all. He may be celebrated and

worshipped like no other--happy he is not."

"I am glad of it," said the Consul, violently, "I am extremely glad of

it. There would be no more justice or right in the world if he were.

And that he has seen you, as you allow yourself to be seen now, does

not conduce much to his happiness, I hope."

He had risen at the last words, and walked up and down the room with

his old vivacity. A short silence followed, which Ella at last

interrupted--

"I want to beg something of you, dear uncle. Will you grant it me?"

Erlau stopped. "Gladly, my child. You know I cannot easily refuse you

anything. What do you wish?"

Ella had fixed her eyes on the ground, and did not look up while she

spoke.

"It is that Rein--that Reinhold's latest work is to be performed the

day after to-morrow."

"Yes, to be sure, and then the adoration will become unendurable,"

growled Erlau. "You wish to escape from the first commotion about it--I

understand that, perfectly; we will drive into the mountains for a week

or a fortnight. Dr. Conti must give me leave of absence for so long."

"On the contrary. I wanted to beg you--to go to the opera with me."

The Consul looked at her with a countenance full of the most intense

astonishment.

"What, Eleonore! I cannot have heard aright? You wish to go on that day

to the theatre, which hitherto you have so decidedly avoided as soon as

Rinaldo's name was connected with it?"

Notwithstanding the shielding hand, one could see plainly how the deep

red which coloured her cheeks rose to her temples, as she replied

almost inaudibly--

"I never ventured to enter the opera house at home, when \_his\_ music

reigned there. I always felt as if every one's eyes would be directed

to me and seek me, even in the darkest background of our box. In your

drawing-rooms and in those of our acquaintances I seldom or never heard

his compositions. People avoided them whenever I was present; people

knew what had taken place, and tried to spare me in every way. I never

attempted to break through this fence of shielding consideration which

you all drew around me. Perhaps I was too great a coward to do so,

perhaps also, too much embittered. Now," she raised herself suddenly,

with a violent motion, and her voice gained perfect firmness, "now

I have seen Reinhold again, now I will learn to know him in his

works--him and her."

Erlau's astonishment continued; apparently this affair surprised him in

the highest degree, but it was very evident that he was not accustomed

to refuse his favourite anything, even if it seemed to him to be a

point requiring consideration. For the present, however, he was

relieved from an immediate consent, as the servant entered with the

announcement that Dr. Conti had just driven up, and that Captain

Almbach also was in the drawing-room.

"Certainly, Herr Captain Almbach is most enviable in his want of

diffidence," said the Consul. "Notwithstanding all that has passed

between you and his brother, he asserts his right as a relation just

the same as if nothing had occurred. Hugo Almbach is the only person in

the world who could do this."

"Do you not like his visits?" asked Ella.

"I!" Erlau smiled. "Child, you know that he has won me as completely as

every one else whom he chooses to win, perhaps only excepting my

Eleonore, for whom he seems to entertain quite incredible respect."

He then took his adopted daughter's arm, and led her to the

drawing-room. The medical visit did not last long, and Hugo in about

half-an-hour also quitted the Erlau's house, which he was wont to visit

frequently. Whether Reinhold knew of it could not be decided, certainly

he suspected it; but there appeared to be a tacit agreement between the

brothers not to touch upon this subject. It was not Captain Almbach's

way to force himself into a confidence which was determinedly and

continuedly withheld from him, and therefore he followed Reinhold's

example, who observed utter silence about the meeting in the \_locanda\_,

and never mentioned his wife's or child's names again, since he knew

they were in his neighbourhood. What might be really hidden beneath the

impenetrable reticence, Hugo could not discover, but he was convinced

that it did not arise from indifference.

Captain Almbach had reached his brother's dwelling, and entered his own

room, where he found Jonas, who seemed to be waiting for him. In the

sailor's appearance to-day there was decidedly something unusual; his

wonted phlegm had given way to a certain restlessness, with which he

waited until his master had taken off hat and gloves and sat down.

Hardly was this done, than he came forward and planted himself close

beside the Captain's chair.

"What is it then, Jonas?" asked the latter, becoming attentive. "You

look as if you meant to make a speech."

"That is what I wish to do," said Jonas, as he placed himself in an

attitude half solemn, half confused.

"Indeed? That is something new. I was always under the impression

hitherto that you would prove a most valuable acquisition to a Trappist

monastery. If, however, by means of all the classical recollections

here, the spirit of oratory has come to you also, I rejoice at it.

Begin then, I will listen."

"Herr Captain Almbach"--the sailor's spirit of oratory did not seem to

be sufficiently developed, as for the present he could not get beyond

those three words, and instead of continuing, he gazed persistently and

fixedly on the floor as if he wished to count the Mosaic stones.

"Listen, Jonas, I am suspicious about you," said Hugo, impressively. "I

have been suspicious about you for more than a week, you do not growl

any more; you cast no more furious looks at the padrona and her maids;

you sometimes lay your face in folds, such as any one with power of

imagination might consider the first feeble attempt at a smile. I

repeat it, these are highly serious symptoms, and I am prepared for the

worst."

Jonas seemed to discover that he must express himself somewhat more

clearly. He made an energetic start, and actually completed half a

sentence.

"Herr Captain Almbach, there are men--"

"A most indisputable fact, which I do not in the remotest degree intend

to attack. So there are men--well, go on."

"Who may like women," continued Jonas.

"And others who may not like them," added the Captain, as a second

pause ensued; "an equally undeniable fact, of which Herr Captain Hugo

Almbach's seaman, William Jonas, of the 'Ellida,' is offered as an

example."

"I did not wish to say that exactly," responded the sailor, whom this

arbitrary continuation of his evidently studied speech quite

disconcerted. "I only meant to say that there are men who appear to be,

no one knows how unkind towards women, and yet at heart are not so at

all, because they think nothing about them."

"I believe that is a very flattering illustration of my character,"

remarked Hugo. "But now tell me, for Heaven's sake, what do you purpose

with all these prologues?"

Jonas drew several long breaths; the next words appeared to be too hard

for him. At last he said, stammeringly--

"Herr Captain Almbach, I know, of course, best what you really

are--and--and--I know a young woman."

A smile, which he suppressed with difficulty, quivered about Captain

Almbach's lips, but he compelled himself to remain serious.

"Really!" said he, coolly, "that is, indeed, a remarkable event for

you."

"And I will bring her to you," continued Jonas.

Now Captain Almbach began to laugh aloud. "Jonas, I believe you are not

sane. What in the world am I to do with this young woman. Shall I marry

her?"

"You shall do nothing with her," explained the sailor, with an injured

countenance. "You are only to look at her."

"A very modest pleasure," scoffed Hugo. "Who then is the lady

concerned, and what necessity requires me to look at her?"

"It is the little Annunziata, Signora Biancona's lady's maid," replied

Jonas, who now became more fluent of speech. "A poor, quiet young

thing, without father or mother. She has only been a couple of months

with the Signora, and at first all went well with her; but there is a

man," the sailor clenched his fist with intense rage, "called Gianelli,

and he is the conductor; he follows the poor thing at every step, and

never leaves her in peace. She has repulsed him once very roughly, and

on that account he maligned her to the Signora, and since then the

Signora is so unkind and violent to her, that she can stand it no

longer. In \_that\_ house, indeed, she does not see much good, and

therefore she shall leave, and must leave, and I shall not allow her to

remain any longer."

"You appear to be very fully informed about that little Annunziata,"

remarked Hugo, dryly. "She is an Italian; have you learned all these

details by pantomimic means?"

"The Signora's servant helped us now and then, when we could not get

on," confessed Jonas, quite openly. "But he speaks horrible German, and

I do not like him putting his finger into everything. Without reference

to this, though, she shall get away from the whole crew; she must

absolutely go into a German house."

"On account of the morals," added Hugo.

"Yes, and besides on account of learning German. She cannot speak a

single word of it, and it is really sad when people cannot understand

one another. So I thought--you often go to Herr Consul Erlau, Herr

Captain Almbach--perhaps young Frau Erlau may want a maid, and in such

a rich household it cannot matter one person more or less, if you were

to put in a good word for Annunziata." He stopped and looked

beseechingly at his master.

"I will speak to the lady," said Captain Almbach, "and at all events it

will be better for you only to introduce your \_protegée\_ after I have

had a decided answer; I will also look at her then. But one thing more,

Jonas"--he put on a grave expression--"I presume that nothing

influences you in the whole matter, excepting pity for the poor

persecuted child?"

"Only pure pity, Herr Captain," assured the sailor, with such honest

frankness that Hugo was obliged to bite his lips, so as not to give way

to renewed laughter.

"I really believe he is capable of imagining that," murmured he, and

then added aloud, "I am glad to hear it. I was convinced of it from the

first; as you know, Jonas, \_we\_ shall never marry!"

"No, Herr Captain," answered the sailor; but the answer sounded

somewhat wanting in heartiness.

"Because we think nothing of women," said Hugo, with immovable

seriousness. "Beyond pity and gratitude, the story never goes; then we

sail away, and regret remains with them."

This time the sailor made no reply, but he looked at his master as if

much taken aback.

"And it is indeed most fortunate that it is so," ended Captain Almbach,

with great emphasis. "Women on our 'Ellida!' Heaven preserve us from

them!"

With which he left Jonas and went out of the room. The latter looked

after him with an expression in which it was difficult to decide

whether it consisted more of annoyance or sadness; finally, however,

the latter sentiment seemed to prevail, as he let his head droop, and

uttered a sigh, saying, in an undertone--

"Yes, certainly, she is a woman also--more's the pity!"

Hugo had gone across into his brother's study, where he found him

alone. The piano stood open, but Reinhold himself lay extended on

the couch, his head thrown back on the cushions. The face, with its

half-closed eyes and high forehead, with its dark hair falling over it,

looked alarmingly pale. It was an attitude, not of repose, but of the

most supreme fatigue and exhaustion, and he barely changed it at his

brother's entrance.

"Reinhold, really this is too bad of you," said the latter, coming up

to him. "Half the town is in commotion with your opera; in the theatre

everything is in a whirl; people openly fight for tickets. His

Excellency the Director does not know where his head is, and Donna

Beatrice is in a regular state of nervous excitement. And you, the real

promoter of all this disturbance, dream away here in \_dolce far

niente\_, as if there were no public nor operas in the world."

Reinhold turned his head towards the new comer with a feeble,

indifferent movement; his face showed that his dreams had been anything

but sweet.

"You were at the rehearsal?" asked he. "Did you see Cesario?"

"The Marchese? Certainly, although he was no more at the rehearsal than

I was. This time he preferred to give a performance himself in the

higher equestrian art; I have just paid a high tribute of admiration to

his bravery."

"Cesario? How so?"

"Well, he rode no less than three times up and down the same street,

and regularly under a certain balcony; let his horse curvet so

senselessly that one dreaded an accident every moment. He will break

his own and his beautiful animal's neck too, if he should try that

often. Unfortunately this time mine was the only, probably not much

wished for, physiognomy which he saw at the window."

The evidently irritable tone of these words caught Reinhold's

attention--he half raised himself up.

"At which window?"

Hugo bit his lips; in his anger he had quite forgotten to whom he

spoke. His brother remarked his hesitation.

"Do you mean the Erlau's house?" asked he, quickly. "It seems to me you

often visit it."

"Sometimes, at least," was Captain Almbach's quick response. "You know

I have always enjoyed the privilege of neutrality there; even when the

battle was raging most fiercely in my uncle's house, I have asserted

this old privilege there, and it is tacitly recognised by both

parties."

Reinhold had raised himself entirely, but the eagerness had quite

disappeared from his features; in its place was a dark expression of

enquiry, as he said--

"Then Cesario has also the \_entrée\_ of the Erlau's house? Of course you

introduced him there."

"Yes, I was so--stupid," said Captain Almbach, speaking angrily,

"and I seem to have caused something very charming by it. We had hardly

left Mirando when Don Cesario--who cannot resolve to sacrifice his

freedom---who rides past the only lady in the neighbourhood without

looking at her even--loses no time on the strength of that introduction

in making himself agreeable at the Villa Fiorina; and this was done,

the Herr Consul tells me, in so pleasant and modest a manner that it

was impossible to repulse him; the more so, as our departure from

Mirando removed the only cause of their seclusion. Then he was

fortunate enough to discover Herr Doctor Conti, who was making his

\_villegiatura\_ somewhere in the vicinity, and bring him to the Herr

Consul. The doctor's treatment produced results beyond all expectation,

and Don Cesario is almost looked upon in the family as the saviour

of life, which he knows how to make use of. Trust one of those

women-haters! They are the worst of all; Jonas has just given me a

speaking example of it. He has started a wonderful theory of pity, in

which he believes firmly as in the Gospel; but all the same, it has

caught him hopelessly, and the aristocratic Marchese Tortoni is on the

same path."

It could not have escaped any calm observer, that under the Captain's

mocking speech, which was usually only dictated by mischief, a

bitterness lay concealed which, with all his scoffing, he could not

quite control; but Reinhold was far from calm. He had listened as if he

would read every word from off his brother's lips, and at the last

remark he started up wildly.

"On what path? What do you mean by it?"

Hugo stepped back as if struck, "My God, Reinhold, how can you fly out

like that? I only meant--"

"It concerns Ella, does it not?" interrupted Reinhold, with the same

violence. "To whom else can these attentions be paid?"

"Certainly, to Ella," said Captain Almbach. It was the first time for

months that this name had been mentioned between them. "And just for

this reason, it can and must be indifferent to you."

Simple as the remark was, it seemed to hit Reinhold unexpectedly hard.

He strode up and down the room once or twice, and at last stopped

before his brother.

"Cesario has no idea of the truth," said he, in a suppressed voice;

"he made some enthusiastic remarks to me at the beginning. I may have

betrayed to him, involuntarily, how much they pained me, as since then

he has not touched the topic again."

"Erlau appears to have given him a similar hint," added Hugo. "He tried

to find out something about it from me--if any and what connection

existed between you and that family. I naturally avoided it, but he

seems to suspect some former enmity between you and Erlau."

Reinhold looked down gloomily. "This connection will indeed not long

remain a secret. Beatrice knows it already, and, as I fear, from a very

unsafe source, whence no silence can be expected. Cesario must learn it

sooner or later, after what you have just disclosed to me. He is

romantic enough to take anything of the sort seriously, and give

himself up, with his whole soul, to a hopeless passion."

Captain Almbach leaned with folded arms against the piano, a slight

pallor lay upon his face, and his voice trembled faintly, as he

answered--

"Who tells you that it is hopeless?"

"Hugo, that is an insult," stormed Reinhold. "Do you forget that

Eleonore is my wife?"

"She was," said Captain Almbach, emphasising the word strongly. "You

surely think now as little of asserting such rights as she would be

inclined to admit them."

Reinhold was silent. He knew best with what determination even the

slightest appearance of any right was denied him.

"You have both been satisfied with mere separation," continued Hugo,

"without requiring judicial divorce. You did not need it, and what

restrains Ella from it I understand only too well. In such a case final

decisions as to the possession of the boy must be made. She knew that

you would never quite sacrifice your paternal rights, and trembled at

the thought of giving you the boy even for a time. Your tacit

resignation of him was sufficient for her; she preferred to give up all

satisfaction, in order to remain in undisturbed possession of her

child."

Reinhold stood there as if struck by lightning. The glow of agitation

which had so lately coloured his brow disappeared; he had become deadly

pale again, as he asked, in a suppressed voice--

"And this--this you think was the sole reason?"

"So far as I know Ella, the sole one which could prevent her completing

the step which you had commenced."

"And you think that Cesario has hopes?"

"I do not know it," said Hugo, seriously, "but we both know that

nothing stands in the way of Ella's freedom, if she were really

disposed to assert it still. You forsook her, gave her up entirely for

years, and all the world knows why it was done, and what kept you

continuously away from her. She has not only law, but also public

opinion on her side, and I fear the latter would compel you to leave

the boy with her. Beatrice stands terribly in the way of your paternal

rights."

"You think that Cesario has hopes?" repeated Reinhold, but this time

the words sounded moody and full of menace.

"I believe that he loves her, loves her passionately, and that sooner

or later he will try to woo her. He will then certainly learn that the

imaginary widow was the wife of his friend, and still bears that

friend's name, but I doubt if this will exercise any influence upon

him, as not the slightest shadow falls upon Ella. Only your friendship

may receive an irrecoverable blow; but even without this, it would be

at an end, so soon as passion speaks; consider this, Reinhold, and do

not let yourself be carried away to any rash act. You broke your

bonds in order to set yourself free. Thereby you also made Eleonore

free--perhaps for another."

Captain Almbach's voice fell at the last words, and, as if to suppress

or conceal some violent emotion, he turned quickly to depart. Although

his brother's agitation, whom he left alone, did not escape him, he had

not the remotest suspicion of the firebrand which his words threw into

the other's breast.

If Reinhold had shown almost nothing but fatigue and indifference

lately to those around him, if a sensation often overcame him that for

him there was an end of life and love, this moment proved that the same

wild passion could still rage in his heart which had once drawn the

young artist away from his bonds at home; and the manner in which the

storm had been loosed, betrayed, if not to others yet to himself, that

which hitherto he \_would\_ not know, and which now disclosed itself to

him with merciless distinctness. The defiance and bitterness with which

he had armed himself against the wife who dared to let him feel that he

had once deeply offended her, and that she would now and never more

pardon this offence, succumbed before the burning pain which suddenly

blazed forth in his breast. But although his pride taught him to meet

the coldness, indifference and irreconciliation with harshness, he

still could not prevent it that so soon as the picture of his child

rose before him its mother's form also stood by its side. Certainly it

was no longer the same Ella, who a few months previously barely held a

place in his recollection, but the woman, who on that evening, when for

the first time he recognised what he had so frivolously given up, and

what he had irretrievably lost, had shown him such an energetic will,

and such a never dreamed of depth of feeling. Near the child's fair

curly head there hovered, ever and ever, the face with those large,

deep blue eyes, whose glance had struck him so annihilatingly. He did

not confess to himself with what passion he clung to this picture, with

what longing he dreamed away hours in these recollections; he did not

even confess the thought which lay unexpressed in his soul, that the

woman who still bore his name, who was the mother of his child,

notwithstanding all that had happened, still belonged to him, and

although he had forfeited the right of possession, at any rate no other

dared approach her.

And now he must hear that another already stretched forth his hand to

the prize, and offered everything to gain it. His brother's words

unsparingly disclosed the motive, to which alone he owed it, that Ella

had not answered his flight with letters of divorce. Only for the

child's sake was she still called his wife; not because one trace of

liking for him lingered in her heart. And if she were now to take the

step once avoided; if on her side she removed the chain, now when a

Cesario offered her his hand, who could prevent her; who could blame

the woman, who after the lapse of years sought at last in a purer,

better love, recompense for the treachery her husband had exercised

towards her? The danger did not lie in the fact that Marchese Tortoni,

who was handsome, rich, and who, belonging to one of the noblest

families, was the aim of so many aspirations, could raise his wife to a

brilliant position; that could only come under Erlau's consideration;

but Reinhold knew that Cesario, with his noble and thoroughly pure

character, with his glowing enthusiasm for everything beautiful and

ideal, might indeed win the heart of an Eleonore--yes, must win it--if

this heart were still free; and this conviction robbed him of all

self-possession. There was once an hour in which the young wife had

lain full of despair on her knees by her child's cradle, with the

annihilating consciousness that at that moment her husband was

forsaking her, his child, and his home for another's sake--that hour

now revenged itself on him, who was guilty of it, revenged itself in

the words, which stood as if written in letters of flame before his

soul--"Therefore you made her free also--perhaps for another."

CHAPTER V.

A storm of applause rolled through the opera house, and the curtain had

not even been drawn up as yet. It was for the overture, whose last

tones had just resounded. The theatre was filled to overflowing in

every place, with the sole exception of one small proscenium box close

to the stage; this was occupied by a single elderly gentleman, probably

some rich eccentric, whom it pleased to procure by lavish expenditure

of money the entire possession of a box, as on such an evening it would

otherwise hardly have been obtained. Every where else the dazzlingly

lighted spaces and tiers of boxes, with their rich parterres of ladies,

offered a brilliant and variegated picture. The world of artists, as

well as aristocracy, was fully represented. All which the town

possessed in the way of beauties, celebrities and persons of

distinction, had appeared to prepare a new triumph for the much admired

favourite of society. And was this merely what it was all for? No young

composer was offering his work timidly to the approbation or

disapprobation of the public: a recognised and undisputed sovereign in

the realms of music stepped before the world with a new display of his

talent, in order to gain a new conquest by it. This certainly lay

written very plainly, although not as if it were agreeable, upon

Maestro Gianelli's face, who conducted the orchestra. At the same time

he did not venture to fail in zeal or attention. He knew only too well

that if he attempted here, where of course a portion of the success

depended upon him, to intrigue against the all-powerful Rinaldo, it

must cost him his post, perhaps his entire future, as in such a case

the disfavour of the public would be ensured to him. Therefore he did

his duty to the fullest extent, and the overture was performed with

perfect execution.

The curtain rustled, and in anticipation the composer received the

homage of eager silence. Before the first act was half concluded there

was not one of the audience who had not already forgiven Reinhold the

tyranny with which he had disposed of all means in his hands, and

insisted mercilessly on having his views carried out. The

representation was in every respect perfect, and the scenery a

masterwork. All felt that it was a different hand to that of the usual

manager which had ruled here, and raised simple theatrical effects

everywhere to artistic beauty; but all these external advantages

disappeared before the all-attracting power of the work.

It was, perhaps, the most perfect which Rinaldo had ever composed in

his own peculiar line, a line by many so much admired, and by so many

others deplored. At all events this time he produced the very best in

that style to which Beatrice's influence had drawn him; was it the

highest which he could produce? This question was absorbed at present

in the ringing applause with which the audience greeted this new

creation of their favourite. Was it not Rinaldo again with all the

fiery spirit of his genius, of which none could tell positively whether

it were at home above, in the heights of idealism, or below in the

depths of passion, and which roused again in men's hearts all feelings

which lay between these two poles.

The storm raged over the northern heaths, and the billows surged

against the coast. As mists are driven along the cliffs, so rose and

fell the tones in chaotic confusion, until at last a dreamlike,

beautiful melody dawned forth. But it only hovered like a fleeting

vapoury picture over the whole, never completed, never ringing forth

clear and full, and soon it was lost amid other sounds, which not so

pure and sweet as it, yet attracted with a singularly strange charm.

The mists separated, and out of them appeared the demon-like beautiful

form, which was the chief performer and central figure of the whole

opera. Loud acclamation greeted Signora Biancona's appearance on the

stage. Beatrice showed to-day that she still understood how to be

beautiful, as at the commencement of her career. What art may have done

towards it was not now brought into consideration, enough that the

apparition standing before the public was perfect in every respect. The

half fantastic, half classic costume displayed her figure in all its

grace, her dark curls flowed loosely over her shoulders, and her eyes

gleamed with the old devouring fire. And now that voice was raised,

which had been the admiration of almost all Europe, full and powerful,

filling the extensive space--the singer still stood at the zenith of

her beauty and artistic strength.

The melodies flowed forth, still more glowing, more fiery, and before

the audience a picture of sounds was unfolded which seemed to borrow

its colours, now from the brightest sunlight, now from the scorching

heat of a crater. It pourtrayed the lost wild life of one whose cup was

filled to the brim, and who drained it to the very dregs. This rushing

forth beyond all bounds and limits, the volcanic glow of feelings, the

goblinlike play with tones carried the hearers irresistibly away on the

sea of passion, there to cast them adrift between shuddering and

enchantment, between heaven and hell. At times, indeed, notes rang out

like pæans of joy and triumph, but between were startling, harsh

discords, and then again sounds of that first lost melody were wafted

back, which ran through the entire opera like a soft, intensely painful

yearning plaint. As a dream of love and happiness passes through the

soul of man without ever descending to reality, so breathed and died

these tones in the distance, while in the foreground stood ever and

ever again the one figure, which Rinaldo had endowed with the highest

dramatic power, of which he was a master like none other, which he had

surrounded with all the magic of his melodies, whose sensual,

entrancing charms were laid like a ban upon the listeners' souls.

Beatrice was, if any one, adapted to understand this music exactly in

its innermost being and nature and to do it justice; she, whose

peculiar element was passion, who, as an actress, had sought and found

her triumph in it only. It rang out of every note of her singing,

quivered out of every motion in her acting, which raised itself to a

greater dramatic height than ever before, while she represented hate

and love, devotion and despair, rage and revenge with life-like truth.

It was as though this woman poured forth a stream of fire, which

imparted itself to the audience, who, half charmed, half alarmed,

followed her performance. Never yet had the singer been so entirely

part of her task, never yet had she delivered it so perfectly as this

time. No one guessed, indeed, for what prize she struggled, what urged

her to employ her best powers. Was it not to win back \_him\_, whom

already she had more than half lost! He had admired the actress before

he had learned to love the woman, and the actress now called all the

power of her talent to her aid, in order to maintain that of the woman.

For the first time the storm of applause was indifferent to her, as it

succeeded every scene; for the first time she did not care for the

worship of the crowd; she only waited for the one glance of passionate

rapture which had so often thanked her on such evenings--but to-day she

waited in vain.

"Signora Biancona surpasses herself tonight," said Marchese Tortoni,

enthusiastically, to Captain Almbach, who was in his box. "Often as I

have admired her, I never saw her like this before."

"Nor I," replied Hugo, monosyllabically.

Cesario looked at him in undisguised astonishment. "That sounds very

cool, Signor Capitano. Have you no other expression of admiration for

this woman, who stands so close to your brother?"

Hugo's countenance was indeed as cool as his tone, while he replied

quietly, "That is just Reinhold's taste. Sometimes our views lie very

far apart. However, it would be unjust not to admire Signora Biancona

to-night without reserve, and I do it, too--that is to say, from a

spectator's point of view. Close to her, such a passion, beyond all

reason, which seems to know no limits, would be rather unnatural. I can

never quite dismiss the thought that one day Donna Beatrice will carry

this truly masterful acting into reality, and could be a sort of Medea

there also, who only breathes forth death and ruin. That she \_can\_ do

it, one sees by her eyes and--although I do not otherwise exactly

belong to the timid class, I could not love such a woman."

"And yet Reinhold's works require exactly this fiery representation,"

said the Marchese, reproachfully, "and of that only a Biancona is

capable."

"Yes, to be sure, she has always been his doom," murmured Hugo, "and he

will never be free so long as this doom reigns over him."

The two gentlemen had long since remarked Consul Erlau in the opposite

stage box, and exchanged greetings with him. They never suspected that

he was not alone any more than did others of the audience, as the lady

who accompanied him sat far behind in the background of the box,

entirely concealed by the folds of the half lowered curtain, but yet so

that she could quite overlook the stage, and her companion, when he

spoke to her, took the precaution of rising and stepping back also. She

wished, evidently, to avoid being seen, and also to avoid a visit from

the two gentlemen.

Ella had actually obtained the fulfilment of her wish by her indulgent

adopted father. So far she knew but few, and only the unimportant

compositions of her husband, several songs and fantasias, nothing else.

The peculiar field of his labours and its results--the opera--was

unknown to her. In consequence of the deadly wound inflicted upon her,

she had never been able to conquer herself sufficiently to witness the

triumphs which his operas obtained in her native town, those triumphs

which were founded on the ruins of her life's happiness; and what she

learned from the newspapers, or through strangers to whom her near

connection with the admired composer was not known, only plunged the

dagger deeper into her soul. Now, for the first time, the tone poet,

Rinaldo, appeared before her in the most genial of his works, now she

learned to know the power of those notes which so often had conquered

friends and foes, and even carried away opponents to admiration, and

the effect was overpowering. Half bent forward, listening breathlessly,

the young wife followed every note of the music; she was now still

capable, amid all the beauties which developed themselves before her,

of gazing into the dark depths which were disclosed therein. For the

first time she understood her husband's character entirely and wholly,

this glowing artist's nature with all its contradictions, with its

storms, tempests and struggles; for the first time she comprehended

what the deeply injured wife \_would\_ not comprehend until now, the

inner need of nature which compelled Reinhold to tear himself loose

from the confined fetters of provincial every-day life and to follow

the call of his genius, which made this catastrophe for him a struggle

between life and death.

That he also broke those bonds, which under every circumstance ought

to have been held sacred by him, that he sacrificed the duties of a

father and a husband, who forsook his own for what would have been

justifiable independence of a free man, could not be exonerated even by

his genius; but in Ella's heart there now dawned, softly suggested, the

question--what had she herself been in those days to her husband, that

she should have required him to resist temptation, which came before

him in the guise of a Beatrice Biancona, and what could she offer

against a passion, whose glowing romance had, from the first, ruled the

artist more than the man. The wife entrusted to him was then far too

much oppressed with the burden of her education and surroundings, to be

able to raise herself in any degree to his height; in her place there

stood another in all the glory of her beauty and talent, and this other

showed the young composer the path of liberty and fame. He had

succumbed! Ella felt from the depths of her inmost heart that he would

not have done so, could she have been to him then what she was to-day.

For the last time the curtain was drawn up, and until the last note

Reinhold showed that he had been true to himself. The finale was as

grand as the entire opera, and created a thrilling effect. Yet the work

was wanting in one thing, the highest, for which not all the brilliant

flashes of genius could atone, namely, harmony with itself. It had no

peace, and awoke none in the minds of the audience. The composer

appeared to have infected his work with the conflict which lay

unappeased in his own breast; it was after all but the despair of life,

of happiness, of himself. When the nightlong tempest had raged until

exhausted, no fluttering morning's red peeped forth, promising a new

and better day; on the wide, dreary waste of waters only the wreck was

driven about, and clinging to it the shipwrecked traveller reached his

native coast at last--too late to be saved. When wearied and wounded to

death he sinks down there; once more is heard completed, as if 'twere

ghostly tones from the far off unapproachable distance, that dream-like

melody for the first time ringing out full and perfect in death, and

the notes fade and die softly, as the life-blood ebbs away.

The reception of this opera by the audience far surpassed any success

which Rinaldo had ever gained. Surely this music and performance were

certain of approbation from a southern public. There every spark took

fire, there each flame ignited and spread from one to another. One

would have imagined the applause must have exhausted itself at last,

the acclamations must have moderated themselves, but to-day even the

most exalted enthusiasm appeared capable of rising still higher. After

the close of each act, after every scene, it broke forth anew, and

ended at last in a regular uproar with which the whole house demanded

the composer's appearance most tumultuously.

Signor Rinaldo let them wait long before he acceded to this demand, he

allowed Signora Biancona to come forward alone, again and again, in

despite of all the stormy cries which were for him. Only at the end of

the opera, when the calls resembled a riot and the enthusiasm could no

longer be controlled, only then did he show himself and was greeted in

such a manner by the audience as must have satisfied the most

immeasurable ambition.

Proudly and calmly Reinhold stepped on to the stage; he stood almost

immovable amid the enthusiastic acclamations. He had long since

learned to accept all triumphs as something due to him, and great

as were to-day's, not for one moment did they deprive him of his

self-possession. His dark eyes swept slowly along the rows of boxes,

but suddenly remained fascinated at a certain point. It was as though

an electric shock had at once passed through his whole being, he

started so violently, and his glance flashed--that glance of passionate

delight for which Beatrice tonight had in vain laid out all the power

of her talent; and if the fair head which had only become visible for

one moment did disappear again at the next, yet he knew who was

concealed behind the curtains of the box, who was witness of his

triumph.

"Eleonore, that was imprudent!" said Erlau, also retreating from the

balustrade. "You leaned too far forward. You were seen."

The young wife made no reply; she stood erect, both hands grasping

the back of the seat from which she had risen in perfect

self-forgetfulness. The large eyes, full of tears, were still directed

unabashed to the stage where Reinhold just then came forward again to

thank the audience, that cheering excited crowd, for whom he was the

sole centre of attraction. All the thousand eyes were fixed upon him

alone; all these lips and hands announced his victory, and while

wreaths and branches of laurel fell at his feet, his name, as if

carried aloft by one surging wave, resounded back in a thousand echoes.

\* \* \* \* \*

At the ---- Embassy a large \_soirée\_ took place, the first

entertainment of its kind for the season. A numerous assembly of guests

moved through the magnificent apartments of the ambassadorial hotel.

Trains swept and uniforms flashed in the rooms beaming with light and

scented with the perfume of flowers; near charming ladies' faces and

distinguished wearers of orders might be seen many grave, noteworthy

figures in simple civilian's dress, and amongst all these well-known

forms and names, many foreign ones were mixed, who, according to their

appearance and title, claimed more or less attention, to lose

themselves again in the throng of guests.

Reinhold and Captain Almbach were also amongst those invited; the

former was, as usual, the object of flattery and compliments from all

sides, although demonstrated rather less noisily than so lately in the

theatre. Reinhold had for long been considered one of the greatest

celebrities in society. His new opera made him quite the lion of the

season, and nowhere could he show himself without being surrounded and

congratulated by every one present.

The charming representative of his work, Signora Biancona, shared this

universal attention with him. Unfortunately, this time it was

impossible to express the admiration of both at the same time, as they

seemed rather to avoid than seek each other. Observant lookers-on

declared that some slight rupture must have occurred between them, as

they had arrived separately and never once drew together. Nevertheless

the actress was continually surrounded with admiration, due, probably,

in no small degree to her beauty. Beatrice understood perfectly how to

"drape" herself for the drawing-room as well as for the stage, and if

her toilette generally displayed something fantastic, it harmonised so

peculiarly with her style of appearance that she only appeared the more

fascinating. The singer preferred black, like many of her country

women, and had selected it again to-day, but the dress composed of

velvet, satin and lace was still most extravagantly magnificent, and

rich jewels glistened on the dark ground. Single crimson flowers,

apparently scattered carelessly here and there in her hair, seemed to

fasten the black lace veil, and with these the Italian's dark

complexion and burning flash of her eyes, formed a whole, which if

intended to create an effect, certainly attained this result in the

highest degree.

"Ah, Herr Almbach, so I find you here?" asked Lord Elton, who, glad to

find any one with whom he could speak English, came up to Captain

Almbach. "I wanted to see you for several days. Your brother's new

opera----"

"For mercy's sake, my Lord, do not talk about that!" interrupted Hugo,

with a gesture of horror, "since the day of its performance I have been

nearly plagued to death with my brother's opera; everybody feels in

duty bound to congratulate me too. How often have I wished for a

revolution, an earthquake, or at least a slight outbreak of Vesuvius,

so that at least something else may be talked of in society."

Lord Elton shook his head half-laughingly, half-disapprovingly. "Herr

Almbach, you should not speak so recklessly, if a stranger heard you he

might misunderstand you."

"Oh, I have amused myself several times by getting rid of some of his

worst admirers by such expressions of my sentiments," said Hugo, quite

unconcerned. "I do not feel obliged to offer myself upon the altar of

my brother's popularity by listening to their speeches. How Reinhold

can endure this triumph so long, I cannot conceive. Artist natures must

be very peculiarly organised in this respect; my sailor's nerves would

have given way long since."

Lord Elton seemed to enjoy the Captain's humour again to-day; he

remained steadily at his side, and was a silent, but yet very attentive

listener to all the remarks which Hugo as usual poured forth

mercilessly upon every known and unknown person.

"If I only knew why Marchese Tortoni suddenly makes such a comet-like

course through the room," mocked he; "that door seems to be the magnet

which attracts him irresistibly--ah! yes, now indeed I can understand

this move."

The last words sounded so unmistakably angry, that Lord Elton also

looked attentively at the entrance. There appeared Consul Erlau with

Ella on his arm. Marchese Tortoni was immediately at her side, and all

three passed through the doorway. The lady wore an apparently simple

white costume, but one could see that Erlau liked to display himself as

a millionaire, even so far as his adopted daughter was concerned. The

white lace dress, which floated so lightly around Ella's delicate

figure, far surpassed in costliness most of those heavy velvet and

satin robes which rustled through the room, and the row of pearls which

adorned her neck was of such enormous value, that many of the sparkling

jewels were as nothing beside it. Her fair head merely wore its natural

ornament; no diamond, not even a flower, decorated the rich blonde

plaits, whose faint golden glimmer harmonised so wondrously well with

the delicate pink colour of her complexion. That figure required no

studied artifice of the toilet to prove itself beautiful, it was so

without any such aid, and if the ladies' glances soon discovered what

cost was concealed under this seemingly simple costume, the gentlemen

had no less keen eyes for the poetry of the apparition which sailed

past them.

The three had arrived in the middle of the room, when, by chance, one

of the groups in whose midst Reinhold had been, suddenly broke up, and

he himself appeared standing almost immediately opposite to his wife.

It was not the first encounter of this kind between the husband and

wife, and they must always be prepared for the possibility of meeting

on such occasions. And so Ella seemed to be; only for a moment did her

arm tremble on that of her companion, and a fleeting colour came and

went in her cheeks; then, however, the large eyes swept calmly on, and

she turned to the Marchese, who was telling her the names of some of

the persons present. Reinhold, on the contrary, stood as powerless as

if he had forgotten everything around him. Although his wife's present,

appearance was no longer strange to him, yet she looked quite different

by the dim lamp-light of the garden room at Villa Fiorina, in the

gloomy, rainy light of the verandah on that stormy day, and in the

half-dark background of the opera box. He had never seen her as

to-night, in the dazzling flood of light in the saloon, in the airy

pale dress; and, despite the place and surroundings, it came wafted to

him, as a recollection of that dream-like morning hour at Mirando, when

the sea broke so deeply blue beneath the castle terrace, and the scent

of flowers arose from the gardens, while the white figure leaned

against the marble parapet--certainly her face was turned from him

then, but now it was turned to another. At the sight of Cesario, who

still maintained his place by her side, dream and recollection

vanished; before Reinhold rose his brother's words which had robbed him

of all peace almost ever since that conversation. "Perhaps for

another," resounded in his heart. An ardent, threatening glance fell

upon Cesario; returning to the circle he had barely left, he withdrew

with a violent movement from the Marchese's greeting and address.

The latter looked at him astounded. He had not the remotest idea of the

cause of this sudden avoidance, but he suspected for long already, that

more than enmity only, as he had imagined, lay between Reinhold and

Erlau. It had not escaped him that some secret connection had taken

place between Ella and his friend, and to-day's encounter confirmed

this notion only too strongly. Cesario was too proud to take refuge in

espionage like Beatrice, and so he endured an uncertainty, whose

explanation he had as yet no right to require of Ella or the Consul,

and which Reinhold would not explain to him.

The German merchant was almost a stranger in the gathering, yet his

companion's appearance soon began to create a sensation. Erlau had, to

be sure, knitted his brows at the unexpected sight of Reinhold, but

when he perceived that Ella remained apparently quite calm, the meeting

rather gave him satisfaction. The Consul was evidently very proud of

his adopted daughter, and noted the admiring glances and whispered

remarks which followed her everywhere. He told himself that her former

husband must see these glances, must hear these remarks, and with a

scarcely concealed triumphant expression he walked on past the groups.

The throng of guests moving up and down, and the numerous reception

rooms, made it easy for those to avoid each other who did not wish to

meet.

About a quarter of an hour after Erlau's arrival, Captain Almbach drew

near to greet him.

"Are you here, Herr Captain Almbach?" asked the Consul, astonished.

Hugo made a slightly ironical bow. "I have the honour. Does it

displease you so much?"

"Certainly not! You know I am always pleased to see you; but out of our

own house one only meets you in your brother's company. It appears

impossible to go anywhere in society without running up against Signor

Rinaldo."

"He is intimate with the master of the house," explained Hugo.

"Naturally," growled the Consul. "I should like to find one circle that

does not adore him, and in which he does not reign. I could not refuse

our Ambassador's invitation, and wished, too, to show my poor Eleonore

something more than merely a sick-room. Have you spoken to her?"

"Of course," said Captain Almbach, looking across the room where Ella

was standing engaged in conversation with the Marchese, Lord Elton, and

some ladies; "that is to say as much as Marchese Tortoni made it

possible for me to do so. He claims the lion's share of the

conversation. I retire modestly."

"Yes, my dear Herr Captain, you must accustom yourself to that,"

laughed Erlau. "In society Ella is seldom at liberty to converse with

one alone. I wish you could see her do the honours of my drawing-room.

Here, we are almost entire strangers, otherwise I assure you Marchese

Tortoni and Lord Elton would not be the only ones who would annoy you

in this way."

Ella in the meanwhile had finished her conversation, and left the group

with a slight bow, in order to return to her adopted father. As the

Marchese, much to his displeasure, was detained by one of the ladies,

Ella was crossing the room quite alone, when suddenly, in the middle of

it, a dark velvet dress pushed past her so closely and rudely that it

seemed as if done on purpose. Looking up, she perceived close to her

the beautiful but, at this moment, alarming countenance of Signora

Biancona.

Ella betrayed neither fear nor confusion, she took her lace dress up

slowly, and moved slightly aside. There lay on her part a quiet, but

very determined protest against any contact in this movement, and

Beatrice seemed to understand it only too well, still she came even

nearer. Ella felt a hot breath close to her cheek, and heard the

whispered words--

"Signora, I beg for a moment's audience!"

Ella answered with a look of astonishment and indignation. "You--of

me?" asked she, equally low, but with an unmistakable intonation.

"I beg for a few moments," repeated Beatrice, "you will grant me them,

Signora?"

"No!"

"No?" said the Italian's voice, in hardly concealed scorn. "Then you

fear me so much that you dare not be alone with me even for a short

time?"

CHAPTER VI.

Signora Biancona appeared to have touched the right chord. The bare

possibility of such an idea broke down Ella's opposition. "I will hear

you," replied she, quickly, "but where?"

"In the little verandah at the right of the gallery. We shall be alone

there; I will go first, you need only follow me."

With an almost imperceptible motion, Ella bowed her head. The few words

had been exchanged so rapidly and softly, that no one had overheard a

syllable, no one even noticed the close vicinity of the two ladies,

who, at that moment, were only surrounded by strangers; therefore, none

remarked it when Signora Biancona immediately afterwards disappeared

from the room, and Ella a few minutes later followed her example.

The gallery, adorned with statues and paintings, next to the

reception-room was almost empty. Only few guests had sought the cooler

apartment, at the end of which a glass door led into a half-open

verandah, which by day probably offered an extensive view over the

surrounding gardens, but tonight had been included in the entertaining

rooms, as it also had been decorated with flowering and foliage plants,

and if not so brilliantly lighted as the saloons, yet was sufficiently

so; at any rate it was quite empty, and the half-hidden room, lying

somewhat apart, which was unknown to most of the guests, offered the

possibility of an undisturbed conversation.

Beatrice was already there when Ella's lace dress rustled through the

doorway, but the young wife remained very close to it, without

advancing even a single step beyond. With just the same unbending,

proud bearing which she had shown at the first meeting in the

\_locanda\_, did she now await the commencement of this half-compulsory

interview. The Italian's eyes hung with a truly devouring expression on

the white figure which stood opposite to her, flooded with the light of

the lamps, and whose beauty moved her to the bitterest hatred.

"Signora Eleonore Almbach!" began she at last, "I regret having to

explain to you that your \_incognito\_ is already betrayed. For the

present only to me, but I do not believe that it can be long

maintained."

"And upon whom would it fall?" asked Ella quietly. "I did not spare

myself when I assumed this \_incognito\_.

"Whom then? Perhaps Rinaldo?"

"I do not know Signor Rinaldo."

The words sounded so icily positive, that it was impossible to

entertain any doubt as to what she meant to express, and Beatrice was

silenced for a moment by them. It was quite beyond her to understand

the pride which could not even forgive a Rinaldo for a breach of faith

once made.

"Indeed, I was not prepared for this denial," replied she. "If

Rinaldo--"

"You wished to speak to me," interrupted Ella, "and I promised to

listen to you. That the decision has cost me something, I need hardly

explain to you; at least I did not expect to hear this name from you,

nor do I wish it. Let our conversation be as short as possible. What

have you to say to me?"

"Above all, I have to beg you to employ a different tone in our

interview," said Beatrice, with irritation. "You are speaking to

Beatrice Biancona, whose name is surely known to you in other ways than

merely through our personal connection with one another, and who may

indeed endure hatred and enmity on the part of an opponent, but not the

contempt you are pleased to express."

Ella remained perfectly unmoved at this demand. She stepped a little

aside, under cover of the tall foliage plants, so that she might not be

seen from the gallery, and then turned again to the speaker.

"I did not seek this interview. It was you, Signora, who to some extent

forced me to it, therefore you must allow me to preserve the tone which

I deem to be suitable towards you; none other is at my disposal."

A glance of wild, deadly hatred shot out of Beatrice's eyes, but she

felt that if she now gave way to her passion, it would rob her of all

power, and prepare her antagonist a new triumph. She therefore crossed

her arms, and replied with annihilating scorn--

"You make me do severe penance, Signora Almbach, for having been the

conqueror in a struggle whose prize was your husband's love."

"You are mistaken," responded Ella, coldly. "I \_never\_ struggle for any

man's love. I leave that to women who first gain such a prize with

difficulty, and then must ever tremble lest they lose it."

The last words seemed to have touched a sore spot. Beatrice paled.

"Certainly you had a right to claim him on the strength of the bridal

altar," said she, still retaining the former contemptuous tone. "Only,

alas, even this talisman does not protect one from the misfortune of

being forsaken."

Now it was she who aimed mercilessly for a wound which she herself had

made, but the arrow glanced harmlessly back. Ella drew herself up erect

and proud--

"Certainly not from the pain of such a fate, but at any rate from its

shame. For the forsaken wife there remain the interest, the sympathy of

the whole world; for the forsaken lover--only contempt."

"Only that?" said Beatrice grimly. "You mistake, Signora; one other

thing remains for her--revenge!"

"Is that intended for a threat to me?" asked Ella. "Whoever challenges

your revenge, may seek to protect herself against it; I am free from

it."

"Of course, you came from the north where passion is not known, as we

understand the word," cried the Italian. "With you prejudices, duties,

the world's opinion, stand for ever and ever in the front--a woman's

\_love\_ only comes in the second rank."

"Certainly in the second rank." Ella's tone was now one of unconcealed

scorn. "In the first stands woman's honour; we are accustomed to place

it unconditionally and everywhere in front--a prejudice certainly from

which Signora Biancona has long since emancipated herself."

Ella did not know the rival whom she irritated, otherwise she would not

perhaps have ventured to let the pride of the deeply injured wife speak

in so crushing a manner; the effect was an appalling one.

It was as if all at once a demon sprang up in the Italian, as if her

whole being really shot forth "death and destruction," so flashed her

dark eyes; a half smothered cry of fury broke from her lips, and

forgetting everything around her, she took one or two steps forward.

Ella shrank back at this more than threatening movement--

"What does that mean, Signora?" said she firmly. "Violence perhaps? You

forget where we are. I see that I was wrong to accede to this

interview, it is high time to end it."

Beatrice appeared to recover her senses to some extent; at least she

stood still, although the unnatural expression of her eyes had not

faded; convulsively her hand crushed the black lace veil which fell

over her shoulders; she did not notice that in doing so one of the red

flowers detached itself from her hair, and fell to the ground.

"You shall learn to repent these words--this hour, Signora," hissed she

through her clenched teeth. "You do not know revenge? Very well, I know

it, and shall know how to show it to you and him."

She swept away and left the young wife alone behind, who could not

bring herself to re-enter the drawing-room immediately after this

scene, and encounter Erlau's anxious enquiries. Drawing a long breath,

she sat down on one of the seats, and rested her head on her hand. This

wild hatred and threat of vengeance did shake her, but it showed her

the truth also, through all veils. Only the successful rival is

hated, only what is lost is avenged, or at least what is given up for

lost--the infatuation was at an end.

But whom did these threatening words concern? Reinhold? The wife paled;

she herself had offered a firm bold front to the menace; but at this

thought a breath as of trembling fear passed through her soul, and as

if in half unconscious pain she pressed her hand to her bosom and

whispered--

"Oh, my God, that cannot be. She loves him surely."

"Eleonore!" said a voice quite close to her.

Ella started up. She recognised the voice at the first sound, even

before she saw the figure, which stood on the other side of the

doorway, as though it did not dare to pass. Reinhold seemed to gain

courage when he saw no repelling movement, and entered completely.

"What is it?" asked he uneasily, "I find you alone here in this distant

room, and just now I saw another come from it and hurry through the

gallery. You spoke--"

"To Signora Biancona," added Ella, as he stopped.

"Did she insult you?" cried Reinhold irately. "I know her look, which

betokened no good. I almost suspected it when I saw her disappear so

suddenly from the drawing-room, and you were to be seen no more. I came

too late, as it appears. Did she insult you, Ella?"

His young wife rose, and made a movement as if to leave--

"If she had done so, you understand surely that your protection would

be the last which I should claim."

She tried to pass him, and reach the door. Reinhold made no attempt to

detain her, but his glance rested upon her with such sad reproach, that

she stopped involuntarily.

"Eleonore," said he softly, "one more question before you go--only one.

You were at my opera--why deny it? I saw you, as you saw me. What urged

you to go?"

Ella lowered her eyes, as if it were a fault of which she was accused,

and a treacherous warmth flowed over her brow and cheeks, as she

hesitatingly replied--

"I wanted to become acquainted with the composer, Rinaldo, in his

works."

"And now that you have become acquainted with him?"

"Do you wish for my judgment upon your new creation? The world says it

is a masterwork."

"It was a confession," said he with strong emphasis. "I did not,

indeed, imagine that you would hear it, but as it was so--did you

understand it?"

His wife was silent.

"I only saw your eyes for one moment," continued he passionately, "but

I saw that tears stood in them. Did you understand me, Ella?"

"I comprehended that the author of such tones could not endure the

narrow circle of my parent's house," replied Ella firmly, "and that

perhaps he chose the best for himself when he broke through it and

plunged into a life full of warmth and passion, such as his music

paints. You have sacrificed everything to your genius--I bear you

testimony that this genius was worthy of the sacrifice."

The last words sounded intensely bitter; they seemed to have touched

the same chord in Reinhold.

"You do not know how cruel you are," said he in a like tone, "or rather

you know it only too well, and make me suffer tenfold for every pang I

once caused you. What indeed is it to you, if I rise or succumb in a

life which the world deems unequalled happiness, which I often, so

often already, would have given away for a single hour of rest and

peace! What is it to you, if your husband, the father of your child, be

devoured with wild longing for reconciliation with a past which he

could never quite tear out of his heart, if at last he despairs of

everything and of himself! He has merited his fate; therefore the rod

was broken over him, and the elevated, virtuous pride of his wife

denies him every word of reconciliation, denies him even the sight of

his child--"

"For Heaven's sake, Reinhold, control yourself," interrupted Ella

anxiously. "We are not alone here--if a stranger heard us!"

He laughed bitterly--

"Well, then he would hear the great crime, that the husband has for

once dared to speak to his wife. And if all the world learn it, I care

no longer upon whom the discovery, whom the condemnation falls. Ella

you must remain," interrupted he beside himself, as he saw she wished

to depart. "For once I must ease my breast of what I have carried about

with me for months, and as you are at other times so inaccessible to

me, you must listen to me now and here. You must I say."

He seized her arm, so as to detain her by force; but at the same moment

Marchese Tortoni appeared at the door, and stepped almost furiously

between them.

Reinhold let his wife's arm go, and drew back. Cesario's appearance

showed him that the latter must have been present at least during the

last scene; with dark brow and a grave look the Marchese placed himself

at once by Ella's side.

"May I offer you my arm, Signora?" said he, very positively. "Your

uncle is uneasy at your absence. You will allow me to accompany you to

him."

Reinhold had already mastered his astonishment, but not his excitement.

The interruption at such a moment irritated him to excess, and the

sight of Cesario at his wife's side robbed him completely of his

self-control.

"I request that you will withdraw, Cesario," said he violently and

dictatorially, with that superiority which he had always employed

towards his young friend and admirer, but he forgot that he no longer

held the foremost place with the latter. The Marchese's eyes flashed

with indignation, as he replied--

"The tone of your request is as singular, Rinaldo, as the request

itself; you will therefore understand if I do not accede to it. I

certainly did not understand the German words which you exchanged with

Signora Erlau, but yet I saw that she was to be compelled to stay when

she wished to go. I fear she requires protection--pray command me,

Signora!"

"You will protect her from \_me\_?" cried Reinhold, becoming excited. "I

forbid \_you\_ to approach this lady!"

"You appear to forget that it is not Signora Biancona in this case,"

said the Marchese, cuttingly. "You may have a right there to forbid or

allow, but here--"

"I have it here more than any other."

"You lie."

"Cesario! You will answer for this to me," cried Reinhold angrily.

"As you please," replied the Marchese, equally violently.

Ella had up to this time tried in vain to interrupt the sentences which

were exchanged rapidly between the wildly excited men; they did not

listen to her, but the last words, whose meaning she understood only

too well, showed her the whole extent of the danger of this unhappy

meeting. With quick decision she stepped between them, and said with a

determination which commanded attention even at this moment--

"Marchese Tortoni, do not proceed any farther! It is a

misunderstanding."

Cesario turned at once to her. "Pardon, Signora! We forgot your

presence;" said he more calmly. "But you overlook the fact that in

Signor Rinaldo's words there lies an insult to you, which I am not

inclined to tolerate. I cannot and shall not retract my words, unless

you were to convince me that he is right."

Ella struggled with herself in agonising indecision. Reinhold stood

silent and gloomy; she saw that he would not speak now, that with this

silence he wished to compel her, either to deny or acknowledge him as

her husband; but to deny him, meant in this case to call forth the

worst consequences. The insult had taken place, and with the two men's

characters, a fatal meeting was inevitable. If it were not withdrawn,

no choice remained to the wife.

"Signor Rinaldo goes too far when he still claims rights which he once

possessed," replied she at last. "But no insult lay in his words, he

spoke--of his wife!"

Reinhold breathed more freely--at last she confessed it before Cesario.

The latter stood as if struck by lightning. Often as he had sought for

a solution of the enigma, he had never expected one such as this.

"Of his wife!" repeated he almost stupified.

"We have been separated for years," said Ella voicelessly.

This explanation restored the Marchese's steadiness. He immediately

guessed the cause of the separation; did he not know Beatrice Biancona?

The one name made all clear to him, and left no doubt as to whose side

the fault lay on now. The Captain was right in his conjecture; the

discovery, instead of frightening Cesario away, rather made him break

forth in passionate partizanship for the beloved and injured wife.

"Well then, Signora," said he quickly, "it only rests with you, whether

you will recognise a claim, which Rinaldo founds upon a past, which

exists no longer, and which he himself surely destroyed. You alone have

to decide whether I may still approach you, if in future I may dedicate

a feeling to you, which I confess openly is now more than the cold

admiration of a stranger, and which one day you must accept or refuse."

He spoke with all the ardour of a long suppressed emotion, but also

with the noble, immovable confidence of a man, to whom the beloved one

is elevated above all doubt, and the language was sufficiently plain;

it pressed urgently for a decision, from which the wife shrank back

tremblingly.

"Yes, indeed Eleonore, you must decide," said Reinhold, now taking up

the word. His voice all at once sounded unnaturally calm, but the

glance which hung openly on his wife with an expression as if in the

next moment the fiat of life or death should fall from her lips, showed

better how it was with him. For one second's duration both their eyes

met, and Ella could have been no woman had she not now seen that the

most perfect, annihilating revenge lay in her hand. One single "Yes"

from her lips would avenge all that she had suffered. Slowly she turned

to Cesario.

"Marchese Tortoni--I beg you to desist--I still consider myself bound."

A short portentous pause followed the words. Ella saw what a struggle

between pain and pride of the man, who would not show how deeply he had

been struck, went forward in the young Italian's beautiful features;

she saw him bow to her, without speaking a word, and turn to go; but

courage failed her to cast a glance to the other side.

"Cesario!" cried Reinhold, going a step towards him as if in rising

repentance. "We are friends."

"We \_were\_ so," replied the Marchese, coldly. "You surely comprehend,

Rinaldo, that this hour separates us. My accusation against you I

must certainly retract! your wife's explanation exonerates you from

it--farewell, Signora."

He left the husband and wife alone. Neither spoke during the next few

minutes. Ella bent low over one of the perfumed flowers, and a few

tears fell upon the broad shining leaves. Then her name was borne to

her ear by a trembling breath--she seemed not to hear it.

"Eleonore!" repeated Reinhold.

She raised her eyes to him. Intense pain still rested on her face, but

her voice sounded under perfect control again.

"What have I said then? That I shall never make use of the freedom

which your step gave me? That was certain from the first; without this

the experience of my marriage protects me from any second one. I have

my child, and in it the object and happiness of my life. I require no

other love."

"You, certainly not," said Reinhold, with quivering lip, "and my doom

is indifferent to you--you have always loved your child only, and never

me. For his sake you could break through all the prejudices of your

bringing up and become another woman; you could not do it for your

husband."

"Did he then ever give me such love as I found in my child?" asked

Ella, in a very low voice. "Let it be, Reinhold! You know who stands

between us, and will ever stand."

"Beatrice? I will not accuse her, although she was more to blame for my

departure then than you perhaps believe. Yet, I was always master of my

will--why did I yield to the fascination? But if I have now recognised

its deception, and tear myself away--"

"Will you forsake her, as you forsook me?" interrupted his wife, in

reproachful condemnation. "Do you think that \_that\_ could reconcile us?

I have lost all belief in you, Reinhold, and it will not be restored to

me, even if you sacrifice a second person now. I have no cause for

sparing or considering this Biancona, but she loves you; she offered up

all for you, and you yourself gave her an undisputed right of

possession for years. If even you would now destroy the fetters you

forged for yourself she would still part us for ever. It is too late; I

\_cannot\_ trust you any more."

Immeasurable sadness rang in the last words, but at the same time

unbending firmness. In the next moment Ella had left the room. Reinhold

was alone.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was on the day following this entertainment, already towards

evening, when Captain Almbach entered Reinhold's drawing-room.

"Is my brother still not visible?" asked he of the servant who met him.

The latter shrugged his shoulders, and pointed across to the locked

door of the study.

"You know, Signor, that we dare not disturb him. Signor Rinaldo has

locked himself in."

"Since this morning!" murmured Captain Almbach; "that begins, indeed,

to be alarming. I must absolutely find out what has happened."

He went to the study door, and knocked in such a manner that it could

not be unheard.

"Reinhold, open the door! It is I."

No answer came from within.

"Reinhold, twice to-day have I demanded admittance to you in vain. If

you do not open the door now, I shall think some misfortune has

happened, and burst it open in a minute."

The threat seemed to have some effect. Steps were heard inside the

room; the bolt was pushed back, and Reinhold, standing before his

brother who entered quickly, said impatiently--

"Why this disturbance? Can I never be alone?"

"Never!" said Hugo, reproachfully. "Since this morning you have been

inaccessible to everybody--even to me; and your face shows that you are

more fitted to bear anything than being alone. That unfortunate

\_soirée\_ last night; Heaven knows what befel you all! Ella suddenly

disappeared from the room, and I am convinced you spoke together.

Marchese Tortoni, who also became invisible, returned with a

countenance as if he had received his verdict of death, and left the

party the next moment. I find you in the gallery in a state of

excitement beyond description, and Donna Beatrice looked like the last

judgment day, as she entered her carriage. I bet that she alone has

caused all the mischief. What is the matter between you?"

Reinhold folded his arms, and looked gloomily at the ground. "Nothing

more now--we are separated from henceforward."

Captain Almbach stepped back in intense surprise. "What does it mean?

You accompanied her."

"Yes, she knew how to manage that, and so at last it came to a decision

between us."

"You have broken with her?" asked Hugo.

"I--no," replied Reinhold, with a bitter expression; "it was told me

plainly enough that I might sacrifice no 'second.' It was Beatrice who

brought the rupture violently about. Why must she force me to an

interview so immediately after it had become clear to me what I had

lost for her sake? She called me to account for my thoughts and

feelings, and I told her the truth which she demanded--mercilessly

perhaps, but if I was cruel, she challenged me to it ten times over."

"I can imagine it, from what I know of Biancona," said Hugo, in an

under tone.

"From what you know of her?" repeated his brother. "Do not believe it!

Did I not only really learn to know her last evening? It was a scene; I

tell you, Hugo, even you, with all your energy, would not have been

equal to her. One must have something of a fiend in one's nature to

resist such a woman. That hour put its seal upon our separation."

The words were full of gloomy moodiness, but betrayed no relief, no

removal of any weight. Captain Almbach shook his head.

"I fear the story will certainly not end there. This Beatrice is not a

woman to waste away in helpless tears. Be upon your guard, Reinhold!"

"She threatened me with all her vengeance," said Reinhold darkly, "and

so far as I know her, she will keep to it. Let her then! I do not

tremble before what I called up myself--with happiness I had parted

already."

"And if this separation continued irretrievable, do you not believe in

the possibility of a reconciliation with Ella?" asked Hugo, gravely.

"No, Hugo, that is over. I know that she cannot forget. Not one voice

in her heart speaks for me now, if it even ever spoke. The cleft

between us is too wide, too deep; no bridge leads across it now. I have

given up the last hope."

The brothers' conversation was interrupted at this moment by Jonas, who

entered hastily.

Reinhold looked up, annoyed that his brother's servant should venture

to enter his study so unceremoniously, and Hugo had a rebuke ready on

his lips, when a glance at the sailor's face arrested it.

"What is it, Jonas?" asked he uneasily. "Is it anything important?"

"Herr Captain!"--the sailor's voice had quite lost its usual quiet

tone, it trembled audibly----"I have just come from Herr Erlau's

house--you know that I often go there now--the old gentleman is beside

himself; all the servants are running about--Annunziata cries her eyes

out, although she really is not to blame for it, and young Frau Erlau

just now----"

"What has happened?" cried Reinhold, with the dread of presentiment.

"Some misfortune?"

"The child is gone," said Jonas, desperately; "since this forenoon. If

they do not find it again, I believe the mother will lose her life."

"Who? Little Reinhold?" enquired Hugo, while his brother stared at the

messenger of evil, without power over a single word. "How could it

happen? Was no one there to look after him?"

"He was playing in the garden as usual," related Jonas, "and Annunziata

with him; she went into the house for a quarter of an hour, as she

often does. When she returned, the garden door was open, the child

gone, and not a trace of him to be found. They have roused all the

neighbourhood, searched all the environs, but no ponds nor pits, where

the little one could come to grief, are anywhere near, and if he had

run away, he is big enough, after all, to find his way back again. No

one can understand the mystery."

The brothers' looks met. In both their eyes stood the same terrible

thought. The next moment, Reinhold, pale as a corpse, and trembling

with excitement in all his limbs, seized his hat from the table.

CHAPTER VII.

"I will soon procure the solution," cried Reinhold. "I know where to

seek it. You go first to Ella, Hugo! I will follow--perhaps with the

child."

The more thoughtful Hugo caught him quickly by the arm.

"Reinhold, I implore you, do not be too hasty! We do not know the

particulars so far. The child may have strayed away, and, as it does

not speak Italian, not have found its way back yet. Perhaps it has

already been brought home to its mother. What are you going to do?"

"Demand the restoration of my son," cried Reinhold, with fearful

wildness. "That, then, was the vengeance which this fury had thought

of. Ella and me--she would strike us both with one single deadly blow!

but I will succeed in reaching her. Let me alone, Hugo! I must go to

Beatrice."

"That would be of no use," cried Captain Almbach, whom the expression

on his brother's face alarmed, and who endeavoured in vain to restrain

him. "If your suspicion be well founded, she will know, too, how to

play her part. You will only irritate her more. We must adopt other

means."

Reinhold broke away by main force. "Leave me alone; if any one can, I

shall compel her to deliver up my child! If I do not compel her--well,

a catastrophe must ensue."

He rushed away. Beatrice's house lay rather far from his; yet he

traversed the distance in less than a quarter of an hour. Usually, he

required no announcement there; all the doors flew open before him; he

was wont to be considered as master here. To-day the servant who opened

the door assured him positively the Signora could not be spoken to by

any one, not even Signor Rinaldo; she was very ill, and had strictly

forbidden--

Reinhold did not let the man complete his sentence. He thrust him

aside, hurried through the ante-room, and tore open the drawing-room

door. The room was empty, equally so the adjoining boudoir; the doors

of the remaining rooms stood wide open, nowhere was she whom he sought,

not a sign of her; she had evidently left the house.

Reinhold saw that he came too late, and in the overwhelming

consciousness of this discovery, he felt vaguely that Beatrice's flight

had saved him from a crime. In his present state of mind he would have

been capable of anything towards the abductor of his child. By calling

all his strength together, he forced himself to be calm, and returned

to the servant, who had not dared to follow him, but stood frightened

and uncertain in the anteroom.

"Signora has gone then--since when?"

The servant hesitated in his reply. The questioner's face appeared to

betoken no good.

"Marco, you must answer me! You see that I shall not be deterred by any

excuse; you seek to deceive me, according to the Signora's commands.

Once more, when did she go, and where?"

Marco was evidently not initiated into the secret, as he was not at all

prepared for this question. However, he may have listened to part of

the scene which took place the preceding evening between his mistress

and Signor Rinaldo, and explained to-day's affair in his own way. It

was quite in keeping with Beatrice's violent character, that she should

now have left the town for a few days, if only to render it impossible

to continue the performance of Rinaldo's opera, and that the latter

should be beside himself with anger was easily comprehended. It was

not, indeed, the first disagreement between the two, and all quarrels

so far had always ended in a reconciliation. With the prospect of such

a readjustment of affairs, the servant was clever enough not to injure

himself with the ruling side, and therefore intimated that Signora had

left the house early this morning, with the distinct order that all

enquiries were to be replied to "that she was ill." She had driven away

in her own carriage; where, he did not know.

"And where did she drive to?" asked Reinhold, breathlessly. "Have you

not heard what address she gave the coachman?"

"I believe--to Maestro Gianelli's house."

"Gianelli! then he, too, is in the plot. Perhaps he may still be

reached. Marco, so soon as Signora arrives, or any news of her, let me

know at once! At once! I will pay you with gold for every word. Do not

forget this!"

With these words, almost thrown at the servant in his flight, Reinhold

hastened away. Marco looked astounded after him. To-day's scene was

enacted much more tempestuously than any former ones under similar

circumstances, and Signor Rinaldo's excitement surpassed anything he

had seen before. What then had happened? The maestro could not possibly

have eloped with Biancona? It really almost looked like it.

In Consul Erlau's house naturally intense confusion and excitement

reigned. Captain Almbach, who had hurried there without delay,

undertook at once the management of the enquiries which had been

already set on foot with the greatest energy and caution, but even he

could not discover anything. In the meanwhile, the one fact was

clear--that the child had disappeared tracelessly, and so remained. As

to whether it had left the garden voluntarily, whether it had been

tempted out, all supposition was at a loss. No one had noticed anything

unusual, no one had missed the little one until the moment when

Annunziata returned to fetch him. The poor little Italian was dissolved

in tears, and yet she was quite blameless in the occurrence, as her

young mistress herself had called her into the house. The boy was old

enough not to require constant supervision, and he often played alone

in the perfectly enclosed place. Hugo had not yet dared to give words

to the suspicion which he shared with his brother, and which every

moment became more lively. He had only hinted slightly at an abduction,

and was at once met with utter incredulity. Robbers in the middle of

the street, in the most aristocratic quarter--impossible! A misfortune

was more likely. Once more they began a search, notwithstanding the

approaching darkness, in the neighbouring gardens and the rest of the

vicinity.

In the meanwhile, Erlau essayed in vain to pacify his adopted daughter,

and to point out to her the possibilities and probabilities which still

might let her hope for a happy termination; Ella did not hear him.

Silent and deadly pale, without shedding a single tear, she sat by his

side now, after having taken part for hours in the vain researches,

which she even to some extent had conducted herself. Although Hugo had

not alluded to that possibility by a syllable, the mother's thoughts

took the same direction, and the more inexplicable the child's

disappearance remained, the more irrepressibly did the recollection of

her yesterday's encounter force itself upon her, the recollection of

Beatrice's wild hatred, and burning threats of vengeance; and clear,

and ever clearer arose the presentiment that this was no case of

accident or misfortune, but that it was one of crime.

A carriage dashed madly up the street, and stopped before the house.

Ella, who started at every noise, imagined in every arrival a messenger

bringing news, flew to the window; she saw her husband descend and

enter the house. A few minutes later he stood before her.

"Reinhold, where is our child?"

It was a cry of deadly fear and despair, but also a reproach more

wounding than could be conceived. She demanded her child of him! Was he

alone to blame that it had been torn from the mother?

"Where is our child?" repeated she, with a vain attempt to read the

answer in his face.

"In Beatrice's hands," replied Reinhold, firmly. "I came too late to

rescue it from her; she has fled already with her prey, but at least I

know her track, Gianelli betrayed it to me; the rogue was cognizant, if

he were not literally an assistant, but he saw plainly that I was in

earnest with my threat to shoot him down if he did not tell me the road

she had taken with the child. They have fled to the mountains in the

direction towards A----. I shall follow them at once. There is not a

moment to be lost, only I wished to bring you the information, Ella.

Farewell!"

Erlau, who had listened to all much shocked, wished now to interpose

with questions and advice, but Ella gave him no time for it. The

certainty, fearful as it was, restored her courage; she stood already

at her husband's side.

"Reinhold, take me with you!" implored she, determinedly.

He made a gesture of refusal. "Impossible Eleonore! It will be a

journey as for very life, and when I reach the goal, perhaps even a

struggle between it and death. That were no place for you; I must fight

it out alone. Either I shall bring you your son back, or you see me now

for the last time. Be calm! The possibility of his rescue is now in his

father's hands."

"And the mother shall, in the meanwhile, despair here?" asked his wife,

passionately. "Take me with you! I am not weak--you know it. You need

fear no tears or fainting from me when action is required, and I can

bear all, only not the fearful uncertainty and inactivity, only not the

anxious waiting for news, which may not arrive for days. I shall

accompany you!"

"Eleonore, for God's sake!" interposed Erlau, horrified. "What an idea!

It would be your death."

Reinhold looked at his wife silently for a few seconds, as if he would

examine how far her strength went.

"Can you be ready in ten minutes?" asked he, quietly. "The carriage

waits below."

"In half the time."

She hurried into the adjoining room. The Consul wanted to forbid, beg,

entreat once more, but Reinhold cut him short.

"Leave her alone, as I do," said he, energetically. "We \_cannot\_ give

way now to cold consideration. I do not see my brother here, and I have

not time to seek him. Tell him what has happened, what I have

discovered. He must take the necessary steps here at once to ensure us

help, which we may perhaps require, and then follow us. We shall first

take the direct route to A----. There Hugo will find farther

information about us."

He turned, without waiting for a reply, to the door, where Ella already

appeared in hat and cloak. The young wife threw herself, with a short

tempestuous farewell greeting, on to her adopted father's breast, to

whose protest she would not listen; then she followed her husband.

Erlau looked out of the window as Reinhold lifted her into the

carriage, entered it himself, shut the door, and the horses started off

in full gallop. This was too much for the shaken nerves of the old

gentleman, especially after the alarm and excitement of the last few

hours; almost unconscious, he sank into an arm-chair.

Hardly ten minutes later Hugo entered; he had already heard from one of

the servants of his brother's sudden arrival and equally sudden

departure with Ella. At his first hasty questions, Erlau recovered a

little. He was beside himself at his daughter's decision, still more at

the independence of her husband, who had borne her away without any

more ado. Arrival, explanation and departure, all had taken place as in

a hurricane; this mode of action resembled a regular elopement, and

what could the poor wife do on such a journey? What might not occur,

what happen, if they really overtook this dreadful Italian? The Consul

was nearly in despair at the thought of all the possibilities to which

his favourite was exposed.

Hugo listened silently to the report, without betraying especial

surprise or horror. He appeared to have expected something of the sort,

and when Erlau had ended, laid his hand soothingly on the latter's arm,

and said quietly, but yet with a slight tremor in his voice--

"Let it be, Herr Consul! The parents are now on their child's track;

they will, it is to be hoped, find the little one and--each other

also."

\* \* \* \* \*

A carriage moved up the steep twisting road of the pass, which led

through the mountains to A----. Notwithstanding the four powerful

horses and cheering cries of the driver, it proceeded but slowly. This

was one of the worst spots in the whole chain of hills. The occupants

of the carriage, a lady and gentleman, had descended from it, and

struck into a foot path, which shortened the road almost by half; they

stood already on the summit, while the conveyance was still some

considerable distance behind them.

"Rest yourself, Ella!" said the gentleman, as he led the lady into the

shade of the rocky wall. "The exertion was too much for you; why did

you insist on leaving the carriage?"

His wife still kept her fixed, comfortless gaze turned to the pass,

which on the other side descended into the valley, and whose windings

could be partly overlooked.

"We are a quarter of an hour sooner at the top, at any rate," said she,

feebly. "I wanted to look out over the road, perhaps even discover the

carriage."

Reinhold's glance followed the same direction, in which nothing,

however, could be discerned but the figures of two men, looking like

peasants, who coming down the hill lustily, sometimes disappeared in

the turns of the road, soon again to reappear.

"We cannot, indeed, be so near them," said he pacifyingly, "although we

have flown since last evening. You see, at least, we are on the right

track. Beatrice has been seen everywhere, and the child beside her. We

\_must\_ overtake her."

"And when we do--what then?" asked Ella, listlessly. "Our boy is

unprotected in her hands. God knows what plans she will pursue with

him."

Reinhold shook his head--

"Plans? Beatrice never acts upon plans or calculations. The impulse of

the moment decides everything with her. The thought of revenge has

suddenly overcome her, and like lightning she has carried it out, like

lightning fled with her prey. Where? To what end? That is not even

clear to herself, and for the moment she does not enquire. She wished

to strike you and me in our most vulnerable point, and she has

succeeded; more she did not wish."

He spoke with great bitterness, but with most perfect certainty. They

stood alone at the summit of the pass; the carriage was still far below

them, and just then disappeared at the last turn of the road. The

mountains here bore an abrupt, wild character; almost naked the sharp

rocks rose upwards, now in mighty groups, now wildly split and broken.

Only aloes could take root in the clefts of the yellow grey stone, and

here and there a fig tree spread its meagre shade. Yonder, on the other

side of the valley, a building hung in dizzy height on the mountain's

wall, a castle or monastery, grey as the rock itself, and barely to be

distinguished from it at this distance. Lower down at the edge of an

abyss, a little hill-town had nestled itself, which built in and upon

the rock seemed almost to form part of it, and its deserted decayed

appearance harmonised with the loneliness around. Still lower, whirled

the broad rushing stream, occupying almost the entire width of the

valley, so that there barely remained space for the road by its side.

Over the whole scene, however, lay that glowing sunlight of a southern

autumn day, which is not inferior at all to the power of a northern

midsummer one; although the sun had long left its noontide height, the

air was still quivering with heat; sharply and harshly illuminated,

every single object stood out almost painfully clear to the sight, and

the heated stones literally burned under the scorching rays to which

they were incessantly exposed.

"It would be folly to precede the carriage, even only by another step,"

said Reinhold. "It would overtake us in a moment on the downward route.

Now we have a view over the whole."

Ella did not contradict him; her countenance bore plainly enough an

expression of the most extreme physical and mental exhaustion. This

drive of twenty hours without rest, added to the deadly fear at heart,

the ever renewed agonising excitement when the track sought for now

appeared and again was lost--this was too much for the mother's heart,

and the woman's strength. She sat down on a piece of rock, leaned her

head silently against the mountain's side, and closed her eyes.

Her husband stood by her and looked down silently at the beautiful pale

countenance, which in its deadly exhaustion appeared almost alarming.

The sharp points of the rock buried themselves deeply in her white

forehead and left red marks there. Reinhold slowly pushed his arm

between the stone and his wife's fair plaits; she did not seem to feel

it, and encouraged by it he put his arm quite round her, and attempted

to give her a better support against his shoulder.

Now Ella started slightly and opened her eyes; she made a movement as

if she would withdraw from him, but his look disarmed her--this look

which rested upon her with such painful, anxious tenderness; she saw

that he did not tremble less for her at this moment than he trembled

for his child. She let her head sink back again, and remained

motionless in his arms.

He bent low over her--

"I fear, Eleonore," said he, with an effort, "you have had too much

confidence in your strength. You will break down."

Ella shook her head denyingly--

"When I have got my boy again--perhaps then. Not before."

"You will recover him," said Reinhold energetically. "How? At what

cost? I do not certainly yet know; but I know how to master Beatrice

when the demon is roused in her. Have I not often stood opposed to her

at times, when perhaps every other person had trembled before her, and

have known how to enforce my will? Once more, for the last time I shall

try it, should she and I become the sacrifice."

"You believe in danger, also for yourself?" Ella's voice sounded as if

full of trembling fear.

"Not if I meet her alone, only if you approach her; promise me that you

will stay behind at the last station, will not show yourself when we

arrive. Remember that in the child she has a shield against every

attack; every means of force on our side, and everything would be lost

if she were to see you at my side."

"Does she hate me so much?" asked Ella, astonished. "I irritated her,

it is true, but yet it was you who offended her most deeply."

"I?" repeated Reinhold. "You do not know Beatrice. If I came before her

penitent, wishful to return, there would be an end of her hatred and

her revenge. One single oath, that I and my wife are separated and

remain so, that I have given up all idea of a reunion, she would give

you back your child without a struggle, without resistance. If I

\_could\_ do this, the danger would be over."

Ella's eye sought the ground; she did not dare to look up, as she asked

almost inaudibly--

"And can you not do it, then?"

His eyes flashed, he let his arm drop from her shoulders, and stepped

back--

"No, Eleonore, I cannot, and I shall not, as it would be perjury. So

little as I shall ever return to the bonds which I had felt degraded me

long before I saw you again, so little shall I give up a hope which is

more to me than life. Oh, do not draw back so from me! I know I may not

come near you with sentiments to which I have forfeited the right,

but you cannot prescribe my feelings to me, and if you did not see

before--would not see--Beatrice's burning hatred to you, and you alone,

must show you, how much you are avenged."

Ella made a sudden deprecating motion--"Oh, Reinhold, how can you at

this moment--"

"It is perhaps the only one in which you do not reject me," interrupted

Reinhold. "May I not, in the hour when we both tremble for our child's

life, tell the mother what she has become to me? Even then when I first

trod Italy's shore, there lay upon me something like a suspicion of

what I had lost. I could not rejoice over the newly-won freedom the

artist's career gained at last; and the richer and more brilliant my

life became externally, the deeper grew that longing for a home which

yet I had never possessed. You, to be sure, do not know the dull pain

which will not be still even in the midst of the whirl of passion, in

the noise of triumph, in the proudest success of one's creations, which

becomes torture in solitude, from which one must fly, even if only by

means of intoxication, by the wildest excitement. I believed that it

was only the longing for my child; then I saw the child again--saw

you--and I knew what this longing craved for; then began the atonement

for everything of which I had been guilty towards you."

He spoke quietly, without reproach or bitterness, and the words seemed

therefore to act all the more powerfully on Ella; she had risen as if

she would flee from his tone and gaze, and yet could not.

"Spare me, Reinhold!" begged she almost imploringly. "I can feel and

think of nothing now but my child's danger. When I have the boy safe in

my arms, then--"

"Well, then?--" asked he in breathless eagerness.

"I shall perhaps not have the courage any longer to pain his father,"

added Ella, while a flood of tears rushed from her eyes.

Reinhold did not say another word; but he held her hand firmly in his

own as if he would never loosen it again. At the same moment, the

carriage appeared on the top of the hill, and the driver stopped to

give himself and the tired animals a little rest.

Almost simultaneously, the two peasants who had been visible before on

the road, arrived from the other side. They stared curiously at the

beautiful pale lady and strange, distinguished-looking gentleman who

stepped towards them and asked where they came from. They named a place

which lay at the exit of the valley, some miles distant.

"Have you seen no carriage?" enquired Reinhold.

"Certainly, Signor. A travelling carriage like yours; but they had only

two horses, you have four."

"Did you see the occupants?" interposed Ella, in a trembling voice. "We

seek a lady with a child."

"With a little boy?--quite right, Signora. She is a good way before

you; you must drive sharply if you would overtake her," said the elder

of the two men while stepping nearer, somewhat alarmed, as the lady

looked as if about to sink down at the news; but at the same moment her

companion threw his arm round her, and supported her.

"Courage, Eleonore! We are near the crisis; now we must act."

He lifted her into the carriage, and sprang in after her. The few words

which he addressed to the driver must have contained some unusual

promise, as the latter swung his whip sharply across the horses, and

away they went after the object of their pursuit.

The latter had indeed gained a considerable advantage, and their

carriage was also driven at a rapid pace. Beatrice was alone in it with

little Reinhold, who, tired with crying and the restless, fatiguing

journey, had fallen asleep. The fair, curly little head was pressed

deeply into the cushions; his hands were twined instinctively around

the side rests, as if they sought a support against the incessant

jolting and shaking of the uneven road. The child slept soundly and

deeply, but Beatrice hardly noticed it just now. She was in that state

of supreme mental irritation which even puts a limit to the wildest

passion. She was as if in a heavy, stupid trance, from which only one

object stands out with fearful distinctness--the recollection of that

hour when Rinaldo cast himself free from her, when he called her the

curse and misfortune of his life, and acknowledged to her with proud

defiance that his love belonged to his wife alone. These words pierced

the Italian's heart ever again as if with a burning thorn. Whatever she

had done, however she may have sinned, she had loved this one man with

all the ardour of her soul--to this one she had been unfailingly true;

she had considered his love as her right, of which no power on earth

could deprive her, and now she lost it through the woman whom she

feared the last of all others--through his wife. His wife and his

child! They had ever been the dark shadow which menaced this happiness,

and which now, coming forward out of the gloomy past, took form and

life in order to destroy it.

Beatrice had hated both, even before she knew them. Did she not know

best what place they still maintained in Reinhold's remembrance? Had

she not often enough tried in vain to tear him away from it? There

must surely be something in the once despised power of sacred

wedlock; it was victorious at last against the beautiful, charming

Biancona--against the admired actress; and now made her taste the whole

agony of being forsaken, to which she had once so indifferently

condemned another, without asking if that other's heart broke under

this unmerited fate. The fetters, apparently dissolved, had never quite

loosed the fugitive; now they encircled him again, and Beatrice felt,

with desperate certainty, that she had never possessed the place in his

heart which once more his wife occupied.

CHAPTER VIII.

The passionate woman did indeed not act upon any plan or calculation

when she seized upon this last extreme means of cooling her revenge.

Her appearance in the Erlau's garden entirely concerned her hated

rival. She did not find Ella, but instead found the boy alone, without

supervision; and the idea, as well as the execution of his abduction,

were the work of a moment. At first the child willingly followed the

beautiful stranger, who drew it caressingly towards her, and when he

commenced to become frightened, and asked to be taken back to his

mother, it was already too late. Beatrice never thought of the possible

consequences of her step when she carried her prey away triumphantly;

she only felt that no stroke from a dagger could hit Ella's heart so

deeply and certainly as the loss of her child, and that this loss would

raise an everlasting barrier between the parents. It was this which she

had wished. But now she must see how to ensure the booty. Gianelli must

give his hand to aid the flight so hastily undertaken.

Now more than a day's journey lay already between the child and its

parents; but they must make a halt some time; some time this aimless,

planless flight must come to an end.

The vengeance had succeeded beyond expectation--what now?

Little Reinhold still slept. Had he only borne his father's features,

perhaps that had preserved him from all ill; but this golden fair hair,

this rosy countenance, and those deep blue eyes--just now closed, to be

sure--all belonged to the mother--the woman whom Beatrice hated as she

had never yet hated anything in the world, and this likeness was

ominous to the sleeping child. The burning eyes of his companion rested

for some minutes fixedly on his face; then she suddenly started as if

frightened at her own thoughts, tore her gaze away from the boy, and

turned aside.

Yonder, up above, she beheld the carriage which was following theirs. A

travelling carriage was very rare on this road, and it came in the same

direction--came with the greatest speed. Beatrice guessed at once what

it meant. So her track was already betrayed, and the pursuers were at

her heels--let them, indeed! She felt herself to be all-powerful so

long as she had the child in her hands.

Rising quickly, she ordered the coachman to lash the horses to their

greatest pace. He obeyed, and now commenced a wild race between the two

carriages. More than once the powerful animals could hardly keep up,

more than once the drag threatened to break and overturn the occupants.

None paid any attention to it, and promises of excessive rewards

spurred the two drivers on to scorn any danger. It was a furious,

reckless drive; rocks and ravines seemed to fly past on both sides;

ever higher rose the mountainous wall, the more the road descended;

ever nearer rushed the river; yet the four-in-hand had undeniably the

best of it. Both carriages now rolled down the valley, but the space

between them was diminished every moment--a few hundred yards, and the

fugitives would be overtaken.

The first vehicle thundered across the bridge which here united the two

banks. Beyond, it suddenly stopped. Beatrice herself had given the

order to do so; she saw that now no evasion, no escape was possible,

she must be prepared for extremities. The carriage stood close to the

edge of the river, which shot along with intense rapidity. Slowly

Beatrice opened the door, while with her left hand she grasped little

Reinhold, whom the mad gallop had awoke, and who gazed affrighted into

the foaming, raging waves which rushed past close below him. He did not

know how near his parents were. Now the second carriage had reached the

bridge, and the moment Ella beheld her child all consideration and

recollection were at an end. She forgot Reinhold's warning not to show

herself, to leave the decisive step alone to him; and bent far out of

the door.

"Reinhold!" resounded across--it was a cry of inexpressible, trembling

fear. The child cried out as it recognised its mother, and stretched

both arms to her. Weeping noisily, it tried to go to her: but this

sight was its ruin. Beatrice had become white as a corpse when she saw

the husband and wife side by side. Together, then! What should have

separated had united them, and if in the next moment Reinhold reached

the fugitive, and tore his son from her, they would be bound together

for ever, and for the forsaken one there would only remain contempt or

revenge.

But the choice was already made. A single step, quick as lightning

towards the stream, decided all. Beatrice had not loosed her hold of

the child, and with the strength of despair drew it down with her into

the flood of death.

A scene of indescribable confusion followed this horrible deed. The

drivers of both carriages had sprung down from their seats and ran

objectlessly up and down the banks; they did not even attempt to give

any succour, which was only possible at the sacrifice of their own

lives. Ella stood on the bridge; she wanted to cast herself in after

those whom she could not rescue; but better help was at hand. She saw

the waves splash up high as her dearest disappeared amidst them--saw

how these waves also closed the next moment over her husband's head.

Reinhold had thrown himself in immediately after his child, which, in

the fall, had torn itself away from Beatrice, and now re-appeared at

some little distance. Moments of agony ensued, in comparison with which

all previous suffering was but play. For Ella, life and death were

struggling together in these foaming, hissing waves, with which the two

bodies fought, the one helpless, almost powerless to resist, the other

toiling fiercely to the one point which at last he attained. The father

grasped his child, drew it to himself, and strove to reach the shore

with him. Now he planted his foot upon the rocky ground, now he seized

the overhanging rocky points on which to support himself; and now, too,

the mother regained power and motion. She rushed to both. Slowly

Reinhold mounted the cliff; his breast heaved with fearful exertion;

his arms bled, wounded by the sharp stones to which he had held, but

these arms encircled his boy whom he clasped against his heart for the

first time for years, and sinking down half-unconsciously, he placed

the child in its mother's arms.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Then this is really and irrevocably to be a farewell visit?" asked

Consul Erlau of Captain Almbach, who sat near him. "Your departure

comes very suddenly and unexpectedly. What will your brother, what will

Eleonore, say to it? Both calculated quite positively upon keeping you

here a few weeks longer."

On Hugo's usually light brow there lay a shadow to-day, and on his

features a strange, bitter expression, as he replied--

"You will soon reconcile yourselves to the parting. Reinhold will

not feel my absence in the constant society of wife and child; and

Ella--" he broke off suddenly. "Consider it as being all for the best,

Herr Consul. They will both be far too much occupied with each other

and their newly-recovered happiness to ask after \_me\_."

"Yes, indeed," rejoined the Consul, "and the greatest loser in this

reconciliation am I. For years I have looked upon Eleonore as my child,

have considered her and the little one as my indisputable property; and

now, all at once, her husband makes good his so-called rights and takes

them both from me, without my being able to raise any objection to it.

I do not understand Eleonore, that she has pardoned him so readily."

"Well, it was not done so very readily," said Hugo gravely. "He met

with resistance enough, and I hardly believe ha would ever have

overcome it without that catastrophe which finally came to their

assistance. He bought the reconciliation with his child's rescue. Ella

would have been no wife and mother if she had turned away from him

then, when he laid her boy, uninjured, in her arms. That moment atoned

for all, and you know as well as I that saving the child nearly cost

the father's life."

"Yes, certainly, he could do nothing more sensible than become

dangerously ill after the affair," grumbled Erlau, who decidedly seemed

to be in a very uncharitable mood. "That was enough to call Ella to his

side at once, from which she was not to be removed again, and he very

wisely would not let her leave him. One knows all that. Danger and

fear, care and tenderness without end! You surely do not require me to

rejoice over this reconciliation? I wish we had left this Italian

journey alone, then I should have kept my Eleonore, and Herr Reinhold

could have continued his genial, romantic artist's life here. That

would have been perfectly right for me."

"You are unjust," said Hugo reproachfully.

"And you out of sorts," added Erlau. "I do not understand exactly what

has happened to you Herr Captain; your brother is out of danger, your

sister-in-law amiability itself, the little one has attached himself

most tenderly to you, but your cheerfulness seems quite to have left

you since everything has been swimming in love and peace around us. You

play no jokes upon any one, you annoy no one with your teasings and

nonsense, one hardly ever hears a word of fun from you. I fear

something has got into your head, or even your heart."

Hugo laughed loudly but somewhat forcedly.

"Why not, indeed! I can no longer bear to remain such a time on shore,

and give up the sea. This inactivity of months wearies me. Thank God,

it is coming to an end at last. Early to-morrow I depart, and in a few

more days I shall be out on the waves again."

"And then we all fly apart quite prettily to every point of the

compass," said the Consul, who still could not get the better of his

irritation. "You sail to the West Indies, your brother and Eleonore

will also leave; I go back to H----, a most pleasant solitude which

awaits me there at home! Herr Reinhold certainly was gracious enough to

promise me that I should see his wife and child from time to time. From

time to time! As if that could satisfy me, after having had her about

me every moment for years. Of course, now the husband and father must

decide about it! I am convinced he will never let her leave him for a

week; he is just as overwhelming in his tenderness as he once was in

his carelessness."

It almost seemed as if the subject of the conversation were painful to

Captain Almbach, as he broke it off quickly by rising and taking leave

of the Consul heartily, but yet rather curtly and hastily. Erlau

evidently saw him go with regret, as however great was the prejudice

which he entertained against Reinhold, he was as decidedly prepossessed

in Hugo's favour, and if the latter had been the repentant prodigal,

the Consul would have regarded the reconciliation with a much more

favourable eye than he did now where every feeling of justice was lost

in the pain of the impending separation from his favourite. It only

slightly consoled the old gentleman that he took his restored health

home with him; his house appeared very desolate to him now, and he

sighed deeply as the door closed after his guest.

Hugo, in the meantime, returned to his brother's abode which he still

shared. His room, in consequence of the preparations for his departure,

was in the greatest disorder already. He had ordered Jonas to pack up,

and put all ready for the early morning, and the sailor had partly

obeyed these directions, as the boxes stood open on the floor, and the

travelling requisites lay about on the table and chairs.

But there seemed to be no talk of packing at present, as Jonas sat

quite calmly on the lid of the large travelling chest, and near him

little Annunziata, whom he had probably called to help him in this

difficult business. The conversation between them, notwithstanding the

young Italian's very defective knowledge of German, was in full course,

and Jonas had also placed his arm, unabashed, round her waist, and was

just in the act of stealing a kiss from her, which did not seem to be

the first, and most likely would not have been the last, if Hugo's

appearance had not put an end to any farther confidential arrangements.

The couple started up, alarmed at the unexpected opening of the door.

Annunziata recovered herself first. She fled with a slight exclamation

past Captain Almbach into the ante-room, where she disappeared and left

the explanation of the situation to her companion. Jonas however,

transfixed from fright, and stiff as a statue, stood without moving,

looking at his master, who now entered completely and shut the door

behind him.

"Do you call that packing the boxes?" asked he. "Then you have gone so

far happily with your exercise of pity?"

Jonas sighed deeply--

"Yes, Herr Captain, I am so far," replied he, resignedly.

The confession was made with such comical humiliation, that Hugo had

difficulty to suppress a smile; still he said with a grave face--

"Jonas, I never thought to experience such things in you. It is only

lucky that you are a man of principles, which will not allow you to let

such follies become serious. Principles before everything! Our

'Ellida,' lies ready to sail; to-morrow we start for the harbour, and

when we return from the West Indies, you will have driven this love

story out of your head, and Annunziata in the meanwhile will have taken

another--"

"She will leave that alone," cried Jonas furiously. "I will kill her

and myself too if she does anything of the kind."

"Will you not extend the killing to me also?" asked Hugo coolly. "You

seem to be quite in the humour for it. You have gone so far as kissing,

that is certain. I have actually witnessed with my own eyes how seaman

William Jonas, of the 'Ellida,' has kissed a woman, and I should have

thought that with this fact, enough to set one's hair on end, all would

have stopped."

"Preserve us," said Jonas, defiantly. "That is only the beginning--then

comes the marrying."

"Will you marry too?" asked Captain Almbach, in a tone of most intense

indignation. "You will marry a woman? But consider, Jonas, that women

are to blame for everything, that all mischief in the world originated

with them, that a man only has peace and quiet when far from them,

that--"

"Herr Captain," replied the sailor, who contrary to all respect,

interrupted his master in the middle of his speech, as he heard his own

words from the other's lips--

"Herr Captain, I was an idiot."

"Oh! your Annunziata seems to have inspired you with much

self-knowledge already, and that is the more admirable as language in

your conversation plays a very inferior part. Your chosen one speaks

German thoroughly badly, and you have not caught much more Italian than

merely her name. To be sure I saw just now how capitally you managed to

help yourselves. Your conjugation of '\_amare\_,' if not quite

grammatical, was extremely comprehensible."

"Yes, indeed, we know how to help ourselves," said Jonas, full of

self-consciousness. "We understand each other however always, and on

the main point we understand each other at once. I like her, she will

have me, and we shall marry each other."

"And so it ends!" finished Hugo. "And how about our departure, amid

these suitable arrangements?"

"I shall still go to the West Indies, Herr Captain," answered Jonas

eagerly. "We cannot marry in quite so head-over-heel a fashion, and my

bride will meanwhile remain with young Frau Almbach, who has promised

to take care of her. When I return, however, Annunziata thinks my

seafaring must end. She thinks when she takes a husband that he must

stay with her also, and not sail about for years on all kinds of seas.

We could set up a little public house in some place, where I should not

be so far from the ocean, and should always meet with my comrades,

Annunziata thinks."

"Your Annunziata seems to think a great deal," remarked Captain

Almbach, "and you naturally submit like a converted woman-hater and

obedient bridegroom to this opinion of your 'future.' Then on this

voyage, the 'Ellida' is to have the honour of counting you amongst her

crew? Afterwards she must look out for another sailor and I for another

servant?"

"Yes, afterwards," said Jonas, somewhat shamefacedly. "If--if you do

not also--Herr Captain--you had better marry too."

"Don't come to me with your proposals!" cried Hugo, jumping up angrily.

"I should have thought it would be sufficient at present, that you come

under petticoat-government. Now, pack my boxes and take leave of your

Annunziata! As we start very early tomorrow, I--have also still to take

leave."

The last words sounded so peculiarly forced, that Jonas looked up

astonished. He knew that it was not his master's wont to let farewells

in any place be hard for him, and yet he fancied that this one made

Hugo's heart right heavy. Fortunately the sailor was in similar plight;

therefore he did not trouble much about it, but set to work to pack,

while Hugo went across to the rooms which his sister-in-law inhabited

now. He stood motionless for a few moments before the closed door, as

if he did not dare to enter; then all at once, as if with sudden

determination, he put his hand on the latch and opened it.

Ella sat at her writing table. She was alone, and in the act of closing

a letter she had just concluded, when her brother-in-law entered, and

came quickly to her.

"Have you announced your return to Germany?" asked he, pointing to the

letter. "Herr Consul Erlau will make all H---- rebellious with his

despair at being obliged to return without you and the little one."

Ella laid her pen aside and rose. "I am sorry that uncle should feel

our parting so much," replied she; "I have already tried my utmost to

procure a substitute, and by letter begged one of his relations to take

my place in his house now that other duties call me. His wish for us to

accompany him to H----, and for us to live with him for a time, I could

not agree to on Reinhold's account. We have once already given society

there cause to busy themselves about us; if we return now, there would

be no end to the painful curiosity and interest, and Reinhold still so

much needs consideration. He cannot bear the slightest allusion to the

past as yet, without exciting himself dangerously. We must certainly

seek another quieter residence."

"At all events, it is fortunate that you have decided him to return to

Germany at all," said Hugo; "he has been estranged from home long

enough, both as regards his life and his musical labours. It is time

that he should at last take root in his fatherland."

Ella smiled. "You preach that to me and him daily, and yourself long

restlessly to go far away? Confess it now, Hugo, you can hardly wait

for the day of your departure, and it is difficult enough for you to

endure the few weeks you still have with us."

"The difficulty is removed already," said Hugo, with feigned unconcern,

"I leave tomorrow."

"To-morrow?" cried Ella, half-astonished, half-alarmed. "But you

promised, though, to remain until our departure."

Captain Almbach bent low over the papers and writing materials on the

table, as if searching for something amongst them.

"Things have changed since then, and I have received news from the

'Ellida' which calls me away at once. You know that with us sailors

that sort of thing often happens quickly and unexpectedly. I was just

going to tell you and Reinhold of it, and bid you farewell at the same

time, as I must start early in the morning."

He had poured it all out hastily, without looking up. Ella's eyes were

fixed gravely and searchingly upon his face.

"Hugo, that is an excuse," said she, decidedly; "you have received no

news, at least, none so urgent. What has occurred? Why will you go?"

"You interrogate me like a criminal judge," said Hugo, jokingly, with

an attempt to regain the old cheerful tone. "Be prudent, Ella! you have

to deal with a confirmed sinner, who will indeed confess nothing."

"Yes; I see that something has happened to drive you away," said Ella,

uneasily, "and for long I have known that something has come between us

which estranges you from Reinhold and me more every day. Be candid,

Hugo. What have you against us? Why will you forsake us now?"

She had gone closer to him, and laid her hand upon his arm

beseechingly, but perfectly unembarrassed. Captain Almbach's

countenance was intensely pale, as he looked silently on the ground; at

last he slowly raised his eyes.

"Because I can bear it no longer," he broke out with sudden violence;

"I have urged your reconciliation with Reinhold so long, and now that

it has taken place, and I must look on at it daily, hourly--now only I

feel how little talent I have for being a saint or for platonic

friendship. I must go away if I do not wish to be ruined. My God, Ella,

do not look at me as if an abyss were opened out before you! Have you

really had no conception, then, of the state of mind I am in, and what

these last weeks at your side have cost me?"

Ella had shrunk back at these last words, her pallor and the expression

of deadly fear in her face gave an answer, even before she opened her

lips to reply.

"No, Hugo, I had no conception of it," replied she, in a trembling

voice. "When we first met, I felt myself obliged to repel a fleeting

fancy. That it could ever be serious with you, I never deemed

possible."

"Nor I either," said Hugo, glumly. "At the beginning, I too, believed I

could laugh and scoff away this feeling--scoff it away like all others;

and now it has become earnest, such bitter earnest, that I was on the

high road to learn to hate my brother, to loathe the whole world, until

the latter part of my time here became a hell--perhaps it will be

better out on the sea, perhaps not either. But go I must, the sooner

the better."

Something so wild, so passionate lay in those words, and Hugo's whole

manner betrayed so plainly the difficulty with which he had suppressed

his internal agony, that Ella found no courage for a harsh reply. She

turned silently away. After a few moments Captain Almbach again came to

her side.

"Do not turn from me, Ella, as from a criminal!" said he, with

returning gentleness. "I am going, perhaps never to return, and the

hour of my confession is also that of my farewell. I might, indeed,

have spared you it, should not have made your heart heavy too with what

oppresses mine. God knows I had the honest intention of being silent,

and bear it until I had departed; but after all, one is but mortal, and

when you begged me to remain, and looked so kindly at me, there was an

end of my self-control. Reinhold himself prophesied that I should some

day meet those eyes which would put a stop to all scoffing, all

thoughtlessness. The only misfortune was, that I must find them in his

wife. If this were not so, I had better have bid adieu to all freedom

and independence for these eyes' sake, have become a quiet, steady

married man, and have denied my whole nature; but it would have been a

pity for old Hugo Almbach after all--therefore, probably Heaven raised

an obstacle, and said 'No.'"

CHAPTER IX.

Captain Almbach tried in vain to speak in his old scoffing way; to-day

it would not come to his aid. His lips quivered, and his words sounded

like the bitterest irony. Ella saw how deeply the wound had eaten into

the man whom in this respect she had considered invulnerable.

"You should have gone long since, Hugo," said she, in gentle reproach,

"now it is too late to spare you the pain; but if a sister's love--"

"For God's sake, refrain from that," interrupted he impetuously. "Only

none of that respect, friendship, and all the fine things with which

ideal people console themselves in like cases, and which kill an

ordinary man, when his throbbing heart is expected to satisfy itself

with them. I know, indeed, that you have always looked upon me as a

brother, that your heart has always and ever clung to Reinhold, even

then, when he betrayed and forsook you; but I cannot bear to hear it

now from your lips. Of course it serves me right. Why did I become

untrue to her, my beautiful blue bride of the ocean, to whom now only I

belong? She makes me atone for ever having thought of forsaking her for

another, and yet it always seemed to me as if I gazed into her blue

depths when I looked into Ella's eyes." He threw his head back with a

half-defiant motion. "And to me those, eyes unveiled themselves first,

then, when my brother never suspected what riches he called his own. I

knew better than he what the woman was whom he gave up for a Biancona's

sake, and in despite of that he bears away the prize for which I could

have given everything. Such demon-like, artistic natures always conquer

one of us who have nothing to oppose excepting a warm heart and ardent,

bounteous love. Reinhold takes back what never, even for a moment,

ceased to be his own property, and I--go; so we are all provided for."

An immeasurable bitterness lay in these words, which betrayed only too

well that his love for his brother could no longer resist a passion

which appeared to have changed Hugo's entire nature. He made a movement

as if to leave the room. Ella held him back.

"No, Hugo, you shall not go thus," said she, firmly. "Not with this

bitterness against Reinhold and me in your heart. Our happiness has

already had to be rebuilt on the ruins of a stranger's life; it would

be too dearly paid for if it were to cost us our brother also. We

should never, never get over it if we knew you were unhappy far

away--unhappy through us."

She had raised her eyes to him beseechingly and sadly. Captain Almbach

looked down upon the young wife with a singular mixture of anger and

tenderness.

"Do not trouble about me," replied he, with emotion, "I do not belong

to those men who at once yield themselves up to despair because they

must tear themselves away from that on which their whole heart now

hangs, and if in the wrench, a piece of the heart goes too, well, he

can bear it still as it is. I shall bear it; whether I shall overcome

it is a different question. When Reinhold is quite recovered again,

tell him what has driven me away from being near him and you. I do not

wish to stand before my brother as a hypocrite, and I should have

confessed it to him myself long since, only that I still dreaded the

excitement for him of such an acknowledgment; he has become only much

too irritable on every point which concerns you. Tell him that Hugo

\_could\_ not stay--not one hour longer--and that he had given you his

word not to return again until he could appear before his brother's

wife as he ought."

The hand, which was extended to her in farewell, grasped hers with a

convulsive pressure, when the door opened, and little Reinhold rushed

in, flying to his uncle with childish eagerness--

"Uncle Hugo, you are going away?" cried he breathlessly. "Jonas has

packed his boxes, and says you will leave to-morrow morning. Uncle

Hugo, you shall not; you must stay with us."

Captain Almbach lifted up the boy, and pressed his lips with passionate

violence upon the child's--

"Take that kiss to your mother," whispered he in a half-smothered

voice. "She will surely dare to take it from your lips. Farewell my

child. Farewell, Ella!"

"Mamma," said little Reinhold, as he looked astonished after his

uncle--who had put him down so hastily and then left the room--"Mamma,

what is the matter with Uncle Hugo? He cried actually, as he kissed

me."

Ella drew the child nearer to her, and now her lips also touched the

child's forehead, which was still damp, as if from two tears having

fallen upon it.

"It grieves your uncle to leave us," answered she, softly. "But he must

go--God grant that he may return to us one day."

\* \* \* \* \*

The course of time had altered but little in the old seaport and

commercial town of H----. It looked just the same as ten years ago,

when the Italian Opera Company gave its first performances there. The

older portion of the town lay just as gloomy and full of corners, the

newer as aristocratic and quiet as in those days. In the streets and by

the harbour the old busy life and activity still reigned, and now, on a

spring evening, the old damp, foggy atmosphere lay again upon the town

and its environs.

In the Erlau's house, unusual excitement prevailed. The extensive

establishment usually conducted with such superior quiet and

punctuality, to-day seemed to be quite out of gear. There was incessant

running to and fro; the whole suite of rooms was thrown open and

illuminated; the servants were in gala livery, and were called first to

one place, and then to another with different orders. The carriage had

been despatched more than an hour ago to the railway station, and just

now the relative who superintended the Consul's household, an elderly

lady, entered the drawing-room, accompanied by Dr. Welding.

"I assure you, Herr Doctor, one can do nothing with my cousin,"

complained she, as she sat down in an arm chair with a countenance

expressive of exhaustion. "He disturbs the whole house, and drives all

the servants into confusion with his orders and arrangements. Nothing

is festive and brilliant enough for him. Of course I rejoice to see my

dear Eleonore again, and to become personally acquainted with her

celebrated husband; but the Consul has made me so nervous already with

his excitement that I only wish the reception ceremonies were over."

"But this is the first time he welcomes his adopted daughter to his

house again," said Welding. The Doctor was barely altered in the long

lapse of time, he merely looked a little older. It was still the same

sharp, intelligently-cut face, the penetrating glance, and tone of

irony peculiar to him in his voice, with which he now continued: "Herr

Reinhold Almbach appears most decidedly to maintain the superiority of

his influence over his wife compared with that of the Consul. You know

he has actually managed that Erlau should always go to them in the

'capital,' and we were not allowed, not withstanding all promises, to

see Frau Eleonore until her husband determined to accompany her here.

He cannot spare her for a single week it appears!"

"No, certainly not," cried the lady excitedly. "You should only hear my

cousin relate all about it; he who was at first so prejudiced against

Reinhold, is now quite reconciled to him and Eleonore's happiness.

Between them reigns a love so pure and clear, so firm and strong, and

yet surrounded by such a fairy-like, poetic halo, that it almost sounds

like a legend in our time, so wanting in happiness and love!"

The Doctor inclined himself ironically. "Perfectly right, dear Madam. I

see with pleasure what appreciative attention you bestow on my

articles. Exactly the same sentiment appeared in No. 12 of the morning

paper, in a review of the \_libretto\_ of Reinhold's newest opera."

"Really? Was it in the morning paper?" asked the lady, somewhat

confused; she seemed glad that at this moment the Consul entered the

room, who, without perceiving the Doctor, in his joyous excitement

hastened towards her at once.

"My dear cousin, I have been seeking for you everywhere. The carriage

may return from the station any moment, and we had agreed to receive

the dear guests together. Has the red boudoir been sufficiently

lighted, as I ordered? Is Henry downstairs in the vestibule with the

other servants? Have you--"

"Cousin, you make me nervous with your incessant inquiries," cried the

lady, in a rather irritated tone. "Is it then, the first time you have

confided the arrangements of an entertainment to me? I have twice

already assured you that everything is ordered according to your

wishes."

"That is not enough for to-day," said Welding, joining in the

conversation. "This time the Consul himself undertakes the part of

master of the ceremonies, and inspects the whole house, from garret to

cellar. Woe to him who does not appear before him in gala dress!"

"Scoff away!" laughed the Consul, "I shall not let it spoil the

pleasure of the meeting, and indeed, I am quite reconciled to you, Herr

Doctor, since you introduced such a hymn of praise about Reinhold's

last work in your morning paper."

"Excuse me, I write no hymns of praise," said the Doctor, somewhat

piqued. "On the contrary, I often experience that my criticisms are

favoured with much less flattering names by the artists. Lately,

our great dramatic and heroic tenor, who, as you know, retains his

high-tragic, stage pathos even in real life, called my verdict on one

of his principal parts 'the outflow of the blackest malice, which the

black soul of man had ever produced!' What do you say to that?"

"Well, Reinhold, too, had to endure plenty from your pen," suggested

Erlau. "Fortunately, he did not see our morning paper in Italy in those

days, otherwise he would have had to read very unpleasant things about

the lamentable direction of an undeniably great talent; of unpardonable

wastefulness of the most precious gifts; of the mistakes of a genius,

which, capable of the highest, yet was on the road to ruin himself and

art; and many more such civilities."

"With which you were quite unanimous at the time," added Welding.

"Certainly, I was an open opponent of Reinhold's. Unconditionally, as I

ever recognised his great talents, much as I encouraged him in his

first artistic attempts, I decidedly objected to the line he struck out

later in Italy. Now it has become quite different. His latest work

shows an alteration for which one can only wish him and art success. He

has forced himself through wild fermentation to perfect freedom and

clearness of artistic composition. His genius seems to have found the

right course at last; this work stands thoroughly at the height of his

talent."

"Naturally--and that is alone Eleonore's merit," said Erlau, with

unshaken confidence, while his cousin listened very devoutly to the

Doctor's words.

"Does Frau Almbach help her husband to compose?" asked Welding,

maliciously.

"Leave your malice alone, Herr Doctor! You know quite well what I

mean," cried the Consul, annoyed. "Now Henry, what is it?" asked he,

turning to the servant who entered quickly, and announced that the

carriage was arriving.

"Cousin! for mercy's sake go slower! All the servants are in the hall,"

cried the old lady, who had prepared to receive the arrivals solemnly

and with dignity, and was now dragged forward so hastily by the Consul,

who seized her arm, that the magnificence of her train could not be

displayed to advantage. Erlau did not listen to her protestations, she

was obliged to rush to the stairs with him. Dr. Welding, who had come

by chance, without knowing the hour of the arrival, considered himself

entitled, as friend of the house, to witness the family scene. He

therefore remained in the drawing-room while the first speeches of

reception and welcome were made outside. With great tenderness the

Consul greeted his adopted daughter and little Reinhold, who, in

fullest joy, hung on his neck. His cousin, on the contrary, seemed to

have taken forcible possession of the bigger Reinhold, whom she

conducted into the drawing-room amid a stream of compliments, while the

others lingered in the first rooms.

"I rejoice exceedingly to make the acquaintance of my dear Eleonore's

husband, whom I may surely greet as a relation as well as the renowned

Rinaldo," assured she, while still in the doorway. "And all H---- will

be proud once again to see its distinguished townsman within its walls.

Herr Almbach, we can only wish you and art success in your newest work;

it stands thoroughly at the height of your talent. Your genius has at

last--yes, at last--"

"Discovered the right course," suggested Dr. Welding, most amicably, as

he stood near.

"Discovered the right course," continued the lady, freshly inspired.

"You have forced your way through wild fermentation to most perfect

freedom, and to higher spheres."

"Not quite true to the words, but it will do," murmured Welding to

himself, while Reinhold, somewhat taken aback at this shower-bath of

æsthetic form of speech, bowed to the lady. Fortunately, the latter now

saw Ella enter on the Consul's arm, and hastened to embrace her and her

boy, while the Doctor went towards Reinhold.

"May an old acquaintance recall himself to your recollection, Herr

Almbach? I am not quite so bold as to receive you at once with

criticising praise such as you have just experienced, but I do not

welcome you the less warmly in your home."

"Aunt means it kindly," said Reinhold, half making an excuse for her.

"It was rather astounding for me at first----" he stopped.

"To be received with one of my reviews," added the Doctor. "Oh, your

aunt often does me the honour of reproducing my articles, although

certainly sometimes on rather unsuitable occasions and with her own

variations, for which I do not undertake the responsibility; for

instance, with the 'higher spheres' I have usually nothing to do."

Reinhold smiled. "Time has left no marks upon you, Doctor; you still

preserve your old \_role\_. Every third word you utter, is one of

sarcasm."

"Pretty well," said "Welding, shrugging his shoulders, and turning to

Ella, who greeted the old friend heartily as she stretched out her hand

to him.

"Well, how do you find our Eleonore?" cried the Consul, triumphantly.

"Does she not bloom like a rose? And the 'little one' has become so big

that we must soon seek another designation for him."

Dr. Welding smiled, and this time, as an exception, without any

maliciousness, while he replied, "Frau Eleonore has remained just like

herself. That is the best compliment which one can pay her. Certainly,

dear madam, I am not the last who will rejoice at this meeting, and

also that the Erlau drawing-rooms, at any rate for the next few weeks,

will stand again under your sceptre. Between ourselves," he lowered his

voice, "it becomes sometimes rather serious when your aunt takes the

lead in conversations on art."

The excitement and pleasure of meeting had made the arrivals only

retire to rest very late. The morning sun was shining clearly and

brightly in at the windows, when Ella entered the apartment which had

been her sitting and work-room during her residence in the Erlau's

house. It still displayed all the former costly furniture with which

Erlau had surrounded his favourite. Reinhold was there already; he

stood at the window, and looked down upon the streets of his native

town, which he now visited for the first time after nearly ten years'

absence. It was no longer the young composer who, in obstinate struggle

with his surroundings and family, destroyed his fetters as well as his

duties, so as to throw himself into a course which promised him fame

and love, and which attained both by force; but neither was it the

Rinaldo, whose wild, social life in Italy, had so often challenged the

world's condemnation, which appeared to know no other bridle, no other

law than his own personal will, and to whom the admiration on the part

of the public and all around him, threatened to become so ruinous.

There lay nothing more in his manner of haughty overbearing or wounding

brusqueness, only that quiet self-consciousness was displayed, which

showed to the advantage of the man as well as of the composer. In his

eye still flashed some of the old passion, which had formed Rinaldo's

peculiar element in life as in his works; but the wild, unsteady flame

which once burned in this glance was extinguished, and what now beamed

there was better suited to the quiet, rather sombre expression of his

features. Whatever a wild, surging life might have buried in this

countenance, it spoke now only of what it had conquered; and the

dreamy, thoughtful gaze which at this moment was seeking the gable of

the old house in Canal Street, where it arose plainly from amidst the

confusion of houses, was quite that of the former Reinhold--of that

Reinhold who, in the small, narrow garden-house, had sat so often

before his piano, and called forth those tones which then might only be

raised in the night if he did not wish to be upbraided for the "useless

phantasies" which the world now called the outpourings of his genius.

Ella drew near her husband. Her appearance, indeed, justified the

Consul's declaration, she bloomed like a rose. The last three years had

robbed this charming figure of none of its grace, but instead had given

her an expression of happiness in which she had once been wanting.

"Have you received letters so early?" asked she, pointing to two open

writings which lay on the table.

Reinhold smiled--

"Of course! They were sent after us from the residence, and the sender

of this letter," he lifted up the one, "you will not guess, I am sure.

My newest work has brought in one thing at any rate, which is more

precious to me than all the ovations with which we have been

overwhelmed--a letter from Cesario. You know how deeply hurt he

withdrew from us and rendered impossible every attempt on my part at

approaching him or being reconciled. He could not forgive you for

having so long been silent towards him, nor me, that I stood in the way

of his happiness; I have had no sign of his being alive for three

years, as you know. The first performance of my opera in Italy has

broken the ice at last; he writes again with the old cordiality and

enthusiasm, congratulates me upon my new work, which he exalts far

above its deserts, and announces at the same time his intended marriage

with the daughter of Princess Orvieto. She will be his wife in a few

weeks."

Ella had stepped to her husband's side, and over his shoulder read the

letter which he held in his hand, and in which there was not a single

word of allusion to her.

"Do you know the bride?" asked she at last.

"Only a little! I saw her once only in her father's house, and merely

remember her as a pretty lively child. She was educated in a convent,

and then was paying a short visit in her parents' house. But I know

that this union, even in those days, was a favourite wish of the

families on both sides, to which Cesario's dislike to every bond which

could fetter his future, as to any marriage in fact, was the only

obstacle. Now, when years have passed, and the young Princess is grown

up, they appear to have resumed the plan again, and Cesario has given

way to his relations' pressure. Whether this \_marriage de convenance\_

can give what such an ardent romantic nature as his is requires, is

certainly another question."

Ella looked thoughtfully on the ground--

"You said though, that the bride is young and pretty, and Cesario is

surely the man to inspire love in such a youthful creature, who is just

entering life from a convent's education."

"We will hope so," said Reinhold gravely. "The second letter is from

Hugo, and dated from----"

A slight blush passed over the young wife's countenance, as she asked

with lively eagerness--

"Well, is he coming at last? May we expect him?"

Reinhold shook his head gently--

"No Ella, our Hugo will not come this time either; we must resign

ourselves not to see him. Here, read it yourself!"

He handed her the somewhat bulky letter. The first page contained mere

descriptions of voyages, which were sketched quite in the Captain's

lively manner, sparkling with fun and humour; only just at the end were

personal affairs touched upon.

"I have employed my stay in S----" wrote Hugo, "to pay a visit to

Jonas, who has been settled here over a year with his Annunziata. You

have fitted out the little one so richly, that they have made quite a

pretty hotel out of the modest inn they intended to set up, and are

going on very well indeed. The young woman has learned German at last,

and is altogether a very charming hostess, but Jonas I have had to take

regularly to task; it really is appalling how that tiny creature,

Annunziata, governs this bear of a sailor, according to all the rules

of art. I have spoken seriously to him; reminded him of his manly

dignity, prophesied that he will come hopelessly under petticoat

government, if it continue thus--what did the wretch answer me? 'Yes,

Herr Captain, but one is so inhumanly happy with it!' So of course

nothing remained but to leave him to his inhuman happiness and

petticoat \_régime\_.

"One more piece of news I have for you, Ella. Yesterday, by chance, I

took up an Italian newspaper in which I met with the announcement that

a union between the houses of Tortoni and Orvieto was impending.

Marchese Cesario will shortly be married to the only daughter of the

Princess. You see that even an idealist does not die of an unhappy love

now-a-days; instead, he consoles himself after a year or more with a

young and probably beautiful woman of princely blood. Only the

thoughtless one, the adventurer, cannot recover from having looked too

deeply into a pair of blue eyes. I cannot come, Reinhold, not yet! You

know the word which I passed to your wife; it still banishes me from

your threshold. Heaven knows how long I must wander about on the sea

without seeing you again; but if the recollections do not still weigh

my heart down as at the beginning, yet they will not leave me. My

'Ellida,' lies in the harbour ready to sail once more, and to-morrow

she will fly out afar again with her captain. So farewell, Reinhold!

Kiss your boy in my name! To Ella I shall surely dare send a greeting,

as you will give it to her? Perhaps we shall see each other again."

Ella folded the letter up and put it down silently--

"I hoped still that he would return to us this time, at least," said

she at last--her voice sounded sad.

"I did not expect it," replied Reinhold gravely, "as I know Hugo. Much

in his character seems to glide off lightly and without traces, and

perhaps really glides off, but once he has grasped anything with his

whole soul, then he will not let it go for all his life. He preserves

his love more truly and better than--I did."

"Did you love me then, when I was entrusted to you?" asked Ella, with

gentle reproach. "Could you love the woman who did not understand you

nor herself in those days? We had to be separated first in order to

recover one another entirely and completely, and nothing would remind

me of our separation if I did not see that shadow on your brow, ever

and again, which reawakens the one recollection."

Reinhold passed his hand over his forehead--

"You mean Beatrice's death? I know, indeed, that she prepared her fate

with her own hand, and yet I cannot always silence the voice which

accuses me of complicity in the sin of forsaking her, of driving her to

despair, to madness; she wished to strike us a crushing blow, and

struck herself."

"And from the waves, which gave her her death, you rescued for me and

yourself the highest, our child and our love," said his wife softly.

"See, there comes our Reinhold. Will you show the child this heavily

clouded brow?"

Little Reinhold put his head in at the door, and when he saw his

parents in the room sprang completely inside, so rosy and fresh, so

full of life and fun, that the father's gloom and the mother's

seriousness could not resist his coaxing and romping. Ella kissed her

boy's forehead tenderly, while Reinhold drew her and the child to

himself. They had held him very indissolubly, these fetters, which

once, in youthful infatuation, he had burst and broken, until he learnt

to feel yonder in the life so ardently longed for, amidst all the

dreamed-of treasures, that he had left the best at home; until the

longing for the past awoke, and forced its way powerfully and

irresistibly; until he could obtain once more, fighting through sin and

the horrors of death, that which he himself had thrust from him--his

wife and child; and in the gaze with which he now looked down upon both

there stood written plainly and clearly the confession which his lips

did not speak--that the happiness, so long and restlessly sought for,

and ever denied him, was found again here at last.